

## DEMOCRACY, ISLAM AND PAKISTAN: A STUDY IN THEORETICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

**Sultan Mahmood**

Assistant Professor, Department of Pakistan Studies,  
Abbottabad University of Science and Technology,  
PAKISTAN.

wafa692@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

*Role of democracy and Islam in the polity has always remained dominant discourse in Pakistani politics. Democracy played vital role in the creation of Pakistan. Nature and functioning of the movement for Pakistan and the invocation of Islam as its raison d'être places Pakistan as only country in the Muslim World founded explicitly on religious doctrine through popular democratic movement rather than by historical accident or colonial invention. In this perspective it is important to explore and analyze aspirations and expectations of the founding fathers of the country regarding the nature and interaction of democracy and Islam. Present study has discussed this phenomenon in the light of primary sources.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Islam, Pakistan, Constitution, Iqbal, Jinnah

### INTRODUCTION

#### Role of Democratic Process in the Creation of Pakistan

There are few countries in the world where democratic process have played as vital role in the creation of a country as it played in the creation of Pakistan. Movement for Pakistan was a popular democratic movement, involving mass participation. Moreover it was astonishing victory of All India Muslim League in the General elections of 1945-46 due to which demand for Pakistan 'was though unwillingly accepted' by congress and the British Government.(Ahmad R., 1990:71-72) The Muslim League fought these elections on two clear-cut issues:

1. Muslims of India are a separate nation and Muslim League is real representative party of Indian Muslims.
2. Division of India and the establishment of a separate and independent Muslim state, Pakistan is only solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem in India.

On the other hand Muslim League's main opponent political party, Indian National Congress stood on two exactly opposed slogans:

1. Indian people are one nation and the Congress represents all Indians.
2. India will remain undivided country' (Qureshi, 1987:236)

In the elections to the central legislature held in 1945, the All India Muslim League won all 30 seats reserved for the Muslims. In the 1946 elections to the provincial assemblies, the League won 84 percent of the Muslim seats. (Palmer, 1975:178) Nationalist Muslims who opposed Muslim League, forfeited their deposits in many cases' (Sayeed, 1978:11) The Muslim League achieved about 75% or 4.5 million Muslim votes in the elections. It achieved 460 out of the 533 Muslim seats of provincial and central legislatures. (Sayeed, 1978:178)

Muslim League's sweeping victory among Muslim voters not only completely vindicated its claim to represent the Indian Muslims, but also proved that Muslims of India unanimously favour the partition of Indian sub-continent and establishment of Pakistan. In the perspective of such a sweeping victory of Muslim League, it became impossible for British rulers and Congress to ignore league's demand for Pakistan. That is why it is said that if the League had not performed so well in 1945-46 Elections "it is very likely that Pakistan would not come into existence". (Wilder, 1999: 1)

### **DEMOCRACY: VISION OF MUHAMMAD ALI JINNAH**

Pakistan's founder Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was a confirmed believer in democracy. Jamiluddin Ahmad in his article 'The Quaid as an Ardent Democrat' observed that as a democrat, he believed in converting others "to his point of view by argument and reasoning, "and to this end his forensic abilities were valuable asset to him". (Mughal, 1999:5) As the president of Muslim League, he always followed constitutional democratic principles of consultation, collaboration and cooperation and never took any arbitrary decision. For him any decision taken on behalf of Muslim League could only be taken after due process of consultation. In his presidential address of the session of All India Muslim League in 1943 he said:

'Democracy is in our blood. It is in our marrows. Only centuries of adverse circumstances have made the circulation of that blood cold. It has got frozen and our arteries are not functioning. But thanks God, the blood is circulating again, thanks to the Muslim League, It (Pakistan) will be people's government' (Qureshi M., 1997: 8)

This statement shows that he considered democracy as most important component of an Islamic society, like blood in the human body. Due to centuries of adverse circumstances i.e. rule of kings, monarchs, hereditary dynasties, this blood has got frozen and real democratic face of Islamic society has been vanished. He was hopeful that in Pakistan people's government i.e. democracy will function and in this way blood will start circulating again.

Not only Pakistan is product of democratic process, purpose of its creation as visualized by its founders was also establishment of a democratic system based on Islamic principles. While clarifying this fact Quaid-i-Azam stated: "It should be our aim not only to remove want and fear but also to secure Liberty, fraternity and equality as enjoined upon us by Islam". (Mughal, 1999:10) Addressing the Shahi Darbar at Sibi in Baluchistan on 14 February 1948, Quaid-i-Azam said:

'I have had one underlying principle in mind, the principle of Muslim democracy. It is my belief that our salvation lies in following the golden rules of conduct set for us by our great law giver, the Prophet of Islam. Let us lay the foundations of our democracy on the basis of truly Islamic ideals and principles. Our Almighty has taught us that "our decisions in the affairs of the state shall be guided by discussions and consultations (Iqbal J: 1971: 5)

In a broadcast to the people of U.S.A in the February 1948, he clarified the validity of democratic principles of Islam in the following words:

'The constitution of Pakistan has yet to be framed by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be of democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam. Today they are as applicable in actual life as they were 1300 years ago'. (Burke, 2000: 148)

Explaining the relationship between Islam and democracy he said:

‘Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of man, justice and fairplay to everybody. What reason is there for everyone to fear democracy, equality, freedom on highest standard of integrity and on the basis of fairplay and justice to everybody?’ (Yousafi, 1996: 2669)

Equality and justice are most prominent components of democracy. Quaid-i-Azam, during his address to Karachi Bar Association on 25 January 1948 stated that democratic system of Islam “is based on the highest principles of honour, integrity, fairplay and justice for all.” He clarified that ‘One God and the equality of manhood is one of the fundamental principles of Islam. Islam there is no difference between man and man. The qualities of equality, liberty and fraternity are the fundamental principles of Islam’. (Zulfiqar, n.d.:237)

He expressed similar views in his public address at Chittagong On 26 March 1948 in following words:

‘It would be possible for each one of us to realize the great ideals of human progress and social justice, of equality and fraternity, which on the one hand constitute the basic course of the birth of Pakistan and also the limitless possibilities of evolving an ideal social structure of our state’. (Ali, 2001: 652)

Even before creation of the Pakistan, he always tried to make it clear in the minds of his followers that Pakistan’s political system will be based upon democracy. In his article ‘Quaid-i-Azam as a Democrat’, Hasan A.Sheikh narrates that on 25th December 1945, birthday of Quaid-i-Azam was celebrated in Bombay. At a place near the J.J. Hospital, a portrait of the Quaid-i-Azam was displayed and on the corner of the portrait was written “Shahinshah-i-Pakistan Zindabad” [Urdu: Long Live King of the Pakistan]. While passing by the road, he noticed this portrait. He immediately came down from the car and addressed the huge crowd that had gathered and said: “Pakistan is going to be a democracy and there is no room for a Shahinshah [king] in Pakistan”. (Quoted in Mughal, 1999:8-9)

Quaid-i-Azam believed that democracy is most prominent characteristic of Muslim society. Speaking before the London branch of the Muslim League, on December 14, 1946, he compared democratic inclinations of Muslim and Hindu societies in following words:

‘Democracy is alien to Hindu society. I do not want to show any disrespect for any other society. But the Hindu society is cast-ridden and cast-bound. The untouchables have no place socially, economically on any way at all. Democracy is the blood of the Musalmans, we look upon complete equality of manhood. I give you an example. Very often when I go to a mosque, my Chauffeur stands side by side with me. Musalmans believe in fraternity, equality and liberty’. (Mughal, 1999:8-9)

Earlier at The session of All India Muslim League held in April 1943, he said:

‘We learnt democracy 1300 years ago. It is in our blood stream...it is we, who have learnt the lesson of equality and brotherhood of man. Among you (Hindus). one caste will not take a cup of water from another. Is this democracy? Is this honesty? We are for democracy...But not the democracy of your conception, which will turn the whole of India into a Gandhi Ashram. One society and nation will, by its permanent majority destroy another nation in permanent minority’. (Editorial:1997)

In the Lukhnow session of the All India Muslim league in December 1916, he emphasized that “There are no people in the world who are more democratic, even in their religion, than the Musalmans.” (Pirzada, 1969:375) Similarly while replying to a question whether Pakistan would be a secular or theocratic state, he categorically stated:

‘You are asking me a question that is absurd. What I have already said is like throwing water on a duck’s back. When you talk of democracy, I am afraid you have not studied Islam. We learned democracy thirteen centuries ago.’ (Mahmood, 20002: 42)

He was aware that in Europe word ‘Theocracy’ was being used as antonym of democracy. So he declared that ‘Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state, to be ruled by priests with a divine mission’. (Ahmad J., 1955:463) After the establishment of Pakistan, speaking with reference to his own Government on 25 March 1948 at Chittagong, Quaid-i-Azam said: “It is people’s Government responsible to the people more or less on democratic lines and parliamentary practices” (Ahmad R., 1990:71) Similarly on 21 February 1948, Quaid-i-Azam talked of securing ‘securing Islamic democracy, Islamic social justice and the equality of manhood’ in Pakistan. (Mujahid, 1997:88 ) He wanted the democracy flourish in the Pakistan. For it he wanted that armed forces of the country should protect democratic process in Pakistan. In his address to the officers and men of the 5<sup>th</sup> heavy Ack Ack and 6<sup>th</sup> Light Ack Ack Regiments in Malair on 21 February 1948, he asserted “Now you have to stand guard over the development and maintenance of Islamic democracy, Islamic social justice and the equality of manhood in your native soil. You will have to be alert, very alert”(Yousafi, 1996: 2691)

### **DEMOCRACY: VISION OF ALLAMA MUHAMMAD IQBAL**

Like Quaid-i-Azam, Allama Mohammad Iqbal who first proposed the idea of Pakistan, also considered democracy as a most prominent aspect of political system of Islam. While presenting the idea of separate Muslim state in Indian sub-continent, he claimed that separate Muslim state would provide opportunity for Islam “to rid itself of the stamp that Arabian Imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilize its education, its culture and to bring them into close contact with its own original spirit”. (Vahid, 1964: 173) Iqbal considered democracy as a most prominent aspect of political system of Islam. Allama Mohammad Iqbal He said:

‘Islam is something more than a creed; it is also a community, a nation. The membership of Islam is not determined by birth, locality or naturalization; it consists in the identity of belief...The best form of government for such a community would be democracy, the ideal of which is to let a man develop all the possibilities of his nature by allowing him as much freedom as practicable. The Caliph of Islam is not an infallible being; like other Muslims, he is subject to the same law; he is elected by the people and is deposed by them if he goes contrary to the law...Democracy, then is the most important aspect of Islam as a political Ideal’. (Hashimy, 1977:101-3)

Iqbal while explaining nature of Islamic political system clarified that: “There is no aristocracy in Islam, says the Prophet (PBUH).’The noblest amongst you are those fear God most’. There is no privileged class, no priesthood; no caste system. Islam is a unity in which there is no distinction” (Hashimy, 1977:108) Presenting a comparison of Islamic and western democracy Iqbal clarified that

‘The Democracy of Europe... originated mainly in the economic regeneration of European societies...The Democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity, it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a centre of latent power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character.’ (Siddiqi, 1970:79-80)

Iqbal argues that “Islam had from the very outset recognized the principle that the community is the real depository of political power. The electors only choose a reliable person whom they consider fit for the exercise of political power and entrusts him with the reins of government.” Iqbal says that “the assumption of power by any individual in the manner described does not entitle him to any special privileges. In the eyes of Islamic law, his personal status in no way differs from that of an ordinary Muslim.” Political equality and accountability are fundamental principles of democratic system. ‘The ruler in Islam, says Iqbal, is a member of the Islamic democracy like any other member. He can be sued against in a court of law, and if a suit is brought against him, he will have to attend the law court personally. Every Muslim is entitled to criticize any action taken by the ruler in his capacity as head of the government’. (Siddiqi, 1970: 80) Belief in the worth of the individual is most dominant idea of Iqbal’s political philosophy. He believes that progress in the society depends upon ‘self-centered individuals’. (Iqbal, 1930:151) So he advocates right of vote for every individual and opposes the qualification of property for voter. (Siddiqi M.S, 1977: 48) So he declares that: “The Kingdom of God on earth means the democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided by the most unique individual on the earth”. (Iqbal:1960: XXXVIII) Iqbal thinks that every individual possess In his book “*Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he elaborated this concept in following words:

‘The essence of tawhid (monotheism) as a working idea is equality, solidarity and freedom. The state from the Islamic standpoint is an endeavor to transform these ideal principles into Space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them into a definite human organization. (Iqbal, 1930:154)

Explaining the Islamic way of life Iqbal clarified that “In Islam, God and the universe, spirit and matter, church and state are organic to each other” and about the nature of Islamic State he emphasized that “For Islam, the acceptance of social democracy in some suitable form and consistent with the legal principles of Islam is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam” (Syed, 1985:62) Iqbal declared himself in favour of the republican form of government. He speaks of such a form of government as being ‘not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islam, but (it) has also become a necessity in view of the new forces that are set free in the world of Islam”. (Cornelius; n.d.:101) He always expressed his concern over the absence of democracy in the Islamic world and considered it a factor which marred the original democratic face of Islamic culture. That’s why he expressed his satisfaction over the introduction of representative institutions in Turkey in these words: “The growth of the republican spirit and the gradual formation of legislative assemblies in the Muslim lands constitutes a great step in time”. (Cornelius; n.d.:101)

Iqbal has discussed the question of legislation in his lecture about the spirit of Islamic Culture in *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. According to Allama Mohammad Iqbal the power of *ijtihad* in the modern Islamic state should be exercised by the elected assembly. He thinks that original temperament of Muslim *Ummah* is democratic. Initially it’s political and legislative institutions were based on the principles of democracy and mutual consultation but with the passage of time these institutions transformed into authoritarian institutions and right of legislation shifted from collective institutions to individuals. (Masood,1985:149).

## DEMOCRACY: POPULAR SENTIMENTS IN PAKISTAN

Majority of Pakistanis always considered democracy as their desired and proffered system of government for Pakistan. Saeed Shafqat observes:

‘It merits attention and recognition that among the Muslim states and developing world, Pakistan is one of those few states, where people have shown vigor and some vitality to adopt a democratic parliamentary system and through popular mass movements demonstrated disapproval of military dictatorships. An enduring feature of Pakistani culture, history and politics has been an aspiration for democracy. The passion for democracy continues to resurge, despite ethnic, social class, religious cleavages, strong authoritarian tendencies and prolonged military rule.’ (Shafqat, 1998: 281)

According to a survey conducted in 2007, by World Public Opinion in Collaboration with, and with financial support from the United States Institute of Peace 84% Pakistanis supported democratic and representative system of government. (<http://www.worldpublicopinion.org>) Another survey conducted by Sabahat Jawaid of Government College Lahore in 1995, among politicians, bureaucrats and scholars of Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad using the technique of stratified sampling revealed similar results.(Jawaid, 1995:82).

**Table 1. Democracy and Political Culture of Pakistan**

<i>Question: Is it true that democracy suits the political culture and temperament of the people of Pakistan?</i>		
Total Number of Respondents	280	100%
Yes	194	69.3%
No	86	30.7%

Source: Sabahat Jawaid, ‘The Dilemma of Democracy in Pakistan’, M.A. Political Science Thesis, Government College Lahore, 1995. p.82.

In 1969, Nasim A. Jawed conducted a survey in undivided Pakistan. He selected a sample of 163 persons from four occupational categories. The occupational categories belonged to two social classes: practicing lawyers, university teachers, and journalists from the modern educated ‘new middle class’ and the *ulama* from the traditional religious leadership. In response to the question “With which political systems among democracy, dictatorship, fascism etc., is Islam closer in spirit. Majority of the respondents considered that Islam was closer to democracy. (Jawed, 1969: 69) There is considerable consensus between different segments of Pakistani population and political parties with conflicting ideologies about the place of democracy in political system of Pakistan. (Qureshi, 1951:5)

## DEMOCRACY & ISLAM: CONSTITUTION OF PAKISTAN

Political and constitutional history of Pakistan presents an interesting example of interaction between Islam and democracy. The most conspicuous source demonstrating this interaction is Objectives Resolution which was passed in 1949 by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan and is included in three successive constitutions of Pakistan. Relevant portions of it clearly state that political system of Pakistan would be democratic. It states that “the State shall exercise its powers and authority through chosen representatives of the people; principles of democracy, freedom, equality tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed; independence of judiciary shall be fully secured and adequate provisions shall be made to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities”.(CAD, 1949:100-101) Explaining the vital position of democracy in the constitution, Pakistan’s first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, who moved this resolution in the Constituent Assembly, said: “When we use the word

democracy in the Islamic sense, it pervades all aspects of our life; it relates to our system of Government and to our society equal validity.” (Choudhury,1969:37)

## CONCLUSION

Founders of Pakistan visualised Pakistan as a modern democratic Islamic state and constitution of the state was also framed on the basis of this vision but these ideals could not be translated into reality in real spirit. Democratic process was interrupted at regular intervals and during first fifty years of its history, the country has been ruled for almost half of the time by authoritarian military regimes. Pakistan’s history is dominated by authoritarian rule, autocracy and dictatorship.

According to Maurice Duverger “political systems like the aeroplane, are destined to fall into dictatorship or violence. Only constant vigilance and creative spirit can keep them aloft in the skies of democracy.” (Duverger, 1965: 90) So people of Pakistan should remain vigilant to translate the vision of Iqbal and Jinnah into reality.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Ahmad, J. (ed.) (1952). *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, Vol.II, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.
- [2]. Ahmad, R. (1990). *Quaid-i-Azam’s Perception of Islam and Democracy*, Rawalpindi: Alvi Publishers.
- [3]. Ali, M. (2001). *Jinnah on World Affairs: Select Documents, 1908-1948*, Karachi: Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi.
- [4]. Burke, S.M.(2000). *Jinnah: Speeches and Statements*, Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- [5]. CAD (1949). *The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, Vol.V, Karachi: Government of Pakistan.
- [6]. Choudhury, G. W. (1969). *Constitutional Development in Pakistan*, London: Longman.
- [7]. Cornelius, Justice A. R. (n.d.). ‘Ideological Foundation for Democracy in Islam’ in Khawaja Abdur Rahim (ed.). *Iqbal, the Poet of Tomorrow*, Lahore: Markziyya Majlis-i-Iqbal.
- [8]. Duverger, M. (1965). ‘The Development of Democracy in France’, in Henry W. Ehrmann(ed.). *Democracy in a Changing Society*, London: Paul Mell Press.
- [9]. Editorial (1997). ‘Quaid-i-Azam and Democracy’, *The Muslim*, 25 December 1997.
- [10]. Hashimy, S.Y.(ed.) (1977). *Iqbal’s Maiden English Lecture(1908),Islam as an Ethical and A Political Ideal*, Lahore: Islamic Book Service.
- [11]. Iqbal, J. (1971). *Ideology of Pakistan*, Lahore: Ferozsons.
- [12]. Iqbal, M. (1930) *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Sheikh Mohammad Ashraf.
- [13]. Iqbal, M. (1960). *The Secrets of Self*, tr. R. A. Nicholson, Lahore, Quoted in Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *Concept of Muslim Culture in Iqbal*, p.72.
- [14]. Jawaid, S. (1995). ‘The Dilemma of Democracy in Pakistan’, M.A. Political Science Thesis, Government College Lahore.

- [15]. Jawed, N. A. (1969). *Islam's Political Culture*, Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- [16]. Mahmood, S. (2002). 'Jinnah's Vision of Pakistan', *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, Vol. XXIII(1).
- [17]. Masood, Dr. K.(1985). *Iqbal Ka Tasawwar-e-Ijtehad* [Urdu: Iqbal's Concept of *Ijtehad* ], Rawalpindi: Matboohat-e-Hurmat.
- [18]. Mughal, M.Y. (1999). 'Quaid-i-Azam and Democracy', *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* (Vol. XIV, No.2).
- [19]. Mujahid, S. (1997). 'Jinnah's Vision of Pakistan' in Zia Mian and Iftikhar Ahmad, *Making Enemies, Creating Conflict: Pakistan's Crisis of State and Society*, Lahore: Mashal.
- [20]. Palmer, N. D.(1975). *Elections and Political Development: The South Asian Experience*, Durham, N.C: Duke University Press.
- [21]. Pirzada, S. S. (ed.) (1969). *Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947*, Vol.II, Karachi: National Publishing House.
- [22]. Qureshi, I. H. (1951). *Pakistan: An Islamic Democracy*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture.
- [23]. Qureshi, I. H. (1987). *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Karachi: University of Karachi.
- [24]. Qureshi, M.A. (1997). 'Ideology of Pakistan', *Journal of Research Society of Pakistan*, (Vol.XXIV, No.1).
- [25]. Sayeed, K. B. (1978). *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948*, Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- [26]. Shafqat, Saeed (1988). 'Democracy in Pakistan: Value Change and Challenges of Institution Building', *The Pakistan Development Review*, 37: 4 Part II (Winter 1998).
- [27]. Siddiqi, M. (1970). *Concept of Muslim Culture in Iqbal* , Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute.
- [28]. Siddiqi, M. S. (1977). 'Jamhooriyat, Iqbal Ki Nazar Main [Urdu: Democracy in the Eyes of Iqbal]', *Saheefa, Special Issue on Iqbal*, July-October 1977.
- [29]. Syed, M. A. (1985). 'Modernism, Traditionalism and Islamization in Pakistan', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.VIII, No.4 (Summer 1985).
- [30]. Vahid, S. A. (ed.) (1964). *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, Lahore: Sh. Mohammad Ashraf.
- [31]. Wilder, A. R. (1999). *The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punjab*, Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- [32]. Yousafi, K. A. K. (ed.) (1996). *Speeches' Statements and Messages of Quaid-e-Azam*, Lahore: Bazm-e-Iqbal, Vol.IV.
- [33]. Zulfiqar, G.H. (ed.) (n.d.). *Pakistan, As Visualized by Iqbal and Jinnah*, Lahore: Bazm-i-Iqbal.