

Iqbal's Political Philosophy and Concept of State

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In politics the art of government and the political affairs of life are discussed. But in the political philosophy all conceptual matters which govern the basics of state affairs including the government, legislature, judicial, and matters of law are focussed. Though Allama Iqbal has not gone into the details of politics and the concept of state, yet he touched the fundamental concepts of these aspects forming part of his political philosophy. The role of state in general and problem of legislation or evolving new laws in the light of Islamic philosophy are mentioned in general in his poetry, but seriously in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.¹ Apart from this general description of the role of any Muslim state in the world of Islam, Iqbal has discussed in detail the demand, purpose and functioning of the Muslim state in South Asia not only in his famous Allahbad Presidential Address to 21st session of the All-India Muslim League (hereafter AIML) held on 29-30 December 1930,² but in various speeches, interviews, letters, poetry and statements to the press discussed in this article.³

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1. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1934).
2. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed), *Foundations of Pakistan* vol.II, (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1969), pp.153-171.
3. For his speeches and statements see A.R.Tariq (ed), *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali, 1973).

Basic concern for Iqbal was how to revive Islam in the modern world? In this approach Iqbal was motivated not by any religious animosity towards other religions, but seeing the nature of advancement of modern civilization tested in the light of European knowledge he was convinced that in the future world it was only the Islamic polity capable of absorbing all the cultures and societies of the world with due regard to local traditions, ethics, needs and aspirations of humanity. The affairs of state and government could be best conducted to the entire satisfaction of humanity and without any sense of exploitation of poor by the rich nations if the men at the helm of state affairs exercise their authority keeping in view the conditions laid down in the Islamic Shariat. Iqbal was against the view that Islamic law was primarily stationary though he agreed that for the last five hundred years the Islamic law has not advanced. Originally, he believed, Islam stresses the progress of humanity which could not be realised without a process of change and continuity. The original idea of the dominance of the greatest reality of the self of God continues to dominate in the spiritual sense, but the exterior form of humanity continues to subscribe to the phenomenon of change stipulated by the natural forces exhibited in various parts of the globe and through the turn of times. At the same the basic spirit continues to live through all changes. In order to make the process of law a living organ of the Muslim state, Iqbal touched the basic sources of law from a new angle. His philosophical explanations of Qur'ān, Hadith, Ijma and Qiyas are a great contribution to the political and basic philosophy of Islam.⁴ It is basically for realizing “these political objectives that Iqbal has gone to the extent of asking the Muslim scholars even to re-construct the religious thought of Islam. The argument he presented for its need in the modern world are worthy of attention not only for the Muslim thinkers but for the thinkers of the world. Iqbal observed:⁵ During the last five hundred years religious thought in Islam has been practically stationary. There was a time when European thought received inspiration from the world of Islam. The most remarkable phenomenon of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam

4. Dr. Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *Fikr-i-Iqbal* (Lahore: n.p., 1983), pp. 98-99.

5. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, p.7.

is spiritually moving towards the West. There is nothing wrong in this movement, for European culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam. Our only fear is that the dazzling exterior of European culture may arrest our movement and we may fail to reach the true inwardness of that culture. Iqbal believed that "the younger generation of Islam in Asia and Africa demand a fresh orientation of their faith. With the reawakening of Islam, therefore, it is necessary to examine, in an independent spirit, what Europe has thought and how far the conclusions reached by her can help us in the revision and, if necessary, reconstruction, of theological thought in Islam."⁶ With the same idea, Iqbal approached the political philosophy of Islam. God is considered by him as the greatest reality which lives through all the varieties of change. The future world of mankind should be constructed around the principle of oneness of God. He explains:

The new culture finds the foundation of world-unity in the principle of *Tauheed*. Islam as a polity is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile in its life, the categories of permanence and change.⁷

Iqbal explains this concept in different ways in his poetry:⁸

In *Ramooz-i-Bekhudi*, he said:⁹

6. *Ibid.*, p.8.

7. *Ibid.*, p.147.

8. Prof. Dr. Ann Mary Shimal, *Shahid-i-Jibrail* (Urdu) (Lahore: n.p., 1985), p.118.

9. *Kulyat-e Iqbal* (Farsi), p.139.

In *Bale-Jibrail*, he said:¹⁰

Without a good society a good state cannot be established. This is what Islam demands. Moreover, the purpose of Islam is directed to build a highly civilised society wherein liberty of individual person is not only nourished but maintained. For realization of this aim, Iqbal believed, state plays pivotal role. But at the same, he was neither too happy with the pattern of European states nor he was glad with the states controlling human societies of other parts of the globe. If he disliked the existence of kingship in the Muslim or other states, he equally disliked the moral degradation of human values in the “advanced states”. For that purpose he wanted to transform the character of modern states around one objective, i.e. obedience to God.

By making all the states to flourish in the same political direction, Iqbal wanted them to move towards a future wherein all human beings could be controlled by one international state. The international state was to function as an international association of states like the League of Nations, in the times of Iqbal, or, after him, the United Nations Organisation. This international association should help in the promotion of common human values through the agencies of different political states. This aspect was further required to be strengthened by him if the field of law is to be further developed.

In the sphere of Law he was gravely disappointed by the role of modern Muslim ulama/scholars. The original moving spirit of Islam was considered by him to have been lost for the last 500 years. This was a folly not in the basic religion of Islam, but on the part of ulama of the world of Islam for the last five centuries. Through his writings, Iqbal emphasised upon the Muslim scholars to learn from the Western experiences and to approach the study of Qur’ān, Hadith, Fiqh and Islamic history from a fresh angle. This approach would equip them not only to pave a new way but make them to return to the original spirit of Islam. For exciting a movement amongst the Muslim scholars, Iqbal suggested four basic approaches: Qur’ān, Hadith, Ijma and Qiyas.

10. *Bal-e-Jibrail*, p.19.

Qur'ān

Iqbal considered Qur'ān not as a "legal code", but the "primary source" of Islamic Law whose purpose is "to awaken in man the higher consciousness" of his relation "with God and the Universe". As the states help in realization of human ideals "the Qur'ān considers it necessary to unite religion and state, ethics and politics in a single revelation much in the same way as Plato does in his Republic".¹¹ But at the same time Iqbal considers the Qur'ān as a book which is not "inimical to the idea of evolution". This subscribes to Iqbal's following observation:

The spirit of man in its toward movement is restrained by forces which seem to be working in the opposite direction. This is only another way of saying that life moves with the weight of its own past on its back, and that in any view of social change the value and function of the forces of conservation cannot be lost sight of. It is with this organic insight into the essential teachings of the Qur'ān that modern Rationalism ought to approach our existing institutions.¹²

Therefore, Iqbal believes that "Qur'ān is a living Book".¹³ Why did he say so? Because the teachings of this Book are more effective on human life and to make future better than before. Iqbal says:¹⁴

Another view which Iqbal expresses is that the Qur'ān emphasises the continuity of life¹⁵ and that continuity means spiritual continuity. We cannot get such thing unless we make an effort to acquire them. So Iqbal has laid great emphasis on the value of effort and struggle.¹⁶ Iqbal says that Muslims believe that God's revealed teaching and guidance became perfect in the form of the Holy Qur'ān which bears testimony to the truth of all previously revealed Books and represents them all with much more to add. Similarly, the Holy Qur'ān represents all Prophets of God and is the embodiment of the perfection of Prophecy. In this regard, Iqbal says:

11. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, p.166.

12. *Ibid.*, pp.166-67.

13. Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (ed) *Allama Iqbal Aur Kitab-e Zinda* (Lahore: n.p., n.d.) pp.27-29.

14. *Kulyat-e Iqbal*, (Farsi), pp.121-22.

15. Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (ed) *Allama Iqbal Aur Kitab-e Zinda* (Lahore: n.p., n.d.) pp.27-29.

16. M.A.M. Dar (Trans), *Introduction to the Thought of Iqbal* (Lahore: n.p., 1978), p.18.

In Islam Prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition.¹⁷

In spite of all the teachings of the Qur'ān which Iqbal explains, we should also observe the words of the Qur'ān in the light of Iqbal's views. For him, the words of the Qur'ān were also eternal and beyond any shadow of doubt. They being words of Allah could not entertain any change, doubt or falsehood. He says:

There is no doubt about the meaning of its words. Nor can they be changed. It does not allow misinterpretation of its verses.¹⁸

The Qur'ān contains clear injunctions and prohibitions besides legends. Legends have their own specific import. Allama Iqbal explains:

The Qur'ānic method of complete or partial transformation of legends in order to besoul them with new ideas, and adopt them to the advancing spirit of time, is an important point which has nearly always been overlooked both by Muslim and non-Muslim students of Islam. The object of the Qur'ān in dealing with these legends is seldom historical; it nearly always aims at giving them a universal moral or philosophical import.¹⁹

Therefore, Iqbal came to the conclusion that Qur'ānic verses should be re-interpreted in the light of "altered conditions of modern life".²⁰

The Hadith

The traditions of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) are considered by Iqbal as "the second great source" of Islamic law. Iqbal agrees with Shah Waliullah that the Prophet's "method is to train one particular people, and to use them as a nucleus for the building up of a universal Shariat". Keeping in view the principle of change and continuity and the example of Imam Abu Hanifa, one of the greatest exponents of Islamic jurisprudence, Iqbal goes to the extent of saying:

17. Prof. M. Munawwar, *Iqbal's Qur'anic Wisdom* (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1981), p.23.

18. Prof. M. Munawwar, *Dimensions of Iqbal*, (Lahore: n.p., 1986), pp.139-140.

19. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, pp.82-83.

20. *Ibid.*, p.168.

And a further intelligent study of the literature of traditions, if used as indicative of the spirit in which the Prophet himself interpreted his Revelation, may still be of great help in understanding the life value of the legal principles enunciated in the Qur'ān. A complete grasp of their life value alone can equip us in our endeavour to re-interpret the foundational principles.²¹

Iqbal gave great importance to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). He says that the Prophet of Islam had one mission, vis-à-vis to knit together in a chord of equality the various peoples and cultures of the world on the basis of true principles. Not only was he opposed to all sectarianism in religion; he was even against all distinctions between man and man, no matter under what name they might go. The teachings of the Holy Prophet were intended to weld the whole of mankind in a bond of fellowship and goodwill. The religion, he preached, was not the monopoly of a particular race or class. It was the common property of all mankind.²²

The Ijma

This is considered as the “third source” of Islamic law which, according to Iqbal, despite “invoking great academic discussion in early Islam, remained practically a mere idea and rarely assumed the form of a permanent institution in any Mohammadan country”.²³ He saw a hope of arise of this principle in “the gradual formation of legislative assemblies in Muslim lands” as “a great step” in the right direction. The strengthening of Muslim legislative assemblies as the one in modern Turkey or that of Iranian Majlis seemed to him to be the only way to give permanent character to the principle of Ijma. He, however, differed from the Iranian model that there should be a separate ecclesiastical committee of ulema supervising “the legislative activity of the Majlis”, a matter which he considered a “dangerous arrangement”. In this regard Iqbal observed:

The ulama should form a vital part of Muslim legislative assembly helping and guiding free discussion on questions relating to law. The

21. *Ibid.*, p.173.

22. Prof. Masud-ul-Hasan, *Life of Iqbal: General Account of His Life* (Lahore: n.p., 1978), p.328.

23. *Ibid.*, p.173.

only effective remedy for the possibilities of erroneous interpretations is to reform the present system of legal education in Mohammadan countries, to extend its spheres and to combine it with an intelligent study of modern jurisprudence.²⁴

The Qiyas

Iqbal considers the Qiyas as the “fourth basis of Islamic jurisprudence”. The Qiyas is a method by which “the use of analogical reasoning in legislation” is done. In this regard Iqbal learnt a lot from the method of interpretation of Islamic law adopted by Imam Abu Hanifa. The latter, he believed, was more guided by the “different social and agricultural conditions prevailing in the countries conquered by Islam” and less “from the precedents recorded in the literature of traditions”. Keeping in view their environment, the Hanfi fiqh resorted “to speculate reason in their interpretations” by which they “tended to ignore the creative freedom and arbitrariness of life, and hoped to build a logically perfect legal system on the line of pure reason”.²⁵ By citing this example of the school of Abu Hanifa, Iqbal concluded:

Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principle, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purposes of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.²⁶

The realities of modern social and political life should be ascertained with the highest sense of originality. A Muslim scholar should fully understand these modern realities. Thus with full knowledge of modern realities the scholar of Islam should approach to frame laws for human beings. The same should apply to polity. Advance principles of politics should be discovered in the light of the Qur’ān and Hadith by following the aforementioned methods. A political system should be evolved by which man’s obedience to Almighty Allah being the greatest reality at the world level should be ensured by dispensing with all kinds of other loyalties.

24. *Ibid.*, p.196.

25. *Ibid.*, pp.176-77.

26. *Ibid.*, p.180.

With the same objective Iqbal approached the problem of the political future of British Indian Muslims. At first he desired autonomy for the provinces of British India.²⁷ By this five Muslim provinces out of eleven were to benefit. These Muslim provinces, with separation of Sind from Bombay Presidency could form the nucleus of his future political strategy. The same was thought by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah in his Fourteen Points.²⁸ Before 1930 Iqbal believed in this concept,²⁹ but in his Allahbad address he floated the idea of separate Muslim state at least in the North-Western British India.³⁰ No resolution in support of Iqbal's novel concept was passed by Allahbad session of AIML (1930).³¹ Only the idea was floated. Then Iqbal went to England to attend the second and third Round Table Conferences in London. There also, he did not press this idea but was used as a pressurising lactic so that maximum provincial autonomy for the Muslim provinces as enshrined in Jinnah's Fourteen Points was secured. But on his return home and after the announcement of Communal Award, and the White Paper during 1932-33 Iqbal continuously pressed for division of British India on religious and cultural lines.³² In his letters to Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Iqbal, as President Punjab Muslim League, further emphasised the need for "re-distribution of the country on the lines of racial, religious, and linguistic affinities."³³

"In the world of Islam", declared Iqbal in 1930 at Allahbad session of Muslim League, "we have a universal polity whose fundamentals are believed to have been revealed, but whose structure, owing to our leggiest' want of contact with the modern world, today stands in need of renewed power of adjustments".³⁴ It

27. *Times of India*, 23 June 1928.

28. M.H. Saiyid, *Mohammad Ali Jinnah: A Political Study* (Karachi: n.p., 1970) pp.137-40

29. *Times of India*, 23 June 1928.

30. *Ibid.*, 30 December 1930.

31. K.K. Aziz, *A History of the Idea of Pakistan*, vol.I (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1987), pp.282-285.

32. *Times of India*, 7 December 1933.

33. Riaz Ahmad, 'Iqbal to Jinnah', 28 May 1937, p. 26.

34. Pirzada, *Foundation of Pakistan*, vol. II, p.155.

would be difficult “to create the international state” without the grant of “fullest cultural autonomy” to each “harmonious nation”. This principle was to apply not only to British India but to all the peoples living in different parts of this globe.³⁵

For him India was not one country but “a continent of human groups belonging to different races, speaking different languages, and professing different religions”.³⁶ Therefore, the principle of European democracy could not be applied to India without recognising the fact of communal groups”. It was in this framework of political thought that Iqbal proposed:

I would like to see the Punjab, the North West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North- West Indian Muslim state appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.³⁷

Some detractors of Iqbal have raised two objections: (i) Iqbal wanted a large Muslim province by amalgamating the Punjab, Sind, NWFP and Baluchistan into one large North-Western province within India³⁸ and (ii) why Iqbal did not propose the inclusion of Bengal, another big Muslim province, into his concept of Muslim state?³⁹ These objections are based on false hypothesis. As a matter of fact Iqbal’s political philosophy applied not only to Punjab, NWFP, Sind and Baluchistan but to Bengal and other Muslim majority areas of the sub-continent. But being a practical politician and thinker he just philosophised his concept of state but left its adoption to the political leaders of the respective areas. As he himself belonged to the North-West part of British India he tried to limit his demand to his own areas for the purpose of avoiding objections from politicians of other provinces, although he wanted its application to other majority Muslim areas as

35. *Ibid.*, p.158.

36. *Ibid.*, pp.158-159.

37. *Ibid.*, pp.158-159.

38. K.K. Aziz, *History of the Idea of Pakistan*, (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1987), pp.182-322.

39. *Ibid.*, some others have also quoted this theory.

discussed later in this chapter. The method of his addressing letters to Jinnah during the last part of the life indicated that Jinnah being the only political leader of sagacity of the Muslims of all British India character should apply his philosophy to the whole of British India. It was in this background that Jinnah after presenting his concept of Pakistan in March 1940 at Lahore published Iqbal-Jinnah correspondence in 1942. In his foreword to this work Jinnah unhesitatingly admitted that Iqbal's political philosophy is reflected in his Pakistan scheme of March 1940.⁴⁰

Iqbal considered "India" as "the greatest Muslim country in the world". Therefore, he proposed that "the life of Islam as a cultural force in this living country very largely depends on its centralization in a specified territory."⁴¹ Therefore, he demanded "the formation of a consolidated Muslim state in the best interest of India and Islam".⁴² He was against the Muslim India's continuance in the centralised Indian country because it would tantamount to ending Muslim "distinct political entity" preserved by the historical forces since centuries.⁴³ Explaining his concept of Muslim nation in British India in an all-India perspective Iqbal said:

We are 70 millions, and far more homogeneous than any other people in India. Indeed the Muslims of India are the only Indian people who can fitly be described as a nation in the modern sense of the world. The Hindus, though ahead of us in almost all respects have not yet been able to achieve the kind of homogeneity which is necessary for a nation, and which Islam has given you as a tree gift. No doubt they are anxious to become a nation, but the process of becoming a nation is a kind of travail, and in the case of Hindu India, involves a complete overhauling of her social structure.⁴⁴

He further said that the problems from which the Muslims are suffering are two:⁴⁵

40. See Jinnah's foreward to *Iqbal's Letters to Jinnah*, pp.39-40.

41. Pirzada, *Foundation of Pakistan*, vol.II, p.159.

42. *Ibid.*, p.160.

43. *Ibid.*, pp.162-163.

44. *Ibid.*, p.169.

45. *Ibid.*, pp.169-170.

- i. The community has failed to “produce” good leaders.
- ii. The community is fast losing what is called the hard instinct.

Iqbal believed that it were only the great leaders who prove to be “the driving force of a people, but they are God’s gift”.⁴⁶ That was the reason that later Iqbal stressed on the unity of Muslims around the leadership of Jinnah. In his letter of 28 May 1937, Iqbal wrote to Jinnah:

You are the only Muslim in India today to whom the community has right to look up for safe guidance through the storm which is coming to North-West India, and perhaps to the whole of India.⁴⁷

Towards the end of his Allahbad Address Iqbal called upon the Muslim India:

I cannot but impress upon you that the present crisis in the history of India demands complete organisation and unity of will and purpose in the Muslim community, both in your own interest as a community, and in the interest of India as a whole... one lesson I have learnt from the history of Muslims. At critical moments in their history, it is Islam that has saved Muslims and not vice-versa. If today you focus your vision on Islam and seek inspiration from the ever vitalizing idea embodied in it, you will be only reassembling your scattered forces, regaining your lost integrity and thereby saving yourself from total destruction... In the words of the Qur’ān, “Hold fast to yourself; no one who erreth can hurt you provided you are well-guided (5:104).⁴⁸

From 1933 onward Iqbal consistently impressed the need for division and “redistribution” British India “on the basis of religious, historical, and cultural affinities, so as to do away with the question of electorates and the communal problem in its presents from”.⁴⁹ This was stated by him because he disliked the uncompromising behaviour of M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal towards the Muslims.⁵⁰

46. *Ibid.*, p.170.

47. Cited in Riaz Ahmad, p.27.

48. Latif Ahmad Sherwani, *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1977), pp.3-26.

49. *Times of India*, 7 December 1933.

50. ‘Iqbal to Jinnah’, 28 May 1937 in *Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah*, pp.17-18.

In his letter to Jinnah in 1937 Iqbal explained the need of a Muslim state from social, economic, cultural viewpoint with reference to Jawaharlal Nehru's views:

The atheistic socialism of Jawaharlal is not likely to receive much response from the Muslims. The question therefore is: how is it possible to solve the problem of Muslim poverty? And the whole future of the League depends on the League's activity to solve this question. If the League can give no such promises, I am sure the Muslim masses will remain indifferent to it as before. Happily there is a solution in the enforcement of the law of Islam and its further development in the light of modern ideas. After a long and careful study of Islamic law I have come to the conclusion that if this system of law is properly understood and applied, at least the right to subsistence is secured to everybody. But the enforcement and development of the Shariat of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states. This has been my honest conviction for many years and I still believe this to be the only way to solve the problem for Muslims as well as to secure a peaceful India.⁵¹

In his letter of 21 June 1937 Iqbal explained to Jinnah that Muslims of Punjab, NWFP, Sind, Baluchistan and Bengal should be organised with a purpose to create political consciousness amongst the majority Muslims areas, so that they could be properly organised. From this letter it is also reflected that Jinnah had agreed with Iqbal. Jinnah seems to have made it clear to Iqbal, that for the moment, the Muslim community was not sufficiently organized and disciplined. He also expressed that perhaps the time for holding such a conference is arrived. For this purpose Iqbal had suggested holding of a Muslim League Conference in any Muslim majority province. But according to Jinnah the time for holding such a conference was not yet "ripe". The time for holding such a conference did not come during the life of Iqbal, as he died in April 1938, but afterwards in March 1940, according to Jinnah's strategy was the first time to pass Pakistan Resolution.⁵²

Thus after Iqbal's death his concept of Muslim state in South Asia lived and progressed the successfully under the sane guidance of the Quaid-i-Azam after surmounting all great difficulties in August 1947 in the shape of Pakistan as the world's largest Muslim state.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Letter of Iqbal to Jinnah*, pp.1-5.

Iqbal's concept of state is twofold. It applies to both the Muslim and non-Muslim lands. In case of Muslim areas the modern Muslim state is desired to work for social, economic, industrial, technological and educational advancement of its people. These states are also required by him to develop Islamic law in the light of ideas discussed in this chapter. For the non-Muslim states also Iqbal showed his respect and desired their development according to their own culture, economic, social and religious aspects. This kind of respect was shown by him in his Allahbad Address:

I entertain the highest respect for the customs, laws, religions and social institutions of other communities. Nay, it's my duty, according to the teaching of the Qur'ān, even to defend their places of worship if need be.⁵³

But still he invited them to accept the concept of *Tawheed* being the only course to solve all social and political problems of humanity. Both kinds of states are required by Iqbal to co-operate with each other under an international organisation of the kind of United Nations organisation, so that problems of all-humanity could be properly and fairly solved. Thus he seems in favour of strengthening the hands of international organisation so as to create unity between nation states and humanity of the whole world.

53. Pirzada, *Foundation of Pakistan*, vol.II, p.158.