

# **IQBAL DAY at the Leiden University, Netherlands**

Speech

by

MR. ALTAF HUSAIN

*Minister of Industries, Government of Pakistan*

A few years back, Mr. Altaf Husain went to the Netherlands as leader of the Pakistan Press Delegation. He was invited by the Leiden University to speak about Iqbal on Iqbal Day. We reproduce below the full text of his speech.

In Pakistan and many other countries tributes will be paid today to the memory of Muhammad Iqbal, one of the world's greatest poet-philosophers. We, who are at present guests of your country, consider it singularly fortunate that on the occasion of the anniversary this year we are in your midst, and I welcome the opportunity that has been given to me to say a few words before this distinguished gathering.

Full justice cannot be done to the works and teachings of any great poet and thinker in the course of a brief address. Iqbal, in particular, requires close and considerable study so that his unique and dynamic genius may be properly appreciated and the great significance of his teachings for the betterment of the world and mankind may be understood. I shall therefore confine myself mainly to those aspects of his genius which have a direct bearing on some of the major problems for which our present generation is so anxiously seeking a solution.

To begin with, it is important to stress the fact that although Muhammad Iqbal was born in the Muslim East, his education was completed in the learned institutions of the West. He had drunk deep and well at the fountains of both Oriental and Western knowledge. His writings show that even from his student-days his mind had been preoccupied with the problem of the welfare of mankind. As his genius developed and his Muse gathered force, beauty, depth, and majesty, his poetry as well as his prose writings

became vehicles for the expression of a deep humanist urge which, in the view of many competent students of his work, has not been surpassed.

Iqbal lived through the First World War and died when the the second was imminent. His experience of world events and his acute perception of the undercurrent behind those events confirmed him in his beliefs and added fire and passion to his expression of them. Iqbal sought the solution of the ills of mankind, of which he saw painful evidence all around him, in working out a synthesis of the Eastern and the Western ways of thought and patterns of life. He believed that only by achieving an abiding harmony between the spiritualism of the East and the West's dynamic approach to nature could mankind conquer the spiritual as well as the material malaise to which it had fallen a prey.

Iqbal saw the economic imperialism of the nineteenth century reach its zenith ; he witnessed its decline ; he watched the rise of atheistic communist revolution in Russia and its extreme antithesis in the growth of fascism in Germany and Italy ; he perceived, more than European thinkers could, the urge for political and intellectual freedom in the East and the agitation in the seething masses of humanity for a solution of their problems which were growing increasingly complex.

The crisis which has threatened Man since the beginning of this century has inspired a number of intellectuals in the East and the West to analyse it and seek a way out of it. Leaving out the unrelieved pessimism of Spengler, many solutions have been worked out ; the evolutionism of Bergson ; the intellectual humanism of Thomas Mann ; the Christian compromise of Toynbee ; the Anglo-Catholic intellectualism of T. S. Eliot ; the mechanistic utopianism of Wells, and many others. The crisis faces the East as much as it does the West and the now almost universal Western Civilization.

To the best of my knowledge, only one Eastern philosopher has taken up the challenge of this great human crisis and that one philosopher is Iqbal. And what is his answer to the challenge ? His answer is the concept of One World — an expression which has lately become familiar with the West, but which more than a quarter century ago Iqbal conceived and proclaimed through powerful verse and profound prose. It was Iqbal who, for the first time, told mankind that they must evolve a single community of human beings integrated together by common ethical and spiritual values. Such an

integration, he declared, was a *necessity* for the very preservation of human values. The terms ethical and spiritual values are vague in themselves, but there was nothing vague in the manner in which Iqbal spoke of them. According to him all such values spring from faith in one God, and he therefore felt that all those who believe in one God had already the basic link between one another. The fundamental basis of his concept of One World promising a single community of human beings, was therefore monotheism. Before I try to explain further this concept of Iqbal, I would hark back to a poetical incident in Iqbal's earlier life, In the years of his study in the Universities of Cambridge and Heidelberg, Iqbal foresaw the tragedy of the aggressive national state. He saw the dangers to which rival economic imperialisms would expose not only themselves but the bulk of humanity and the heritage of human values. In a poem written in 1907, he warned "the dwellers of the cities of the West", that "a nest built on a fragile bough cannot endure." This was a poetic imagery sought to warn that the superstructure of material progress which the West had reared, rested on an insecure moral and ethical foundation, and so there was the danger of a collapse.

This warning was the beginning of the poet's philosophy which was gradually unfolding itself in a distinct moral pattern. But at that time international recognition had not yet come to Iqbal and his warning went either unheeded or was regarded as just another piece of oriental obscurantism. But the collapse did come, and since then two world wars have shaken the world and threatened the destruction of the heritage of Man accumulated through thousands of years. Since then, events have forced similar responses from European intellectuals also.

The problem which faced the human society in its international relations was, in the view of Iqbal, essentially a moral one. One had to believe in certain basic moral values which have made the creative evolution of the human race possible. In the light of these moral values society has to be studied as an organism, resembling very much in its growth and in its situation the individual human being. In other words human beings are apt to behave even collectively as a single human being and therefore the moral reform of the personality should begin with the individual.

Thus, from thinking of collective human good and of a single community of man linked together with common spiritual and moral values,

Iqbal arrived at his famous doctrine of Self or the Ego. He taught that every constituent human personality which contributed to the formation of the collective personality of the human race, must first of all imbibe fully those spiritual and moral values. The individual Self or Ego, Iqbal proclaimed, could only develop in the following ways. First, it had to have an environment of freedom. Where the Ego came into clash with an adverse environment, it had to struggle with that environment and conquer it. Only by such a conquest could the Self or Ego approach God whom Iqbal described as "the Most Free Individual". This absorbing philosophy of Iqbal had been immortalized in his famous poem *Asrar-i-Khudi* or *The Secrets of the Self*, translated into English by Professor Nicholson.

Secondly, the Self or Ego must derive the food for its growth and purification, as well as acquire fitness for being able to approach God, from the purest possible moral sources which must also be infallible. Iqbal believed that the best of all sources was the Quran, and here I may remind you of what the great Western thinker, Goethe, said of that Holy Book. He said, You see, this teaching never fails; with all our systems, we cannot go and generally speaking no man can go, farther than that."

Iqbal's poetic vision having seen this truth so clearly, his Muse, in its maturity, made itself a powerful and sublime vehicle for the teachings which he summed up as follows. The division of the world into the East and the West and the further sub-divisions into hundreds of national, sub-national, ethnical and cultural groups, is like vivisectioning a collective Human Personality. This vivisection is responsible for the ills of mankind and retards progress towards the fulfilment of the goal of creation, namely, the attainment of perfection by man in an ascending scale so that ultimately Man might be fit and free to approach his Maker. The Human Personality has thus fallen into a thousand fragments because it has failed to grasp spiritual and ethical values which must be common to all. These values must be revived. A necessary condition for that is that every individual human being must first develop his or her own self or ego.

Having come to this conclusion and approached this general truth, Iqbal turned to his immediate environment which was a Muslim environment, and his poetry was a clarion call to them to be true to the Quran — the purest source, for them at any rate, of guidance and of spiritual and moral values.

The meaning of what I have just said about Iqbal may perhaps be made clearer in the following words.

We have to decide what kind of society provided the greatest scope for the developed ego. Before determining the nature of this ideal society we have to lay down optimum relations between society and the individual. On the one hand, there are individuals who regard the development of the individual as the supreme end of life's process and the State as merely an instrument for this development. On the other hand, there are those who regard the State a super-personal entity whose strength is far more important than the rights of the individual. Between these two extremes Iqbal takes a balanced view and maintains that the growth of a full and free personality is impossible except where it draws its spiritual sustenance from the culture of the group to which it belongs. On the other hand, the group, in its own interest, owes a duty to the individual and so interferes with his development as little as possible, and only when common good demands it. For such an ideal society Iqbal has laid down seven essential requirements

- (i) It must be based on spiritual consideration like monotheism.
- (ii) It must centre round inspired leadership or prophethood.
- (iii) It must possess a code for its guidance.
- (iv) It needs a centre.
- (v) It must have a clear goal towards which the whole community should strive.
- (vi) It must gain supremacy over the forces of nature.
- (vii) The communal or collective ego must be developed in the same way as the individual ego is developed.

It will thus be seen that Iqbal's conception of society has an inescapable spiritual basis : monotheism. It is most important to note that the concentration on the idea of one God necessarily emphasises the essential unity of all mankind under the Divine Being. The human society is therefore one indivisible unit and man is related to man as brother, irrespective of colour, creed or race or geographical accident. Monotheism provides the human psychology with an antidote against exploitation, group hatred and

antagonism. Iqbal has himself described the unifying role of monotheism (*Tawhid*) in these lines (*Rumuz*, 105) :

That which leads to unison in a hundred individuals  
Is but a secret from the secrets of *Tawhid*.  
Religion, wisdom and law are all its effects,  
Power, strength and supremacy originate from it.  
Its influence exalts the slaves,  
And virtually creates a new species out of them.  
Within it fear and doubt departs, spirit of action revives,  
And the eye sees the very secret of the Universe!

This universal humanism is the ultimate object of Iqbal's sociological thinking. But Iqbal's personality had another aspect. He was not merely an ideologist; his approach to the problems which faced his land and his people was also one of practical commonsense within the framework of universal humanism. Islam and the Muslim World and the Muslim people among whom he was born were his special and immediate pre-occupation.

It was Iqbal who in 1930 for the first time told the world of his conception of an independent Muslim State in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, the State which according to his lead was achieved by the Muslims of the sub-continent and their leader Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah. It should be made clear that the conception of Pakistan has not been that of a parochial or narrowly nationalistic or theocratic state. The conception of this State of ours was sponsored by Iqbal on the same humanistic urges which are the basis of his system of thought; the conception of Pakistan was a challenge to all the accepted criteria of narrow nationalism, and hence it led to a great deal of controversy. But Iqbal himself explained the Pakistan idea in his Presidential address at the Annual Session of the Muslim League in 1930 in these words:

The creation of autonomous Muslim States will not mean the introduction of a kind of religious rule in such states. The truth is that Islam is not a Church. It is a State conceived as a contractual organism long before Rousseau ever thought of such a thing, and animated by an ethical ideal

which regards man not as an earth-rooted creature, defined by this or that portion of the earth but as a spiritual being understood in terms of social mechanism and possessing rights and duties as a living factor in that mechanism.

Two years later, presiding over the session of the Muslim Conference in 1932, Iqbal again explained the Pakistan idea not in the limited political context of mere self-rule for a population group, but as the fulfilment of a beneficent principle. He foresaw the rise of forces which would be destructive of that Human Personality whose glorious "secrets" he had unfolded in his celebrated poem, and which would disrupt and enslave individual societies and finally the human community as such. He had in mind both materialistic atheism and materialistic capitalism. He said:

Those phenomena are merely premonitions of a coming storm which is likely to sweep over the whole of India and the rest of Asia. This is the inevitable outcome of a wholly political civilization which has looked upon man as a thing to be exploited and not as a personality to be developed and enlarged by purely cultural forces. The people of Asia are bound to rise against the acquisitive economy which the West has developed and imposed on the nations of the East. Asia cannot comprehend modern Western capitalism with its undisciplined individualism. The faith which you represent recognises the worth of the individual, and disciplines him to give away his all to the service of God and man. Its possibilities are not yet exhausted. It can still create a new world where the social rank of man is not determined by his caste or colour, or the amount of dividend he earns, but by the kind of life he lives; where an untouchable can marry the daughter of a king, where private ownership is a trust and where capital cannot be allowed to accumulate so as to dominate the real producer of wealth. This superb idealism of our faith, however, needs emancipation from the medieval fancies of theologians and legists.

Iqbal's premonition about the rise of destructive forces has been more than fulfilled, and after two World Wars, while on the one hand Godless materialism is seeking and making new conquests in the mind; of men, on the other hand, capitalistic materialism not altogether divorced from religion is, nevertheless, groping to recapture spiritual urges that might ensure its

survival. A study of Iqbal's poetry and philosophy can prove a potent aid in that search in the West as well as in the East.

For the Western reader a number of Iqbal's works are already available in English translations and also in some other European languages. He wrote his famous lectures on *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* in English and this work is being translated into French. Several volumes of his Urdu and Persian verse are available in the English translations of Victor Kiernan, Nicholson and Arberry. And I too have ventured to make a humble contribution in my translation of his *Complaint and Answer*. I notice that this modest work has been of some use to a recent writer of Iqbal, Professor Northrop of the Yale University of the United States of America, whose book *The Taming of the Nations* I have just read.

In conclusion I shall venture to make a suggestion. Here in the Netherlands this great University of yours is already rich in its collection of oriental literature. Should it set up a Visiting Fellowship for Iqbal it would give a practical impetus not only to the study of the verse and philosophy of the oriental sage but also to the movement for the synthesis of the sublimest Eastern and Western thought through which alone can mankind preserve its common spiritual heritage and civilization.