

IQBAL: AN UNRELENTING ADVOCATE OF ISLAMIC VALUES

by

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A firm believer in *Ijtehad* (the principle of movement in the structure of Islam), but unrelentingly uncompromising, where Islamic values of life were concerned — that is, what Iqbal was. He thought it was quite in order to exert one's mind to form an independent judgement on moral, legal and ethical questions, but in Islam, according to him, the spiritual and temporal were not two entirely separate and distinct domains, and the nature of an act, however secular in its import, was determined by the attitude of mind with which the agent did it. The agent, in all circumstances, was to be guided by the tenets of Islam. "The ultimate Reality," he said, "according to the Quran, is spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity." He believed that the spirit found its opportunities in the natural, the material and the secular. To him Islam was the most rational religion and the Holy Prophet, Muhammad (May peace be upon him), the greatest man ever born on the face of earth. Iqbal's message and the whole philosophy of this message was based on these considerations which pervaded all his poetical compositions of substance. Some years back Lt.-Col. Ferrar truly remarked about Iqbal in his *Whither Islam* (p. 204) : The strength and fervour of his love for Islam as an ideal which if fully realised should suffice for man's

every want in this world and the next. According to the estimate of Ferrar wide reading and poetic temperament of Iqbal had created in his mind so attractive and so inspiring a picture of the simplicity, the force and the appeal of early Islam that his main preoccupation centered round a return to that simple creed in order to revive what he believed Islam had lost.

Iqbal had very carefully studied the political-cum-social movements in vogue in the so-called more civilized and advanced contemporary world of Europe and other countries and denounced all these movements (in 1934) by saying : "Fascism, Communism and all the isms of this age are nothing real. In my conviction only Islam is the one reality which can become the medium of salvation for human beings from every point of view" (*Maktubat*, II, 314).

The importance of studying Quran is repeatedly preached by Iqbal in prose and poetry and, in fact, his last ambition, to achieve this ideal, was to write a book on the Holy Quran. In a letter addressed to Sir Ross Masud, on April 26, 1935, he very despairingly remarks:

"Thus it would have been possible for me to complete in the light of the modern thoughts, which are for a long time, under my consideration, my notes on the Quran. But now I doubt very much if I shall ever be able to achieve this. If I could be afforded the little time, now left at my disposal, to devote to this work, I think I could not offer a better present to the Muslims of the world, than these notes on the Quran" (*Iqbalnama*, I, 357-358).

He reiterated his desire in his letter of May 30, 1935, when he said : "I wish I could record my views about the Quran-e-Karim before I die" (*Iqbalnama*, I, 361-362).

This wish was never realized, but in order to keep the Islamic ideals alive in the country Iqbal propagated throughout his life that a real effort had to be made to dispel the scepticism towards Islam, which was deeply embedded in the minds of the ignorant people. He very bitterly remarked in 1921: "Muslims are now, from the intellectual point of view, in a state that resembles in many respects, the period of European history which started from the time of Luther. But as this Islamic movement is not led by any individual, its future is not free from dangers" (*Iqbalnama*, I, 143).

The poet often complained of his intellectual loneliness in the contemporary society calling himself the "first Adam of a new world" (*Zabur e 'Ajam*, 37). He also complained of the difficulty of his position while he was struggling against heavy odds to convince the Muslims to revive an unflinching and unassailable belief in the tenets of the Holy Quran. Yet he kept the torch burning with an unrivalled fervour as he firmly believed that

An katab e Zandeh Quran e Hakeem

Hekmat e oo la Yazal ast o qadeem

Noskha o ye asrar e takveen e hayat

Nau e insan ra payam e akhbreen

Hamel oo Rahmatol Lal Alameen

"The wisdom contained in that eternal book, Quran e Hakeem, is unfading and ever living. It is an archetype of the secrets of life's genesis, from whose strength the infirm derives firmness. It is the last message to the human race, delivered to it by the Holy Prophet."

To-day when we are celebrating the twentyeighth death anniversary (and why don't we celebrate the birth anniversary?) of Iqbal, all over Pakistan, and even in some other countries, we have to ask a simple question from ourselves : Have we at all cared to practise what Iqbal preached ? His preachings were original but not new. He simply aimed at the restitution of the ideals of pristine Islam, devoid of all later additions and interpretations from Hellinistic, Persian and even Hindu sources. Before the establishment of Pakistan we shouted from the house tops:

Pakistan ka matlab kiya

La ilaha ilia Allah

"What is meant by Pakistan ? There is no god but God."

Have we struck to this slogan? If not, what is being done in our society to bring home to us the dangers of fleeing away from realities and the message of Iqbal? If the preachings of Iqbal and the spirit of this slogan is lost to oblivion there can be no hope for tomorrow. We are paying homage to a guide by lip service, which is probably not a very honest attitude of mind.