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# A Poet- Philosopher's aspiration for his Nation

# Allama Iqbal's Letters to Jinnah

# May 23, 1936 – November 10, 1937

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## ABSTRACT

*This writing is an effort to elaborate and understand the political state of affairs of India in late 1930s and intellectual bend of the prominent Muslim leadership, primarily Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal. Both of these personalities had become the pivotal of Muslim political understanding at that particular rendezvous of the Indian history. Iqbal had presented his views in Annual Session of All India Muslim League at Allahabad in 1930and Muhammad Ali Jinnah had abandoned his self-exile in London and come back to India in 1935. He was endowed with the responsibility of reorganizing League and to popularize its message among the Muslim masses. Later, Iqbal and Jinnah remained in contact through correspondence and enlightened each other about the political situation and upheavals faced by the Muslims in the colonial India. They also pondered over the strategy to cope with those problems and to achieve freedom for India as well as the Muslims. Therefore, a study of these letters is a valuable primary source of developments of these years, which is attempted to find out in this article.*

***Keywords:*** *Allama Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Colonial India, All India Muslim League, Allahabad, Iqbal -Jinnah correspondence.*

## Introduction

The Letters from Dr. Muhammad Iqbal written to Muhammad Ali Jinnah encompassing the era from 23rd May 1936 to November 10, 1937 are considered as important documents portraying the political conditions of India, particularly the north western India. This was a crucial period in the history of struggle for Pakistan. The major issue was the creation of an All India platform and to set the objectives for the Muslims of India.

These letters had been published before the creation of Pakistan by Ashraf Publishers in 1943 with a foreword by Jinnah himself, who viewed these letters as a must-read document for anyone who desired to understand the thought process that went into the making of Pakistan.Jinnah also elaborated the historical importance of these letters as these portrayed Iqbal's clear and unambiguous world view in relation with the conditions prevailing in Indian subcontinent and the political future of Muslim India. (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 29)

However, letters from Jinnah to Iqbal could not be available. Jinnah expressed his regrets that he could not retain the copies of those historical documents while Iqbal's trustees in Lahore failed to trace these from Iqbal's literary inheritance.(Haider, 1985, p. 298) In addition, Aashiq Hussain Batalvi adds two more letters, which were written in early 1938 by Ghulam Rasul, the honorary secretary of Punjab Provincial Muslim League on Iqbal's directions. Two more letters were brought into light by M. Jehangir Alam, written on December 08, 1936 and August 13, 1937, raising the number to 17 letters.(Haider, 1985)

An analysis of these letters leads to deduce what Iqbal was thinking of the ideological basis of the Muslims as a nation; What were the real problems Muslims were facing; and What might be the practical mode of actions, the Muslims and their leaders should adopt towards Hindus and the British Government and also among themselves. He invited Jinnah to come back to India after Round Table Conferences (RTCs) held in 1930-1933 from his self-assumed exile explaining in clear tone that it was only the Quaid, who could lead the nation out of turmoil, as he expounded in the letter on 21st June, 1937 that Jinnah was the only Muslim in India to whom the community had a right to look up for safe guidance through the storm which is coming to North West and perhaps the whole of India.(Haider, 1985, p. 296)Iqbal viewed Jinnah as "Incorruptible and un-purchasable." Jinnah declared him "the sage philosopher and the poet of Islam in his foreword of the letters compilation. (Ahmad, 2017)& (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 27)Jinnah also explained the background of correspondence between both the personalities and declared that these sharing of thoughts had led the establishment of Central Parliamentary Board of All India Muslim League in June 1936 and the great historic session at Lucknow in October 1937 was also took place which was an explicit and significant development in the history of Muslim of India (Dar, 1978, p. 136) Quaid also recognized Iqbal's contribution for creating intellectual grounds for Muslim League popularity in Muslim majority province of Punjab.

**Ideological basis of the Muslim Nation**

Iqbal was among the Muslim thinker of the 20th century, who made effort for the Renaissance in Islamic thoughts, culture, politics and economy. He appreciated the modern ideologies of Secularism and liberalism yet he warned that the induction of these ideas in the Muslim folds should be under taken cautiously. He denounced Nehru's Socialist views in his Letter to Jinnah on May 28, 1937. He inclined in this letter to accept the idea of social democracy but in some suitable form and in consistence with the legal principles. He declared it as a return to the original purity of Islam which might lead the Muslims to solve the problems of modern world comprehensively.(Asim, 1977, p. 140)He presented the solution of the Muslims problems in the Islamic economic system. However, while raising the question how this could be implemented? He resolved that reinforcement and evolution of the Islamic Economic Law may be taken place only in an independent and sovereign state, keeping in view the changing surroundings.(Allana, 1969)At the same time, he was of the view that the modern basis of homeland, i.e., race, language and geographical boundaries, are causing bifurcations among the humanity. The modern democracies and form of the governments according to him are:

*Jalale Padshahi ho ya Jamhoori Tamasha ho*

*Juda ho Deen Siyasat say to reh jati hai Changezi*

Asim (1977) viewed that political problems become meaningless to Iqbal with respect to the religious and moral matters in particular conditions of Hindustan. (Asim, 1977, p. 98) He (Iqbal) advised Jinnah in his letter on March 20th, 1937, to held an All-India Muslim Convention in Delhi. Where Muslim leadership should present the political objective of the Indian Muslims emphatically and where the Muslims could be presented clearly as a distinct political entity in the country. It was imperative to present this before the world; both inside and outside India and that the economic problem was not the core problem in the country but the cultural problem carries much greater consequence to most of Indian Muslims. (Letter to Jinnah, March 20, 1937) It would be made clear to the other communities of India, particularly the majority community, the Hindus that no political device could make the Indian Muslim lose sight of his cultural entity.

**Unity among the Muslims**

The disunity in the ranks of the Muslims on the basis of classes, groups and factions was the major obstruction on the way to work for the Muslim interests. Iqbal advised for the unity among the Muslims, not only in India but the whole world, as he narrates:

*Ek hon Muslim Haram ki Pasbani k Liye*

*Neel k Sahil se le kar Tabakhak e Kashghar*

Unity to Iqbal, was the foremost need of the time and essential to achieve their objectives. He urged to diminish differences among the various groups therefore he favored the agreement between AIML and the Unionists in his letter in August, 1936 despite of the fact that he was against the Unionist ideology. The Unionist had not only created split between the urban and the rural areas on the name of Punjabi nationalism but they limited their politics on regional status, neglecting the Muslim contextualization India-wide. Iqbal on the other hand was demanding in his Letter to Jinnah on June 21, 1937, representation for the Muslims of India according to the Communal Award, only thing this Award granted to the Muslims but could not solve acute problem of poverty of the Muslims. (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 34)He opined that the Muslim representation would be effective only by the Muslim members in the Constituent Assemblies and in the respective Cabinets.(Asim, 1977, p. 124) The Politics on Unionist line would harm the Muslim Cause. Such character of non-communal Politics had been making the Muslims dependent on the other communities or groups in Constituent Assemblies. Nevertheless, he appreciated the AIML alliance with PROJA Party in Bengal (Letter to Jinnah, August 23, 1936) and wished to work with Unionists in Punjab, too, with reservations that the Unionists would be bound by the decision of the League in all matters related to the Muslim community as an all-India minority. (Unionist Party would never make any pact with any non-Muslims group in the Provincial Assembly. Despite of all the efforts rendered by Iqbal, the Unionists had been trying to maneuver the agreement with AIML and conditioned their co-operation by stating that the League members would function with their party which claimed the largest Muslim numbers thus, annihilating the effectiveness of Muslim League's policy to function. On the other hand, Iqbal was extremely sensitive about the Muslim representation in the Legislative bodies that in the letter on May 20th 1937, he proposed that the attendance of the Muslim legislators who had formed parties contrary to the aims and aspirations of Indian Muslims should be conditioned for a test of their credentials in the proposed All India Convention of the legislators.

**Co-operation among the Communities**

Iqbal was not against the Unity between the communities in India, yet he was regretful of the Congress president, who denied the political existence of Muslims in no unmistakable term. In addition, he observed in his Letter to Jinnah on June 21, 1937 that the Hindu Mahasabha had also defied many times that a united Hindu-Muslim nation was impossible). (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 34) Therefore, he was strictly in favor of separate electorate for the Muslims. He emphatically stated that the future of the Muslims is related to the separate electorate at least for the time being while replying to the Gandhi's letter to British Prime Minister (Asim, 1977, p. 103)Iqbal, along with Sir Agha Khan had also assured Mr. Gandhi at the occasion of Round Table Conferences, that Muslims will obey him (Mr. Gandhi) if their demands will be accepted by the Congress and Hindus. Mr. Gandhi agreed to this in his own capacity but did not give the guarantee from the part of Congress despite of the fact, that he was the sole representative appointed by the Congress. (Asim, 1977, p. 107) On the question of the provincial election under 1935 Act, he laid the emphasis on the mutual consensus among the Muslims, Hindus and also the Sikhs, along with the political co-operation with those of liberal and patriotic Hindus, Sikhs and the Christians in the Parliament.(Asim, 1977, p. 125) In his letter on March 20, 1937 he reiterated Muslims' readiness to collaborate with other Progressive Parties of the country along with reinforcing their own organization as a moral and political force not losing their cultural entity as well.

Jinnah also viewed that Congress High Command treated the Muslims to be a mere understudy of the Congress, ignoring them (the Muslims) after they had served their (Congress) purpose. Indian National Congress had killed every hope of Hind Muslim settlement in the right royal fashion of fascism,(Waheed-uz-Zaman, 1969, p. 111)and once the ambassador of Hindu Muslim unity came to the conclusion that co-operation between Congress and Muslims was not possible. Lord Wavell expressed concern to the communal riots, particularly in Bihar and UP, wrote to the British Government in his letter on November 05, 1945 "…violence has increased everywhere in the country after the annual session of All India National Congress. Its behavior towards the Muslim League has becoming more non-cooperative day by day". (Kamran, 1981, pp. 130-132) Despite of all offers of co-operation extended by the Muslims, the riots were taking place in India, particularly in North-Western part. Conditions were worsened when at least four cases of vilification of Prophet (S.A.V) by Hindus and Sikhs were reported creating high tensions among the communities which resulted in murder of all vilifiers. (Letter to Jinnah, June 21, 1937) Iqbal believed, "the real cause of these events was neither economic nor religious but purely political. It was the Sikhs and Hindus' desire to intimidate Muslims even in the Muslim majority provinces." (Asim, 1977, p. 142) (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 134) Congress was not successful in barring the rioters despite of its claims of being a continental representative. In this context, it is not surprising that Iqbal considered Hindu Mahasabha the real representative of Hindus despite of the Congress majority win in at least eight provinces in 1937 elections. Mahasabha was proclaiming the separatism between Hindus and Muslims. The party's19th session was held in 1937 at Ahmadabad. While presiding the session, Veer Savarkar enchanted that India could not be the Unitarian and homogenous nation, but Hindus and Muslims are two main nations there. (Savarkar in Ahmedabad 'declared' to nation theory in 1937, Jinnah followed 3 years later, 2016) Iqbal warned that the Indian social fabric which comprises of the Hindu caste system needed basic reforms. This process is imperative to accomplish prior Hindus and Muslims strive for combine

efforts for independence. (Karim, 2010) These socio-political relations between the communities led Iqbal to conclude finally that the only way to keep the peace in India was the establishment of separate state of the Muslims. He feared that Palestine may be repeated in country. He even doubted Jawarhar Lal's socialism that might cause much bloodshed among the Hindus themselves.(Allana, 1969)

**Reforms were essential**

Karl Marx is of the view that history is basically the story of struggle between the social classes in any given society. Iqbal laments the plight of the poor Muslims in India, too. Whose class difference and misery in comparison with the upper class Muslims too had been widening gradually but speedily. The new longest constitution of India (Indian Legislative Act of 1935) devised by the political institutions of the British had never thought of improving the plight of the poor Muslims. Higher posts were monopolized by the sons of upper classes and the smaller ones went to the friends or relatives of the ministers.(Allana, 1969) Hence, AIML should come forward with the comprehensive and workable plan for them. Fortunately, to Iqbal, Islam has presented an economic system which could not only reduce poverty but also lead the Muslims into a nation.

The question here was how these reforms could be brought about positively? The answer is an independent region with a sovereign government where the Islamic laws **of** social justice would be enforced, and Islamic economic system would be experienced keeping in view the needs of modern time.(Asim, 1977, pp. 139-140) Jinnah established a planning committee in 1943 in accordance to Iqbal's vision. It had to work out a five year plan for the socio-economic development in an independent country for the Muslims of India. Quaid-i-Azam envisioned that the economic system of the west had been creating inexplicable problems for the human societies. He expressed his hope to evolve the banking practices which would be an expression of Islamic ideas of a just social and economic life.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IQBAL'S PHILOSOPHY

Though dare and live was Iqbal's message as Jinnah stated, it is obvious that early line of action Iqbal practiced was different to that of Jinnah. He was also a Nationalist in the beginning but he never endorsed weightage endowed to the Hindu minorities in the provinces where the Muslims were in majority. He postulated that the Muslims in Hindu majority provinces had no utility of the weightage they got in pursuance of historic Lucknow Pact. On the other hand, they had to sacrifice their majority in their majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. Iqbal gave much importance to these provinces as these might render important role in the efforts to achieve freedom and sovereignty for the Muslims as a nation. He also antagonized the excluding of the right of separate electorate in Delhi Proposal by Jinnah as a gesture to achieve the Hindu Muslim unity. However, weightage rule was incorporated in MacDonald's Communal Award on August 16, 1932. All the minority communities along with the Muslims were endowed with the Right to vote separately. Principle of weightage with modifications was also maintained in the Muslim-minority Provinces. It was applied to the Europeans in Bengal and Assam, Sikhs in the Punjab and North Western Frontier Province, and to Hindus as well in Sind and North Western Frontier Province. However, Iqbal's apprehensions came true as 56% Muslim population in Punjab secured only 86 seats out of 175 in the Punjab Assembly. Similarly, the

Muslim majority of 54.8% in Bengal was also reduced to the minority in its provincial Assembly. Apparently this formula favored the minorities in Punjab and also Bengal. (The Communal Award (1932))

Provincial elections in 1937 disclosed the negative implications of the communal formula. Congress ministries and leadership executed non-co-operative attitude which molded the All India Muslim League view under the Jinnah's leadership from formation of a responsible government in the Centre to a wholly new form of government safeguarding the rights of all communities. Revolutionary steps were adopted tore-organize Muslim League on popular basis as the only authoritative and representative organization of Indian Muslim. (Dar, 236) Sind Provincial Muslim League was the first at provincial level to express these views proposing to devise a constitution under which Muslims may achieve full independence(Waheed-uz-Zaman, 1969, p. 112) and may establish 'a true democracy in accordance with Islam'. As Quaid was true democrats who always respected and represented the interests of his people, he envisioned a democratic political system that could operate within today's global environment, declared Salina Karim in an interview. That is why Iqbal deliberately chose Jinnah to lead his people. (Karim, 2010)Quaid recognized Iqbal's philosophical contribution in one of his messages as, "Iqbal's works should be read and digested by every Muslim and we all should strive to organize the Muslims and to create solidarity throughout India, economically, educationally, socially and politically." (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 42) Iqbal's philosophy derided earlier by friends and foes was materialized finally in Lahore Resolution in 1940 by AIML. Quaid once again remembered the poet philosopher by stating if had he been alive, he would have been happy to know that Muslim League carried out exactly what he wished us to do. (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 40)

**Conclusion**

Iqbal's approach in these letters reflects a nationalistic-pan-Islamist view. He talks about the problem of Palestine and gave a piece of advice to Jinnah to let the Muslims of India aware of these issues, too. He assured in his letter on March 20, 1937 that the new constitution had brought a unique opportunity to the Muslims of India to make them organized for imminent political developments in India and Muslim Asia as well. He emphasized that future of Islam as a moral and political force in Asia rested on a complete organisation of Indian Muslims. (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 29. 30)

Iqbal obsessed to arrange an All India convention inviting the Muslim representatives in Legislative Councils and other Muslim leaders to elaborate the facts and to find out the solutions of the Indian problems.(Dar, 1978) He expressed his belief in the rule of democracy while on the way to attending the third round table conference in 1932. He advised the Muslims to retain right for separate electorate. However, replying the question if the majority of the Muslims thought otherwise, he assured to abide by the majority decision and that he would not work against it."(Shafique, 2012)Iqbal did not conceded to the principle of weightage as agreed upon in Lucknow Pact yet He emphasized the importance of Muslim League to be activated positively in Punjab and to seek co-operation of other parties. He was anxious for the fruitful conclusion of the negotiation carried on with the Unionist Party, so that the masses apprehensions towards AIML might be eliminated. He expressed his concern for the grave situation in Punjab. He wanted Muslim League leadership to propose possible social and economic solutions to eradicate poverty among the Muslim masses or otherwise they would become rapidly pro-congress, Iqbal's Letter to Jinnah, April 22, 1937 in (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 31) Iqbal had also tried to turn

Jinnah's attention towards the elite class status of the League and to take steps to make it a body representative of masses giving the promise to improve the lot of the average Muslims in India.

Tarane e Hindustani presented Iqbal's nationalistic viewbut he complained later for the behaviour of Hindu and Sikh masses and their leaders. He denounced Nehru's version of socialism and foresaw it as more suitable for Mahasabhaian extremist vision, even he declares Mahasabha as the real Hindu representative organization. (Iqbal Letters to Jinnah June 21, 1937, Ashraf, 2002) This suspicion has been disclosing itself recently and Hindutva is spreading its tentacles in Indian society engulfing not only Muslims but also the other religious minorities. Accordingly, he presented his views in his famous Address in Allahabad in 1930 that the Indian society had not comprised the territorial units but it was a continent of human groups who belong to different races, languages and religions. He proposed a federation of Muslim Provinces consisting of North-West India and Bengal which should be entitled of self-determination. This could lead to a peaceful India and also save the Muslims from the hegemony of an uncompromising majority. The creation of a sovereign and independent Muslim State was also an imperative to him for experiencing the evolution in Islamic thoughts in social, cultural, economic and political fields for the betterment of the Muslims within and outside India. (Ashraf, 2013)

This was the idea quoted popularly in Quaid's words too, "We do not want just a piece of land but a laboratory where the Islamic principles were to be tested". Jinnah acknowledged Iqbal's efforts in popularizing All India Muslim League in minority and majority provinces particularly Punjab had made a remarkable progress and it was beyond doubt that the Muslims stood solidly behind the Muslim League Organization,(Dar, 1978, p. 237)and Sir Muhammad Iqbal played a most significant part in achieving this goal, Jinnah recognized in his message on Iqbal's death on April 21, 1938, Calcutta. (Zulfiqar, 1985, p. 38 & Editor, 2012)

The perpetual denial of rights to the Muslim minority of India by the British Government and unyielding attitude by the Congress and its leaders steered both Iqabl and Jinnah to conclude the same objectives for the Muslims of India that the ultimate solution of the Indian Communal Problem was an independent and sovereign state for the Muslims. Though Jinnah is still blamed for this conversion leaving the line of action of Hindu-Muslim Unity, and still it is a point of discussion among scholars, however it was materialized in the Muslim League's Lahore Session, held on 22-24 March 1940, when Muslim League adopted the resolution, which was named Lahore Resolution and later as Pakistan Resolution. Jinnah who hoped future of India with Hindus and Muslims as 'partner' or 'nations' even in 1936 became agreed to Iqbal's ideas. (Karim, 2010)

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**ANNEXURE 1**

**A Chronology of Iqbal's Letter to Jinnah**[1]

1. Letter 1. May 23, 1936 ,Lahore
2. Letter 2. June 09, 1936, Lahore
3. Letter 3. June 25, 1936, Lahore
4. Letter 4. August 23, 1936, Lahore
5. Letter 5. March 20, 1937, Lahore
6. Letter 6. April 22, 1937, Lahore
7. Letter 7. May 28, 1937, Lahore
8. Letter 8. June 21, 1937, Lahore
9. Letter 9. August 11, 1937, Lahore
10. Letter 10. October 07, 1937, Lahore
11. Letter 11. October 30, 1937, Lahore
12. Letter 12. November 01, 1937, Lahore
13. Letter 13. November 10, 1937, Lahore

[1]Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf. *Iqbal to Jinnah: A Collection of Iqbal's Letters to the Quaid-I-Azam Conveying his Views on the Political Future of Muslim India*. Reproduced by Sani H. Panhwar. (June 24, 2022). Retrieved from http://sanipanhwar.com/IQBAL%20TO%20JINNAH.pdf.& Dr. Bashir Ahmad Dar. *Letters of Iqbal*.