

IQBAL: AN APPRECIATION

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Iqbal breathed his last on April 21, 1938, at 5-15 in the morning. A few minutes before his death he recited the following lines from one of his latest poems:

"The melody that has gone may, or may not, come;

A breeze from the Hejaz may, or may not, come.

This is the end of the days of this Faqir,

Another wise one may, or may not, come."

His death in the early hour of the dawn was calm and peaceful. The remnant of a faint smile appeared to play about his lips as he lay dead in his bed. Thinking of that scene one is naturally reminded of the poet's lines:

"I tell you the sign of a true Believer,

When death comes, there is a smile on his lips."

Iqbal's Contributions

The poet-philosopher Iqbal revitalised a decaying people with his inspiring messages conveyed through the medium of powerful poetry. He thrilled the whole world, particularly the Eastern mind, which had grown used to only lilting soft melodies and sweet cadences, with a new kind of poetry that was dynamic, vital and thought-provoking. And the wonder and magnificence of it all lay in the fact that in this process, quite a substantial part of his poetry lost none of its beauties and emotional appeal. This was no mean achievement. We know that great poetry and complex philosophical thinking do not often go together. Often thoughts and ideas prove too great a burden for the frail wings of Poesy to bear gracefully. On other occasions

poetry becomes only soft musical cadences and tender emotion. A truly harmonious combination of the two is to be found only rarely. One can think of Dante or Browning or T.S. Eliot of the modern age. But compared to such masters, too, Iqbal's poetry probably excels theirs in this respect.

Iqbal was a prophet and a philosopher. He had a message for all men in general and for the Muslims in particular. He was a great thinker and had a definite philosophy of life which he preached through his inspiring poetry. A study of his poetry not only yields pleasure and enjoyment but also provides inspiration and guidance.

Iqbal was the poet of renaissance, of re-awakening. Dr. Amiya Chakravarty, a renowned Indian Scholar and poet, in one of his speeches said (quoted in "Kavi Iqbal" by Muhammad Habibullah published, 1941):

"Iqbal recreated the tradition of the East. He proved to the whole world that resurgence of awakening was the soul of India. He showed that poetry and power marched together towards the same goal."

Dr. Chakravarty went on to add:

"Iqbal was a great artist, a careful craftsman. In the choice of his diction he showed a remarkable sense of beauty and proportion. The combination of hard-earned simplicity of expression and limitless depth of feeling endowed his later nature poetry with a sense of completeness and totality not easily found even in the best poetry of any literature of the world." For Iqbal lethargy, laziness and inaction meant death. As long as man was striving for perfection, as long as he was trying to develop his personality, he was alive, otherwise he was as good as dead in his grave. This sense of constant action and of perpetual movement finds charming expression in the following verse:-

"Do not measure life with the cup of —

Today and tomorrow,

Life is perpetual and youthful at all times.

Ask the heart of Farhad the truth of life.

Life is a stream of milk, an adage and a weighty stone."

And elsewhere he said:

"Rise like a wave and always keep struggling with the sea.

Dost thou seek the shore,

O ignorant one?

Where is the shore?"

For, is not life a constant struggle and a march forward?

Iqbal found that the Muslims of his time had fallen from the high status of glory and dignity that they had once achieved. He saw that they were steeped in inaction and were overwhelmed with a sense of despondency and frustration. To them he brought a message of hope. He galvanised them by drawing their attention to the glorious deeds that they had once performed and also pointed out the reasons for their subsequent downfall. He reminded them that the Muslims had once

دشت تو دشت ہیں دریا بھی نہ چھوڑے ہم نے

بحرظلمات میں دوڑا دیے گھوڑے ہم نے

(What to say of deserts, we did not spare even the deep waters.

Into the Dark seas we headlong plunged our horses.)

He exhorted them to shake off the lethargy and to rise up again in glory and might.

"Arise, darkness has prevailed over the Eastern horizon;

Let's light up the Assembly by our fiery voice.

Let's depart with the necessities of soul from Sinda and Suleima:

Mark, the dromedary of Leila has become useless in Yathrib, Let's acquaint Qais with a new desire."

Iqbal has also indicated the way by which the Muslims should revitalise themselves and grow strong and powerful again. This is to be achieved by developing one's personality, by trying to be a perfect man, by modelling one's life on the pattern of the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) by following the teaching of the Qur'an. Considered from this angle, viewing Iqbal as a great Muslim savant anguished in heart at the present sad and degenerate state of the Mussalmans and keenly desirous of re-awakening his people to enable them to occupy again their rightful place of supremacy and glory, the appeal of his poetry is rather limited. But the above appreciation would not be quite correct, for does not he address all mankind, instead of the Muslims alone, when he preaches the doctrine of the development of personality in *Asrar-i-Khudi*? This idea of personality, of self as something real, capable of development and preservation, Iqbal develops from his close study of both Eastern and Western philosophers, from the Qur'an, as well as from the treatises of Bergson and Nietzsche. In *Asrar-i-Khudi*, his great philosophical poem, Iqbal states that the power and potentiality of self is tremendous and that the goal of man should be to develop his personality so that he can grow into a perfect man and can attain the viceregency of God on earth. This doctrine is in direct opposition to the theory of self-negation or *nirvana*. Iqbal himself has stated categorically:

"The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-

affirmation and he attains to this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique He who comes nearest to God is the completest person..."

Iqbal's Philosophy

It is true that Iqbal was influenced by Nietzsche's 'superman theory' but we must not lose sight of the basic difference that existed between Iqbal's conception and that of the German philosopher. In Nietzsche's philosophy, there was no place for a higher moral order operating, there was no check by way of a noble, all-pervading influence exercised by a comprehension of religion and hence his philosophy of the superman could easily degenerate into a monstrous doctrine where power was not a means to something greater but an end in itself. Iqbal's conception of the fully developed personality did not provide for the Nietzschean superman but for what may be called the *Mard-i-Mu'min*, (the true Muslim) the viceregent of God on earth, who always owes his allegiance to Allah but whose soul, through prayers and good deeds, has reached a stage where even apparently impossible achievements are possible of accomplishment. To Iqbal religion is a force which is ever-existent and all-embracing and the unique individual that he advocates, strives to grow powerful and strong, not because he wants to destroy the world or to lord over it but because he wants to attain a position where he can most effectively serve God and mankind. According to Iqbal's conception, self grows strong through love, which is a great factor in expressing the latent faculties and potentialities of an individual.

"(The Self) becomes more enduring through love....

More alive, more zealous, more effulgent."

To quote again from his verse:

"When the self gains strength through love,

Its power becomes the ruler of the world,"

Iqbal was no ivory tower artist. He looked to the stars but had his feet firmly planted on the earth. It was, therefore, quite in the nature of things that he should be thoroughly conscious of the inequities prevalent in the

contemporary society. He was eager to see the birth of a new world, free from these inequities.

He wrote:

"The stars are old and the sky is worn out,
I want a world, which is just newly sprung."

A study of the history of literature reveals that most of the great poets of the world have felt this urge of remoulding the world nearer to their heart's desire. 'Umar Khayyam had said:

"Ah! love, if thou and I could with Fate conspire,
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire?"

We have noticed this urge in Shelley, in Nazrul Islam. But notice the difference between 'Umar and Iqbal: 'Umar talks of a conspiracy with Fate for bringing about this change; but, for Iqbal, man is truly the architect of his destiny. He does not consider man as a mere plaything in the hands of an indifferent God as a personality with limitless possibilities. For Iqbal man can and should reach for the sky.

The exploitation that Iqbal saw all around pained him deeply and stirred him with a righteous indignation.

"The Master makes a pure ruby from the blood of the labourer's vein,
The farms of the peasants are laid waste on account of the landlord's
highhandedness."

And elsewhere he wrote:

"Arise and awaken the poor people of my world,
Shake the doors and walls of the palaces of the rich.

Warm the blood of the slaves with the fire of faith and confidence....
Set the humble sparrow at the falcon,
The field which does not provide the peasant with food,
Burn every corn of such a field."

Iqbal's major works are *Banga-i-dara*, *Bal-i-Jabril*, *Zarb-i-Kalim*, *Asrar-i-Khudi*, *Ramuz-i-Bekbudi* and *Javid-nama*. He wrote in Urdu and in Persian. His chief philosophical poems are, however, all written in Persian which language he found eminently suitable for the exposition of his lofty ideas.

We in East Pakistan primarily know Iqbal through translations. The intense love for his country as expressed in poems like *Himala*, *Tarana-i-Hindi*, *Naya Shinala*, move us greatly; the vigour and force of his philosophical poems like *Asrar-i-Khudi* and *Javid nama*, stir us deeply, and poems like *Tarana-i-Milli*, *Tulu-i-Islam* and *Khizr-i-Rah*, act as a source of undying inspiration and guidance to us. Let me quote a few lovely lines from that famous and popular piece, *Tarana-i-Milli*:

اے گلستان اندلس وہ دن ہے یاد تجھ کو

تھا تیری ڈالیوں میں جب آشیاں ہمارا

اے موج دجلہ تو بھی پہچانتی ہے ہم کو

اب تک ہے تیرا دریا افسانہ خواں ہمارا

In translations, however good they may be, the tone of the original is somewhat impaired, but even then we do not have to take any great pains to discover the poetical excellences of Iqbal. In the wealth of imagery and diction, above all, success in making his verses a suitable and adequate vehicle for the exposition of his lofty philosophical ideas, Iqbal undeniably demonstrates his greatness as a poet of a very high order. True that sometimes his poetry seems rather heavy, over-burdened with ideas and preachings, but that happens only very rarely. And in this context we must also remember that Iqbal was indeed a guide and a preacher and for him, as for any really great artist of any time, art was not an absolute end in itself.

It would be appropriate to quote here Iqbal's own words regarding Art and its scope and function:

"The ultimate end of all human activity is Life—glorious, powerful, exuberant. All human art must be subordinated to this final purpose, and the value of everything must be determined in reference to its life-yielding capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force and nerves us to face the trails of life manfully. All that brings drowsines and makes us shut our eyes to Reality around, on the mastery of which

alone life depends, is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in art. The dogma of Art for the sake of Art is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power."---(The *New Era*. 1916, page 251).

Iqbal was certainly no opium-eater in Art. He wrote because he felt that he had something definite to say. He had firm and strong views on many issues, carefully thought out, intensely rational and yet endowed with an ardent moral fervour, but he was never dogmatic. He had the temper of a true philosopher. About his own ideas he said:

"There is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views and probably sounder views are possible. Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it."

Iqbal is no more in our midst and we have not yet been blessed with another 'wise one' like him. That is however not surprising, for great personalities like Iqbal are not born every other day. But we have with us his poetry which is immortal. In this refreshing and vigorous poetry there is an unending mine of enjoyment and wisdom for anybody who may care to study it.