

# IQBAL: THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE POET

*by*

*Mamoun Ghareeb*

To talk about Iqbal is to talk about a philosopher who excelled in poetry and a poet who excelled in philosophy. His poetry was not mere feeling or music far from reality and involved in fancy and imagination, but a living dynamism which led to the creation of Pakistan.

His poetry aimed at recreation of man on the basis of "ego" in order to be able to get rid of obstacles and go ahead with freedom and liberty with the current of progress.

The life of Iqbal was rich and fertile. He was born in Sialkot on February 22, 1873.<sup>2</sup> When he was a child, he learned the Holy Quran.

He studied philosophy in the University of Lahore after which he was encouraged by his professor, the British Orientalist, Thomas Arnold, to complete his studies abroad. He studied philosophy and law in Cambridge, Munich and London. When he returned home, he taught

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<sup>2</sup> His date of birth, on the basis of available evidence, is November 22, 1877 and not 1873 (Ed.)

philosophy and was called to the Bar at the same time. Later, he was elected President of the All-India Muslim League and Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam. Early in 1930 Iqbal demanded the partitioning of India into two States, one of which had to be the homeland of Muslims. He adopted the idea and struggled for it and in 1947, Pakistan came into being under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. But Iqbal did not witness the birth of the State he had demanded because he died in 1938.

- Before he died, Iqbal said :

سرور رفته باز آید کہ ناید؟

نسیمی از حجیاز آید کہ ناید؟

سرآمد روزگار این فقیرے

دگر دانائے راز آید کہ ناید؟

(ارمغان حجاز)

The bliss that is departed may or may not return,

A breeze from Hidjaz may or may not blow again.

The days of this *Faqir* have come to an end,

Another knower of secrets may or may not appear again.

A little earlier he had said:

I tell you the sign of a *Momin*:

When death comes, there is a smile on his lip.<sup>3</sup>

Iqbal's works are spread over eleven books, ten in verse and one in prose.

### *Iqbal's Philosophy*

To Iqbal, Islam is an open religion which prepares an individual for a happy life. Islam is not a religion of priesthood, but a religion of openness and free thinking. It embodies the strength and power required for liberating man from the slavery of colour, language and race. To Islam, all people are equal, an Arab cannot excel a non-Arab except by his piety. Islam is the religion of freedom, amity and justice. But have these noble principles springing from the real essence of religion, been practised ? These principles cannot be achieved through mysticism which makes man oblivious of the reality of life and puts him in an ivory tower, nor by idleness and fanaticism, but by practising the justice of Omar Ibn Al-Khattab and following the path of Al-Hasan.

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<sup>3</sup> The present text of *Armaghan* (p. 165) gives this verse in a different form

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نشان مرد حق دیگر چه گویم  
چو مرگ آید تبسم بر لب

These principles spring from the ego and therefore man has to develop and reaffirm his self. Prophet Muhammad says : *Takballaqu bi Akhlaq Allah*. The more man comes nearer Allah, the more his self is developed. He no more lives in a world in which he is unaware of his surrounding. The true individual cannot be lost in the world ; it is the world that is lost in him.

Iqbal believed that life without freedom is meaningless and that it is an endeavour for freedom. Thus man's pressing need is for spiritual values. Iqbal's philosophy contradicts that of Plato who believes that real philosophy is the contemplation in death. Iqbal ridiculed opportunism and philosophies supporting it.

### *Politics*

Iqbal believed that Islam is the religion of dignity and power and that any surrender or submission is nothing but departure from the real spirit of Islam. Iqbal thought over the conditions of the Muslim World and was deeply touched by its dissensions. To Europe, Turkey was a sick country led by a gullible Sultan. In it the Jews have played a dirty role ; they wanted to undermine Islamic unity. The *dumma*, under the leadership of Shabatai,—which included all the Jewry in Turkey,—was formed in Turkey. The leader of this group had gone too far but when he was about to be executed for his misdeeds he uttered the *Kalimah* for which he was pardoned by the Sultan. This group had apparently adopted Islam. Another, called *Al-Nouraniyah*, advocated Turkish nationalism and separation from the Islamic world. Iqbal did not like Turkey to

suffer from stagnation and backwardness. Examining the conditions of the Arab countries, Iqbal realised that they were disunited. He also realised what had happened in India as a result of imperialism. The first thing the British had done in the Subcontinent was to bank on the differences between the Muslims and the Hindus. The British cancelled the Criminal Law derived from the spirit of Islam and Persian was dislodged as official language. Moreover, the British created seditions and plots with the result that human massacres were the order of the day. For all this, Iqbal urged for the creation of a Muslim State in India. When Iqbal studied the conditions of the other parts of the Muslim World, he asked the Muslims to change their outlook to life and to create new ideologies derived from the spirit of Islam.

When Mussoloni had said that whoever had iron and steel would have bread, Iqbal said that whoever was steel would own everything. Hence his demand for the establishment of a new Muslim State based not only on a religious base, but on a political and economic one too.

### *Socialism*

Iqbal believed that Western democracy was, in reality, a false one — the democracy of the interests of capitalists. Behind its glowing and nice words lie tyranny and aggression. Conflicts in parliaments are conflicts springing from contradictory monopolies. In fact, peoples should not be deceived by this form of democracy ; the mirage should not be

taken as a flourishing garden ; it is not a comfortable place, but a -prison.

Iqbal expressed his dislike for the democracy which took no notice of the rights of workers and peasants. He used to call the labourers to shake the foundations of palaces of the exploiters.

He used to say : "O, boy, go and search for yourself and faculties. Take off from your body the dust of ages. Destroy all your old traditions and give up fanaticism. Adhere to your faith and religion because in it you will find real *Tawhid*."

Iqbal composed a poem about Lenin for which he had great regard. But he sees in his theory, which ignored the spiritual side, an incomplete doctrine. Iqbal said : "O, God, you have all power and justice. Take care of Your miserable servants who exhaust themselves in earning livelihood. When would You, my God, drown the ship of capitalism in the middle of the sea ?"

### *Towards New Horizons*

To Iqbal, the East would re-establish itself once again. To look forward to new horizons and to be more dynamic, it has to adhere to the real essence of Islam. Iqbal says that if the Muslim World would realise and understand the essence of religion, "Iblis" would have nothing to say or do. Iblis sees no light coming from the East because it lives in darkness. Light is faint even in mosques and in *Ka'ba*. He fears that the truth would be exposed before those who are lagging behind on the

way of life. Iblis warns people against the Arab Prophet and his ideologies. His message would remove slavery, exploitation and give the poor and the miserable the chance to occupy the key posts. This Prophet has prevented kings from having the earth as their own property because it belongs only to Allah.

This is Iqbal, the poet and philosopher, whose verses brought about Pakistan. His philosophy was an instrument to achieve power and a milestone for the man who is aware of his position in the world of today and who is possessed of the guide which directs him towards the proper direction.