

## Islamic Concept of Imāmat and Leadership in the Light of Iqbāl's thought Research Analysis

**Published:**

24-12-2023

**Accepted:**

05-12-2023

**Received:**

15-10-2023

**Dr. Shafiqah Bushra**Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic & Arabic Studies,  
University of SwatEmail: [shafiqabushra@uswat.edu.pk](mailto:shafiqabushra@uswat.edu.pk)

### Abstract

*In the eyes of Allah, the only religion is Islam, which is absolute goodness. The need for order from the lowest level to the national and international levels to run this system of goodness is proven by the Qur'an and Sunnah. Islam emphasizes unity and organization to such an extent that even two servants spend their time in a state of order on the journey, one being a leader and the other a follower. According to Umar Farooq Raziallah Anhu, "There is no concept of Islam without organization, no organization without leadership, and no leadership without obedience". There was no separate concept of religious and political leadership during the blessed days of the Prophet and his upright deputies. Later the religious and political leadership separated, of which Iqbal, may God have mercy on him, and is a great critic. In light of Iqbal's thought, it is also clear that the existence of the nation is in need of leadership. It is very important here that as much as the concept of ummah is important, in the same way, the quality of Imamat and leadership should also be exemplary. He emphasizes accepting the Prophet as a true leader and leader of the hearts and souls. The hidden aspects and facts of life are hidden in Iqbal's concept of self and the concept of self is actually a philosophical and eloquent interpretation of the concept of God's presence in the Quran. This research will be useful for those who are interested in understanding the concept of Imamat and leadership in the light of Iqbal's thought. The research method is descriptive using both primary and secondary sources.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Imamat, Khilafat, Iqbal.

## **Introduction**

In the sight of Allah, only Islam is the religion which is entirely beneficial. To run this system of goodness, organization is required from the lowest level to the national and international levels, as proven by the Quran and Sunnah. Islam emphasizes organization to such an extent that two individuals traveling together should appoint one as a leader and the other as a follower. According to Umar Farooq (may Allah be pleased with him), without organization, there is no Islam; without leadership, there is no organization; and without obedience, there is no leadership. During the blessed era of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, there was no separate concept of religious and political leadership. Later on, religious and political leadership became separate, a concept criticized by Allama Iqbal. It's also evident from the thoughts of Iqbal that the existence of the nation itself is in need of leadership. It's crucial to understand that just as the concept of the nation is important, similarly the standard of leadership should also be exemplary and worth following. It's clear that beyond the confines of color, race, and nationality, in real terms, declaring Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the true guide and leader from the heart and emphasizing obedience is essential. The hidden aspects and truths of the Prophet's biography are concealed within Iqbal's concept of selfhood, and the concept of selfhood is essentially a philosophical and eloquent interpretation of the divine concept found in the Quran. Understanding the concept of leadership and Imamate in Islam through the lens of Iqbal's thoughts and taking an interest in the education of leadership will be beneficial for individuals. This article follows a descriptive research methodology and utilizes both primary and secondary sources.

## **The Islamic Concept of Leadership and Governance**

According to Allah Almighty, Islam is the only religion that is entirely beneficial. The necessity of organization from the lowest to the national and international levels to run this system of goodness is established through the Quran and Sunnah. Islam emphasizes social cohesion and organization to such an extent that even two people traveling should organize themselves, with one taking the role of a leader and the other a follower. According to Umar Farooq (may Allah be pleased with him), without organization, there is no Islam, no governance without structure, and no concept of governance without obedience.<sup>1</sup> During the blessed era of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, there was no separate concept of religious and political leadership. Later, these leadership roles diverged. Leadership entails guiding people and aligning their thoughts, actions, and behaviors with one's own vision and plan to work for social benefit and the welfare of humanity. For an effective leader, honesty, knowledge, action, clear goals, decisive power, patience, wisdom, and loyalty to the purpose are essential conditions. These are all positive traits that align with the Islamic perspective, but within

the Islamic framework, leadership is distinguished. The Quran elevates the Islamic concept of leadership above the general concept by stating that Allah has appointed a deputy on earth.<sup>2</sup> According to this verse, humans are the deputies of Allah on earth, and they must live their lives according to the authority given to them. Thus, actions in this world are only permissible if they align with Allah's commands and the teachings and Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ. Human beings are never the owners of their own will, but rather, they are guardians and responsible. On the Day of Judgment, every person will be accountable to Allah for their responsibilities. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Beware, every one of you is a guardian, and everyone will be asked about their subjects. Therefore, a person who is responsible for responsibilities at both domestic and international levels is an Imam and a Khalifa in that regard. The authority granted to them is not personal but given by Allah according to the Islamic philosophy of leadership and caliphate, about which Allah will inquire. The Prophet ﷺ demonstrated through his actions that the purpose and essence of leadership from an Islamic perspective are not dominance or ruling but rather the implementation of Allah's commandments and service to humanity. It's not about displaying authority but about responsibility and accountability. A Muslim leader is more responsible and accountable to people compared to an ordinary person."<sup>3</sup>

The statement of the Second Caliph, Hazrat Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), is well-known, that if a dog dies hungry on the banks of the Euphrates, Umar will be responsible. Hence, for a believer, leadership and caliphate are not beds of roses but paths filled with thorns. A leader is responsible for guiding people towards goodness and success. Otherwise, due to people's wrongdoing and sins, the grip of both Imam and leader can slip away.

Allah says:

*"The Day their faces will be rolled in the fire, they will say, "Oh, would that we had obeyed Allah and obeyed the Messenger! And they will say, "Our Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and our elders, and they made us to go astray from the path Our Lord, give them twice the punishment, and send a curse on them, an enormous curse.""*<sup>4</sup>

In Surah Al-Baqarah, Allah Almighty states:

*"When his Lord put Ibrahim to a test with certain Words, and he fulfilled them, He said, "I am going to make you an Imam for the people." He said, "And from among my progeny?" He replied, "My promise does not extend to the unjust"*<sup>5</sup>

This verse clarifies that the leadership and governance of the ummah are not ordinary tasks but rather extraordinary and significant. Allah tested and rewarded Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), a noble prophet, with leadership and imamate based on his test and righteous actions. In Surah An-Nur, Allah promises the believers that if they maintain faith and righteous deeds, He will grant them leadership on earth. The command of the Lord is:

*“Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will certainly make them (His) vicegerents in the land, as He made those before them”<sup>6</sup>*

The gracious Prophet ﷺ and then the guided Caliphs present us with extremely bright and compelling examples of leadership and guardianship in human history. After the era of the Companions, Hazrat Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (may Allah be pleased with him) proved that the establishment of the caliphate upon the methodology of prophethood is only possible when the esteemed position of leadership and guardianship over the Ummah is fulfilled by the right and deserving personalities.

Just as Allah, the Lord of Majesty has appointed humans as His vicegerents on Earth, and the Prophet ﷺ, by fully implementing Allah's religion, fulfilled the divine mandate, this caliphate was the real manifestation of Allah's message, and the establishment of divine governance was the result of this message. On the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Companions unanimously testified that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ not only conveyed Allah's message but also fulfilled its rights. After the demise of the Prophet ﷺ, you as his successors became the heads of this divine government, also called the Caliphs of the Muslims and the Commanders of the Faithful. In true sense, the Caliph of the Ummah is the one who leads the Ummah of Muhammad according to the commands of Allah and the blessed ways of the Prophet ﷺ. The Quran bestows upon the Earth the divine governance and caliphate as a great blessing. This blessing is the right of those righteous and obedient servants of Allah who are capable of fulfilling His responsibilities.

“وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ”<sup>7</sup>

*“It is He who made you the vicegerents of the earth”*

وَاذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ”<sup>8</sup>

*“And remember when He made you successors after the people of Nuh”*

يَا دَاوُدُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ”<sup>9</sup>

*“O Dawud, We have made you a vicegerent on earth”*

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ”<sup>10</sup>

*“ And We have written in Zabur (Psalms) after the advice that the land will be inherited by My righteous slaves”*

### **The Selection of a Caliph and Leader**

From studying the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it becomes evident that desiring and seeking the position within a truly Islamic society is not something coveted; rather, sincere individuals strive to avoid it. None of the Rashidin Caliphs expressed a desire for this position; instead, the senior Companions selected them based on their qualifications, piety, service to the religion, and detachment from worldly desires. Allah says:

*“Surely, Allah commands you to deliver trusts to those entitled to them, and that, when you judge between people, judge with justice”<sup>11</sup>*

## Qualities of a Leader

Because according to Islamic teachings, every human being is Allah's caliph in the world and every human being is an example of a responsible person. Therefore, the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasize the importance of virtues within a Muslim, including insight, strong knowledge and physique, honesty, justice, responsibility, self-accountability, contentment, patience, courage, tolerance of criticism, decisiveness, strong will, broad vision, practical strength, forgiveness, sacrifice, simplicity, and modesty, among others. These qualities are exemplified by the great leaders of Islamic history.

After Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) became the Caliph, he once went to the market with a bundle of clothes on his shoulder to sell. Hazrat Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) stopped him, so he said, "Where will I bring household expenses from?" Then, when it was decided to allocate a stipend from the state treasury, he instructed that the stipend should be equal to the wage of an ordinary laborer in Medina. When asked if this stipend would suffice for his household, he replied, "If my household expenses are not met from it, then I will increase the stipend of the laborer."<sup>12</sup>

## Iqbal and Leadership:

According to Iqbal, the Muslim community holds a very high status and honor. Just as the position of this final nation is very esteemed, similarly, the leadership and guardianship of Muslim nations and communities are also very crucial. According to Iqbal, religion is synonymous with a system of life. Therefore, you strongly oppose considering certain rituals as religion. Instead, you discuss the reform of affairs, social and economic systems, and the complete implementation of religion.

Iqbal warns against idolizing rulers and having a servile mentality among Muslims, instead of striving to become leaders and making efforts to propagate religion, some individuals indulge in spreading strife among others.

قوم کیا چیز ہے، قوموں کی امامت کیا ہے اس کو کیا سمجھیں یہ بیچارے دورِ رکعت کے امام<sup>13</sup>

The poet refers to the "poor leaders of the present age," suggesting that the leaders of contemporary nations may not be ideal or perfect in their leadership. This could imply that they are not fulfilling their role as leaders of their nations effectively.

That Imam who becomes a courtier turns you into worshipers of kings and rulers. The leadership and guidance of such an Imam are nothing but a cause of corruption for the enlightened community. Just as it is with most religious and worldly leaders nowadays. Such leadership brings more harm than benefit.

قتنہ ملت بیضا ہے امامت اُس کی جو مسلمان کو سلاطین کا پرستار کرے<sup>14</sup>

The poet refers to the real leader of the Muslim community is the one

who makes Muslims adore their rulers. It reflects Iqbal's critique of blind obedience to political authority and his call for Muslims to seek true leadership based on principles rather than mere adoration of rulers.

Instead of becoming worshipers of rulers due to being the vicegerents of Allah in the world, Iqbal calls for turning towards Allah alone and recognizing one's own identity. Iqbal's concept of selfhood is essentially a philosophical interpretation of the concept of divine vicegerency in the Quran, which includes statements regarding the creation of Adam. According to them, man is the deputy and vicegerent of the Creator in the world. The essence of Iqbal's theory of selfhood is this vicegerency and deputyship. The ultimate goal of "selfhood" is for man to observe the universe with the eye of insight so that, with the cup of knowledge of essence, he may reach the divine court after crossing the difficult stages of the universe's journey. Also, to utilize all his creative abilities for the construction of his personality. When self-awareness and self-discovery are reflected in the mirror of self, then the sense of self-esteem will naturally emerge.

جمال اپنا اگر تو خواب میں بھی دیکھے      ہزار ہوش سے خوشتر تری شکر خوابی<sup>15</sup>

Even if you see your beauty in a dream, a thousand times sweeter than being conscious, thank the dream

یہ موجِ نفس کیا ہے تلوار ہے      خودی کیا ہے تلوار کی دھار ہے<sup>16</sup>

What is this wave of breath, is it a sword? / What is selfhood, but the wielder of the sword.

### **Iqbal's Standards for Leadership and Imamat:**

In regards to leadership and Imamate, Iqbal's poetry encapsulates the qualities and virtues of a leader in the following manner:

#### **Self-Aware and Self-Recognizing:**

Iqbal highlights that the greatest quality of an Imam and leader is to liberate you from all the evils of the present era. A true Imam of your time is the one who can make you detest superficiality and embrace reality. They instill love and devotion to Islamic values and beliefs in your heart in contrast to the evils bred by the materialistic culture.

ہے وہی تیرے زمانے کا امام برحق      جو تجھے حاضر و موجود سے بیزار کرے<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the true leader of your era is the one / who makes you disdainful of the present and the existing.

#### **Bearer of Secrets:**

The task of governance and leadership is so crucial and complex that understanding the reality of Imamate, according to Iqbal, remains quite challenging until one becomes acquainted with the mysteries of self and cosmos. Hence, they pray for those who desire to understand the reality of leadership to become bearers of secrets.

تو نے پوچھی ہے امامت کی حقیقت مجھ سے      حق تجھے میری طرح صاحبِ اسرار کرے<sup>18</sup>

You have asked me about the reality of leadership / May truth unveil mysteries to you as it has to me.

It reflects Iqbal's desire to share his insights and understanding of leadership with others, suggesting that truth has the power to reveal hidden realities to those who seek it earnestly.

If the institution of leadership were of general nature for the grand Muslim community, then it is imperative for one to be a bearer of secrets. To reach the reality of leadership, one must be familiar with the symbols of self and cosmos.

### **Foresightedness:**

The power of imagination of a leader should be so versatile that by understanding the experiences of the past, the circumstances of the present, and the upcoming events, they can prepare and paint a picture of the future. The skill of filling colors in that map is what makes them exceptional. Therefore, scholars desire to see foresightedness beyond the limits of perception.

کھول آنکھ، زمیں دیکھ، فلک دیکھ، فضا دیکھ  
مشرق سے اُبھرتے ہوئے سورج کو ذرا دیکھ<sup>19</sup>

Open your eyes, look at the earth, look at the sky, look at space / Gaze at the rising sun from the east.

It's a call to observe the wonders of the universe and to contemplate the beauty and grandeur of nature, urging individuals to broaden their perspectives and seek enlightenment from the natural world.

نگہ بلند، سخن، دلنواز، اور پر سوز جان ہو<sup>20</sup>

"Eyes lofty, words eloquent, heart captivating, and a soul aflame."

It portrays the ideal qualities of a person who possesses vision, eloquence, emotional depth, and passionate determination.

### **Eliminator of the Distinction between Religion and Politics:**

Iqbal believes in eradicating the distinction between clergy, religion, and politics, and advocates for not confining leadership and guidance only to the extent of worship, but rather a leader should be the leader and imam of every aspect of life, as demanded by the religion of Islam.

جلال پادشاہی ہو کہ جمہوری تماشا ہو  
جدا ہو دین سیاست سے تو رہ جاتی ہے چنگیزی<sup>21</sup>

"Whether it be a kingdom or a republic,

If it deviates from religion and politics, it will be destroyed."

It underscores Iqbal's emphasis on the integration of religion with politics, suggesting that even in modern forms of governance like democracy, the influence of figures like Genghis Khan persists when religion is divorced from political affair

### **Possessor of Truth, Justice, and Courage:**

سبق پھر پڑھ صداقت کا عدالت کا شجاعت کا  
لیا جائے گا تجھ سے کام دنیا کی امامت کا<sup>22</sup>

"Learn once again the lesson of truthfulness, of justice, of courage /

You will be entrusted with the task of leading the world."

It emphasizes the importance of virtues like truthfulness, justice, and courage in assuming leadership roles and suggests that true leadership is based on these qualities.

### **Noble Aspirations:**

According to Allama, a leader and imam should possess lofty aspirations and farsightedness.

تو شاہیں ہے پرواز ہے کام تیرا تیرے سامنے آسماں اور بھی ہیں<sup>23</sup>

"You are an eagle, your task is to soar / Before you, there are even more skies."

It's a metaphorical expression of encouragement, urging the individual to aim higher and aspire to greater heights, symbolizing the endless possibilities and opportunities that lie ahead.

Allama presents examples of "eagles" and "falcons" because eagles are considered the kings of birds. Their sight, bravery, and ability to attack are unparalleled. Allama Iqbal wished that Muslims attain the status in the world that eagles and falcons have among birds. He says:

عقابی روح جب بیدار ہوتی ہے جوانوں میں نظر آتی ہے ان کو اپنی منزل آسمانوں میں<sup>24</sup>

When the eagle-spirited awaken among the youth,

They see their destination in the heavens

It metaphorically portrays the awakening of ambition and aspiration in the youth, likening it to the soaring spirit of an eagle that sees its destination in the vast expanse of the sky.

### **Connection with Allah:**

A Muslim leader should have a deep connection with Allah and an unshakable faith and conviction.

ہاتھ ہے اللہ کا بندہ مومن کا ہاتھ غالب و کار آفرین کار کشاد کار ساز<sup>25</sup>

"The hand is God's, the servant's hand is the believer's / Ghalib is a supplicant, a creator and a maker."

It reflects Ghalib's contemplation on the relationship between the divine will and human agency, acknowledging the ultimate authority of God while also recognizing the creative and constructive abilities bestowed upon individuals.

### **Conclusion:**

In the light of Iqbal's thoughts, the importance of leadership for the survival and ascension of the Muslim community is significant. Just as the concept of the community is crucial, similarly, the concept and standard of leadership and guidance are also highly ideal and magnificent. Therefore, as much as the nature of leadership is grand, its conditions and standards are equally high in Iqbal's view. The rightly guided caliphs, nurtured under the guidance of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and later exemplified



by Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, demonstrated that when worthy individuals occupy positions of leadership and guardianship over the community, goodness flourishes everywhere. Iqbal, in real terms, accepts you (peace be upon him) as his true guide and leader from the heart and emphasizes obedience in both individual and collective life. The hidden aspects and realities of character, leadership, and Imamate are concealed within Iqbal's concept of selfhood, and the concept of selfhood is, in essence, a philosophical and eloquent interpretation of the divine concept of representation found in the Quran.

### Recommendations:

1. It is essential, particularly in the context of the political and religious leadership of the Ummah, to educate and nurture the younger generation on Iqbal's concept of selfhood and the attributes and conditions of leadership.
2. Iqbal's concept of selfhood should be made an integral part of the curriculum at educational institutions so that individuals capable of exemplary conduct and leadership can be groomed for every sphere of life.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

### References

- 1 Umar Tilmisani, Hazrat Umar, Andaz Khilafat ke Chand Waqiat, Mahnama Tarjuman al-Quran, April 2021
- 2 Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, Khilafat o Malookiyat, P: 201
- 3 Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayah Number: 31
- 4 Surah Al-Ahzab, Ayah Number: 66...68
- 5 Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayah Number: 124
- 6 Surah An-Nur, Ayah Number: 55
- 7 Surah Yunus, Ayah Number: 14
- 8 Surah Al-A'raf, Ayah Number: 69
- 9 Surah Sad, Ayah Number: 26
- 10 Surah Al-Anbiya, Ayah Number: 105
- 11 Surah An-Nisa, Ayah Number: 58
- 12 Al-Imam Al-Hafiz Jalaluddin Abdul Rahman ibn Abi Bakr al-Suyuti, Tarikh Khulafa, Translation: Iqbal al-Din Ahmad, P: 84
- 13 Asrar Zaidi, Kuliyyat-e-Iqbal (Zarb-e-Kaleem), Maktaba Daniyal Lahore, P: 612
- 14 Also, P: 645
- 15 Also, (Bal-e-Jibril), P: 539
- 16 Also, P: 525
- 17 Asrar Zaidi, Kuliyyat-e-Iqbal, (Zarb-e-Kaleem), P: 645

18 Also, P: 645

19 Also, (Bal-e-Jibril), P: 540

20 Ghulam Rasool Mehr, Kuliyyat-e-Iqbal, (Bal-e-Jibril), Sheikh Ali Sons Publications Lahore, 616

21 Ibid, P:600

22 Ibid

23 Ghulam Rasool Mehr, Kuliyyat-e-Iqbal, (Bal-e-Jibril), P: 638

24 Asrar Zaidi, Kuliyyat-e-Iqbal, (Bal-e-Jibril), p. 519

25 Ibid