

**MUSLIMS OF BRITISH INDIA AND THE KEMALIST
REFORM IN TURKEY
IQBAL, JINNAH AND ATATÜRK, 1924-1938 ***

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Ever since his emergence as the leader of the Turkish nationalists, Kemal Atatürk had attracted wide support from among the Muslim of British India.¹ Though the adulation of Kemal had sprung from the Indian involvement with pan-Islam but basically it was his apparent defence of the caliphate which had endeared him to his well-wishers in the Subcontinent. Thus, all through the exuberance of the Khilafat movement (1918-1924), Mustafa Kemal was lauded for his perceived stand against Western imperialism in the hour of Islam's grave crisis. Even when the relations between the sultan-caliph at Istanbul and the nationalists at Ankara fell to their lowest ebb, as in November 1922 owing to the separation of the sultanate and the caliphate, no widespread stir was created in India. The clash came only in March 1924, when Kemal abolished the caliphate which to him had become anomalous and anachronistic.² The reaction in India was instantaneous and sharp, but somehow the break was soon repaired. After the initial shock, the Indian public opinion, spearheaded by those who understood the Turkish predicament, began to tilt again in favour of the nationalists and the new situation generally came to be accepted.³

The present paper concentrates on the post-abolition period and looks into the response of the Indian Muslims to the events in Atatürk's Turkey until the passing away of the leader in 1938. This was precisely the period when republican Turkey, under the charismatic leadership of Mustafa Kemal, had embarked on an ambitious programme of rapid modernization, touching almost every facet of the national life of his people. Within one month of the abolition of the caliphate, the whole medieval paraphernalia

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1 M. Naeem Qureshi, 'The Rise of Atatürk and Its Impact on Contemporary Muslim India: The early phase', *Proceedings : International Conference on Atatürk*, (Istanbul, 1981), No: 55.

2 'The Caliphate is nothing', said Kemal, 'but a myth of the past having no place in modern times'. See Akil Aksan, *Quotations from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*. Tr. Yılmaz Öz (Ankara, 1982), 52.

3 Naeem Qureshi, 'The Rise of Atatürk', *passim*.

of the religious government, as represented by the *shari'a* courts, *evkaf* ministries and religious schools, was swept clean with a broom. The government then pursued with the utmost vigour and at a reckless pace the cultural and economic transformation of the state on purely European lines. The full sweep of the Kemalist revolution has been described graphically by a Turkish official publication in the following words:

"A homogeneous, unitary nation-state emerged from the ruins of a sprawling multi-national, multi-religious, multi-lingual empire. A dynasty which had ruled for more than six centuries came to an end. All power was assumed by a republic, with its parliament and president, representing the will of the people. Theocracy, entrenched religious institutions, Koranic education, and Islamic law, with all their 'sacred' values and symbols, were abolished and replaced by Western governmental and legal institutions, secular education, and the adapted forms of the Swiss Civil Code, Italian Penal Code, and German Business Law. The traditional fez was outlawed overnight as a symbol of backwardness and the veil removed as the first step in the Turkish women's liberation. Indeed, within a few years, women were accorded completely equal rights with men, including all political rights. Perhaps the most difficult of all reforms, the Language Revolution, was undertaken with lightning speed and achieved. A scope of success unparalleled anywhere in the modern world. The Arabic script, sacrosanct as Koranic orthography, which had been used by the Turks for a millennium, suddenly gave way to the Latin alphabet. Immediately thereafter, a massive effort started to rid the language of the vast number of words borrowed from Arabic and Persian. The Islamic calendar and the 'Eastern clock' were abandoned. Turkey inexorably moved to transform its culture. It was perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon of 'dis-orientation' in the modern world: Not only political and governmental change, not only the overthrow of the ancien regime, but also the shift from religion to secularism, adoption of a wholly new legal system, overhaul of education and its institutions, innovation of urban life, and language revolution".⁴

By these reforms Atatürk achieved the transition of his state from theocracy to laicized democracy within a remarkably short span of time. His was a modern, progressive, secular and democratic Turkey, completely free from retarding influences and other hampering ties. With his clear vision he saw that Turkey in order to survive must be brought into line with the rest of Europe in all walks of life. And he achieved his objective in a manner which speaks volumes of his statesmanship and leadership.

⁴ Ambassador for Cultural Affairs, Turkish Centre, Atatürk's Republic of Turkey, (New York, 1881), 2-3.

To develop a correct perspective on Indian Muslim perceptions of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the situation in Turkey, it is important that the problem be viewed in the context of three basic propositions. First, of all the Muslim peoples, the Muslims of India probably had the most articulate sense of the international aspect of Islam.⁵ This 'extra-territorial' involvement may have been a reaction against the dominant Hindu nationalism, or just due to the social and political predicament in which they found themselves under British rule, though it is clear why such an attitude should have led them to identify their interests with those of Ottoman Turkey. Secondly, the Indian Muslim identification with Ottoman Turkey was based on their perception of Turkey as the protector of Islam's interests. The threat to Turkey was, therefore, construed as a threat to Islam so that any one who made an effort to check this threat would be hailed as the 'saviour' of Islam. It is in terms of this second proposition that the Indian Muslim adulation of Mustafa Kemal in the years between 1919 and 1924 should be interpreted.⁶ Finally, the fact that this challenge was presented in modernist terms had profound implications for Indian Muslims, especially for two of the most venerated leaders of the time, poet-philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal and the Muslim League leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Iqbal could take this as a happy augury for Muslim renaissance and Jinnah, could find in Kemal a good precedent to follow. There is no doubt that the abolition of the caliphate was a tremendous shock to Indian Muslims. However, the basic point to note about the impact that this episode had is that there occurred a basic change in the way Indian Muslims conceived of Turkey: Ottoman Turkey, *which symbolized Islam* and the Muslim community was replaced by republican Turkey which was not Islam, but only one of the several parts of the Muslim world. This meant that in future, the position of Turkey would be not that of a *protector*, but one of a model for emulation. In a sense, therefore, for Indian Muslims, Kemalist Turkey represented not so much as an emotional set back as a psychological advantage; and men like Iqbal took great pains to emphasize that it was not even a religious set back, that even if all Kemalist measures could not be justified, the spirit of dynamism was worth some risk, and what is most significant, some of Kemal's measures could be construed as only the variants of many principles and institutions Islam cherished most. Iqbal and Jinnah were among the most intellectual Indian Muslims during 1924-1938, the period of the Kemalist republic. It would, therefore, not be incorrect to study -as the present paper seeks to do- the response of the Indian Muslims to the events in Atatürk's Turkey during the period under review in terms of the formulations articulated by the two leaders. But did the Indian Muslims, in general, acquiesce in the way Iqbal and Jinnah interpreted Kemalist

5 H. A. R. Gibb (ed.), *Whither Islam?* (London, 1932), 73.

6 Cf. Naeem Qureshi, 'The Rise of Atatürk', *passim*.

Turkey? There are two broad indications that they did. First, from the fact that both Iqbal and Jinnah confidently praised Kemal when the Indian Muslims were themselves favourably disposed towards Kemal and not because Iqbal and Jinnah led them to this position. 'To explain, to expand, to write commentaries on, and to 'follow' Iqbal, became almost a major profession in Indian Islam'.⁷ If this was so after his death, there is no reason why his formulation should not have been widely accepted, and followed, in his life time. Secondly, it is noteworthy that in the Muslim freedom movement in India, it was the secular leadership and not the *ulama* who had influence and initiative. The *ulama* may have had some reservations about the inspiration coming from Kemalist Turkey, but the liberal leadership did not suffer from similar inhibitions. The people followed this leadership and not the *ulama*; and the similarities between Kemal's struggle against the Allied powers and the Indian Muslim struggle against the British, were always transparent. In a theoretical sense, therefore, Indian Muslims could not have reservations about Kemal without suspecting their own leadership. And this leadership -especially Jinnah, who since 1932 had fallen under the spell of Atatürk- never attempted to concede its admiration for what Turkey was poised to achieve.

How did Iqbal view Mustafa Kemal Atatürk? How, in other words, did he react and respond to the changes being initiated in Kemalist Turkey? On this subject, Iqbal expressed himself repeatedly, and at great length, though not always in uniform terms. His final position is what he maintained in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Our passage from his lecture on 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam', epitomises well his perception of the Turkish experience, and, therefore, needs substantial reproduction:

"The truth is that among the Muslim nations of today, Turkey above has shaken off its dogmatic slumber, and attained to self-consciousness. She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom; she alone has passed from the ideal to the real -a transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle. To her the growing complexities of a mobile and broadening life are sure to bring new situations suggesting new points of view, and necessitating fresh interpretations of principles which are only of an academic interest to a people who have never experienced the joy of spiritual expansion...(M)ost Muslim countries today... are mechanically repeating old values, whereas the Turk is on the way to creating new values. He has passed through great experiences which have revealed his deeper self to him. In him, life has begun to move, change and amplify, giving birth to new desires, bringing new difficulties and sug-

7 W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (Lahore, 1947), 169.

gesting new interpretations. The question which confronts him today, and which is likely to confront other Muslim countries in the near future is whether the Law of Islam is capable of evolution -a question which will require great intellectual effort, and is sure to be answered in the affirmative..."⁸

The basic point in Iqbal's stand is that he was neither resigning himself to the *fait accompli*, nor was he offering a kind of an *apologia* for what was going on in Turkey. For him the only way to understand and appreciate the dynamism of the Turkish experiment was to develop on this problem a perspective which itself was not merely pragmatic but also dynamic. This indeed, was the way in which Iqbal viewed the measures suggested or taken in Atatürk's Turkey. The basic achievement of Turkey, in his view, was that it had passed from the ideal to the real even though the experiment had tended to deny, in many ways, the validity of the ideal itself. Since Iqbal himself would *reconstruct* religious thought in Islam on the assumption that there was a need for such a reconstruction, and that this enterprise would be in the nature of a departure from tradition, his position on theoretical grounds was, therefore, compatible, even synonymous, with that of the Kemalist Turk. There is thus, no reason why he should not have 'heartily welcome(d) the liberal movement in modern Islam'.⁹ In fact, Iqbal hoped that the Indian Muslims, too, one day, like the Turks, would re-evaluate their intellectual inheritance, and if were unable to make any positive contribution, at least provide a healthy restraint on the rapid movement of liberalism.¹⁰

And yet, Iqbal's position was not that of a vague theoretician. He was a firm supporter of concrete manifestations of Turkish modernism. Thus he regarded as 'perfectly sound' the Turkish view that the institution of the caliphate, as understood in the traditional juridical sense, was anachronistic, and that an elected assembly, which would be better suited to the need of the time, and was not incompatible with the spirit of Islam, should replace this institution.¹¹ It is remarkable that Iqbal was prepared to go even further. On the question of the separation of Church and State, a question particularly relevant in the context of Kemalist Turkey, Iqbal maintained that 'personally' he regarded ideas of separation as 'a mistake' but conceded that 'the structure of Islam as a religio-political system, no doubt, does permit such a view...' ¹². On the emancipation of women, another problem addressed by Turkish modernists, Iqbal was affirmative and emphatic; the point on which he differed with the Turks, was not that

8 Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, 1971), 162.

9 *Ibid.*, 162.

10 *Ibid.*, 153.

11 *Ibid.*, 157.

12 *Ibid.*, 153-154.

woman is in any way inferior -for he readily conceded her equality with man- but that it is Islam that has made her so. As for the present dispensation where in there were cases in which Muslim women wishing to get rid of undesirable husbands were driven to apostasy, Iqbal recognised a need for reform. 'I do not know,' he wrote, 'whether the awakening of women in Turkey has created demands which cannot be met without a fresh interpretation of foundational principles.'¹³ But nowhere does he say that such demands and reinterpretations would not be in order. It is important at this point to be clear about one thing: Iqbal's support for the Turkish experiment was unambivalent, but it was not unqualified. The fundamental clue to an understanding of Iqbal's position is this: A vigorous and dynamic world-view was, for him, the pre-requisite to this worldly salvation; of all the Muslim peoples, the Turk alone had shown this vigour, and had also shown what this vigour could lead to. To Iqbal, this was a tremendous achievement: The inauguration of Islamic renaissance. But there also was some uneasiness in Iqbal's mind. He complained :

*The Turk has no new melody in his lute,
His new is but Europe's old.
Originality is at the root of all creation,
Never by imitation shall life be reformed.*¹⁴

The apprehension, therefore, was that the inner vitality of the Turkish experiment might in its early stages become bogged down because of being patterned on the western model. What worried Iqbal was not that Turkey had gone too far; he feared that given the potential that it had, it might not -by limiting itself within the perimeters of the western framework- stop short of going further. What is remarkable about Iqbal is that all his conservatism notwithstanding, he was not worried by what many Muslims interpreted as Turkish excesses. 'We have now and then,' he wrote 'that Turks are repudiating Islam. A greater lie was never told. Only those who have no idea of the history of the concepts of Islamic Jurisprudence fall an easy pray to this sort of mischievous propaganda.'¹⁵ For Iqbal, the spirit of dynamism was worth some risk. Indeed, Muslim intellectual tradition had stagnated because of guarding too rigidly against, and stamping out, such risks. But since modern Islam could ill afford this stagnation it was imperative that the spirit of dynamism be given a free flow, in the hope that in time, the dialectic of continuity and change, of tradition and modernity, would eliminate or minimize the risk.

¹³ Ibid., 169.

¹⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, in *Kulliyat* (ed.), Ahmad Saroosh (Teheran, 1343 A.H. {shamsi}), 307; Tr. as in B. A. Dar, *A Study in Iqbal's Philosophy* (Lahore, 1971), 140.

¹⁵ S. A. Vahid (ed.), *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, 371, Cf. W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, 1957), 161 : '... the Turks in Islam have not renounced Islam but reviewed it'.

This was how Iqbal argued. And this was the theoretical basis on which he appreciated the Kemalists' enterprise.

Jinnah's appreciation was a different matter. If Iqbal was conscious and tried to make others conscious, of the significance of the experience the Turkish people were undergoing, and of the relevance this experience had for the future of Islam, Jinnah realized the importance of the precedent Mustafa Kemal had set. Kemal Atatürk, Jinnah said, 'was the foremost figure in the Muslim East. In Iran and Afghanistan, in Egypt and of course in Turkey, he demonstrated to the consternation of the rest of the world that Muslim Nations were coming into their own... With the example of this great man in front of them as an inspiration, will the Muslims of India still remain in quagmire?'¹⁶ These words, which Jinnah uttered on the death of Mustafa Kemal, indicate clearly, the terms in which he conceived of Atatürk. It is evident that Kemal was for Jinnah not necessarily, a model for emulation. The situation in which the two men found themselves, the odds they confronted, and the way they reacted, were completely dissimilar. And Jinnah was not an idealist: To emulate Kemal was, therefore, out of the question for him. The sense in which the Kemalists' achievement was important was indicated by the resolution of the All India Muslim League on his death: 'His memory', the resolution said, 'will inspire Muslims all over the world with courage, perseverance and manliness'.¹⁷ Kemal, therefore, was a source of inspiration, not a model for imitation. For as Iqbal had already warned, inspiration reinforces vitality; but imitation dampens its spirit: Jinnah could ill afford to dampen his spirit.

In what way could Jinnah seek inspiration from Kemal? The answer is, that in at least three ways. First, it is important to note that until 1937, and probably even later, Jinnah, while being one of the most prominent Indian politicians, had not been successful in national life in the way he wanted to be. His frustration was, for a variety of reasons, considerable.¹⁸ Indeed, as late as 1931, Jinnah had decided to quit politics, and it was not until 1934 that he re-entered the political arena. But a resumption of political life did not mean an end of the problems that had led to Jinnah's initial retreat. It is possible, therefore, that in this situation, Jinnah may have found the experience and achievement of men like Mustafa Kemal to be a source of some psychological 'redemption'. The report that Jinnah did in fact come under Kemal's spell when he read, and greatly enjoyed, H. C. Armstrong's biography, *Grey Wolf*, would reinforce this point.¹⁹ Secondly, in so far as there was a measure of affinity in the attitude, orientation, and

16 Jamil-ud-din Ahmad (ed.), *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, i (Lahore, 1960), 68.

17 Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan*, ii (Karachi, 1970), 311.

18 Cf. Ahmad (ed.), *Speeches and Writings*, i, 39.

19 Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan* (London, 1960), 102.

world view of Kemal and Jinnah, the suggestion that the latter should have been amenable to Kemal's influence, becomes plausible. This affinity took two forms: A strong will and strength of character; and an essentially westernized outlook. Jinnah, therefore, did not have to *translate* Kemal's experience in terms of the categories that were familiar to him; he had merely to *acquire* the inspiration which this experience entailed. In terms of basic assumptions, Jinnah was closer to Kemal than Iqbal could ever be. Finally, it is significant that the relevance of Atatürk's achievement was two-fold: A regaining of national sovereignty was only the first step; the second was that of nation-building. If Atatürk's experience was at all relevant for Jinnah is clear that it should have been relevant in both its dimensions.

What then was the basic point of reference in the Indian Muslim perception of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk? It is clear from the preceding discussion that it was Atatürk's remarkable success which was central and this success meant many things. To men like Iqbal, it meant that the stranglehold of tradition would be broken, that Islam would be reinvigorated because of the Muslims' regaining their initiative. To men like Jinnah, it meant that perseverance did indeed command success. And to the Indian Muslim at large, as to Muslim all over the world, this meant an invitation to a courageous struggle in the way Turkey had struggled; and against the odds, and even against the enemies that were not dissimilar to those Turkey had fought against.