

# IQBAL DAY CELEBRATION IN COLOMBO

IN Colombo the Islamic Youth Council celebrated Iqbal Day on 27th April, 1966, with active co-operation of the Pakistan High Commission, by holding a mammoth public meeting at which many prominent people spoke on the life and works of the great poet-philosopher of the East. Mr. K. M. A. Hassen, President of the Council, was in the chair. The Council also arranged an oratorical contest on Iqbal. It was the first such contest ever held in Ceylon on the great poet, and a large number of Muslim students participated in it. The winner was awarded a gold medal by Mr. Enver Murad, High Commissioner for Pakistan and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in this country. The High Commissioner presented various awards to runners-up also.

The function was held in the spacious new Memon Association Hall which was overflowing with hundreds of Iqbal's admirers. There were the old and the young, people from all walks of life, representing different religions. They were engrossed in enriching their minds with the rich tributes paid by eminent speakers, among whom, besides the High Commissioner for Pakistan, were Dr. Ananda Guruge of Ceylon Administrative Service ; Mr. Badiuddin Mahmud, President, Islamic Socialist Fro at and former Minister of Education ; Dr. Akhtar Imam, Professor of Arabic in the University of Ceylon and Professor Shookri, also of the Ceylon University. The meeting was a complete success. It manifested that Iqbal's words inspire not only the Pakistan nation, but the entire East and in the hearts of the Muslim Youth of Ceylon in particular he has a very special place. They look up to him as a great guide and a great Muslim, of whom they are immensely proud.

The High Commissioner for Pakistan in Ceylon as also other speakers, in their speeches, touched on various phases of Iqbal's life. Dr. Imam, well known scholar and Professor of Arabic in the University of Ceylon, addressing the assembly said that Iqbal stood for the creation of a world of happiness and equal opportunity for all. He had appeared as a hope to the down-trodden and a challenge to those who described life as static. Dr. Imam said his recent visit to Pakistan after several years was very revealing

and inspiring for him because there, as visualised by Iqbal , he saw the Islamic way of life truly and beautifully blended with modern progress.

The High Commission of Pakistan in Ceylon rendered every possible help to make the function a success. The funds for the gold medal awarded to the winner of the oratorial contest were also raised by the High Commission.

Radio Ceylon broadcast a special programme on Iqbal in their Tamil service to mark the occasion, while articles on Iqbal also appeared in some leading newspapers.

Reproduced below is an article specially written for the occasion by Mr. Tissa Wijeyeratne of the Inner Temple, Barrister-at-law, for the *Ceylon Daily News* of April 21, 1966.

## IQBAL:

### THE LEADER OF A NEW MUSLIM RENAISSANCE

*Mr. Tissa Wijeyeratne*

Very nearly a quarter of a century ago Muhammed Iqbal passed away and his admirers built for him a simple tomb by the exquisitely beautiful Badshahi Mosque in Lahore. Long after his death the Urdu and Persian poems composed by this philosopher-poet and the state of Pakistan he did so much to create, remain to remind us of the genius of this extraordinary man.

Iqbal was born in 1877 ; in his blood were the strains of Hindu Brahmin ancestors ; of this he was always proud. The India into which he was born at Sialkot had just seen the crushing of the Indian Mutiny and the Indian intellectual witnessed British troops butchering the heroes of the resistance movement assisted in their task by a new aristocracy stabilising itself as it turned informers to the British Raj. Indian turned traitor to Indian in exchange for vast acres of land as did the emerging Ceylonese elite anxious to supplant the old aristocracy after the Uva Rebellion. Iqbal was profoundly affected by this atmosphere.

In his childhood Iqbal came under the influence of Shamsul Ulama Mir Hasan, the great scholar. At Lahore, a few years later, Sir Thomas Arnold hearing of the new arrival's brilliance and lucidity followed Iqbal's career and

advised him to go abroad for his education. At Cambridge, Munich (from where he collected his Doctorate) and the Inns of Court he applied himself with remarkable vigour to the study of European philosophers and European poetic streams. Thirteen hundred years of dynamic culture that is Islam were his proud and privileged inheritance ; as a youth he had read extensively of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy ; and now he tutored himself in the cultural traditions of the European : over the years there blossomed a truly civilized Asian.

Iqbal studied in an Europe that saw the industrial revolution advance with almost brutal rapidity. He was immensely impressed by the sense of discipline in Europe and the rapid development of science. It has been his contention that his writings on the Sufi doctrine were published even before he had read Nietzsche : but no unbiased reader of Iqbal can fail to notice the influence this apologist for the "superman" has had on the poet's life. Equally much is it true that Iqbal rebelled against the coarse atheistic and aristocratic prejudices of the German. And his contempt for the purely mercenary instincts European commercialism was breeding was expressed thus:

O Dwellers of Western Lands

God's world is not a shop;

That which you considered good coin

Shall prove to be of low value;

Your civilization will commit

Suicide with its own dagger:

A nest built on a slender bough cannot last.

(Tr. from *A Voice from the East*)

Iqbal returned to Lahore in 1908. He practised at the Indian Bar till he died in 1938; yet his was not a successful legal career. He meandered into politics for a while and was nominated the President of the All-India Muslim League in 1930. In 1931 he paid a brief visit to England to participate in the Round Table Conference. He was too much of a dreamer though to be a successful politician. He never bothered to tutor himself in the elements of

political understanding and he never quite grasped or sincerely believed in the necessity for relentless class struggle or militancy.

He had a romanticist's faith in the role and destiny of the peasantry and the poor: he never anticipated the role of the proletariat. Yet it was Jinnah himself who said of Iqbal once that "he was one of the first to conceive of the feasibility of the division of India on national lines." It is perhaps one of the ironical tragedies of Iqbal's life that the communal chauvanist may remember him as a protagonist of Muslim right. This was the very antithesis of everything Iqbal stood for. He was a true humanist and the principles of equality, freedom and love as the basis of universal brotherhood were reaffirmed in almost all his poems.

It was in the "Ego" that Iqbal believed when he said: "Its highest form is the creation of values and ideals; and the endeavour to realise the most unique individuality individualises the seeker and implies the individuality of the sought, for nothing else would satisfy the nature of the seeker."

To one, like the writer of this article, untutored in Urdu or Persian, the translations of Iqbal's work by men of high culture like Jafri, Kiernan, Khan and Bilgrami have been an introduction to Iqbal through the English language.

To those familiar with English poetry the similarity between Iqbal and a host of European verse writers is amazing. There are messages from Dante, Goethe, Donne and the early nineteenth century romantic movement in England intertwined in the poetry of Iqbal. Of particular appeal is his identity with the Metaphysical poetry of John Donne; for is it not Iqbal who says:

Come, Love, thou heart's most secret whispering,

Come thou, our sowing and our harvesting,

These earthly spirits are to aged grown—

Out of our clay another Adam bring.

Iqbal shares the ideals of a whole host of poets before his time and yet there is about him the stamp of genuine originality. Experts have regarded his *Jawid Nama* as a masterpiece which will rank alongside Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* or Homer's *Iliad*.

Unsurpassed for its delicacy in Urdu (in translation) is *Bang-i-Dara* (The Sound of the Caravan Bells). In *Payam-i-Mashriq* (Message of the East) which Iqbal regarded as his own response to Goethe's *West-Ostlicher Divan*, scholars have discovered a mastery of language as much as a discipline in style which serves as literary signposts for those writing in the Persian language.

There is nothing in common between Iqbal and the twentieth century poets of pessimism with their pre-occupation with death and nihilism that gave English poetry their signposts in the interwar years or bred the existentialist school in France during the period that followed the Nazi occupation of Europe.

It is from Nicholson's translation that one sees Iqbal reassert his faith in human personality:

Beauty is the creator of desire's springtide.

Desire is nourished by the display of Beauty.

'Tis in the poet's breast that beauty unveils.

'Tis from his Sinai that Beauty's beams arise . . .

His music breathes o'er us a wonderful enchantment.

His pen draws a mountain with a single hair.

His thoughts dwell with the moon and the stars.

He creates beauty in that which is ugly and strange.

Here then we see Iqbal describe the role of a poet as a prophet of his time leading humanity onto further and higher reaches of creative achievement. Strongly does he condemn the pessimist when he says:

Woe to a people that resigns itself to death

And whose poet turns away from the joy of Living!

No other but a follower of Islam can truly interpret Iqbal's explanation of the Prophet's message. Iqbal did not hesitate to criticise the Mullahs of Islam when occasion demanded. He was unsympathetic to those masquerading under the name of Sufis. Iqbal believed in God and said:

That man is real who dares—

Dares to see God face to face ...

"Hell," commented Iqbal, "is not a pit of everlasting torture inflicted by a revengeful God ; it is a corrective experience which may make a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine Grace. Nor is Heaven a holiday. Life is one and continuous. Man marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality which 'every moment appears in a new glory'. And the recipient of divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding." Boldness therefore and not timidity should be man's reaction to the divine challenge.

To those of us who do not share Iqbal's faith in God or a Creator, his poetry carries an inner meaning. He did not regard God as an outwardly abstract entity. He demanded "loyalty to God and not to the throne and since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life (for Muslims and Christians) loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature." It was Iqbal's dream to create for his fellow beings a society dedicated to the service of humanity. It was to promote peace and provide equal opportunities for all mankind; it was to flower on earth itself — within our life-time.

It is this message of Iqbal that has helped so much to "accelerate the transition of the Muslim mind from a feudal to a modern frame." It is this message that by its very humanism makes its appeal universal.

That is why wherever peasants gather this evening at a *Musha'ara*, whether it be in Muslim Pakistan, Hindu Bengal, Persia, the Muslim Republics of the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China or students in the Junior Common Rooms of Christian European Universities or the Buddhist students at Peradeniya, they will pay special attention to the songs sung and immortalised by the pen of the leader of a new Muslim Renaissance—Muhammad Iqbal.