

IQBAL—A SURVEY OF HIS WORK*

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Amir Shakaib Arsalan of Damascus (Syria) once remarked that Iqbal is the greatest thinker the Muslim world has produced during the last thousand years. Iqbal's merits as an Islamic thinker are recognized by all, but what is often overlooked is the fact that he was not only a thinker but also a versatile genius. He was a poet, prose-writer, linguist, jurist, statesman, educationist, lawyer and an art critics besides a thinker of great merits. In fact the versatility of his genius staggers our imagination.

Iqbal was born in Sialkot in Pakistan on the border of Kashmir in 1877. After a distinguished career at school, he went to the Government College, Lahore, where he studied Arabic and philosophy and obtained the degree of M.A. in 1899. After serving for sometime in the Oriental College and Government College, Lahore, he went to Cambridge for studies. At the same time he carried out researches in Munich from where he got Doctorate as a result of his thesis on "*The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*", and also studied law. He returned home in 1908 and for sometime worked as a teacher and practised law. But finally he decided to concentrate on law.

Iqbal's outlook on life underwent two important changes during his stay in Europe. He developed an utter dislike for narrow and selfish nationalism which was the root cause of most political troubles in Europe and his admiration for a life of action and exertion became pronounced. He wrote:

"The life of this world consists in movement; this is the established law of the world. On this road halt is out of place. A static condition means death."

When leaving England he warned Europe, in lines of rare prophetic vision, of the abyss towards which her materialism, imperialism and colonialism were leading her:

دیوار مغرب کے رہنے والو خدا کی بستی دکاں نہیں ہے

* This article is taken from Mr. S. A. Vahid's forth coming book. "Glimpses of Iqbal."

کھرا جسے تم سمجھ رہے ہو وہ اب زر کم عیار ہوگا
تمہاری تہذیب اپنے خنجر سے آپ ہی خودکشی کرے گی
جو شاخ نازک پہ آشیانہ بنے گا ناپائیدار ہوگا

"O' residents of West, God's earth is not a bargaining counter,

The gold you are thinking to be genuine will prove to be of low value ;

Your civilisation is going to commit suicide with her own dagger;

The nest which is made on a frail bough cannot: but be insecure."

Iqbal who had already earned a name as a great poet before leaving for England wrote on return some epoch-making verses like *Shikwa* and *Jawab-i Shikwa*. In *Shikwa*, addressing the Almighty he asks why the Muslim people are so backward in spite of the great work their ancestors had done to spread His Last Message on the earth.

صفحہ دھر سے باطل کو مٹایا ہم نے
نوع انساں کو غلامی سے چھڑایا ہم نے
تیرے کعبے کو جبینوں سے بسایا ہم نے
تیرے قرآن کو سینوں سے لگایا ہم نے
پھر بھی ہم سے یہ گلا ہے کہ وفادار نہیں
ہم وفادار نہیں تو بھی تو دلدار نہیں

"We erased the smudge of falsehood from the parchment of the firmament;

We redeemed the human species from the chains of slavery;

And we filled the Holy Kaaba with our foreheads humbly bent;

Clutching to our fervent bosoms the Koran in ecstasy;

Yet the charge is laid against us that we have played the faithless part;

If disloyal we have proved, least Thou deserved to win our heart." In *Jawab-i Shikwa* God Almighty points out the reasons why the Muslims have fallen so low:

منفعت ایک ہے اس قوم کی نقصان بھی ایک
ایک ہی سب کا نبی دین بھی ایمان بھی ایک
حرم پاک بھی اللہ بھی قرآن بھی ایک
کچھ بڑی بات تھی ہوتے جو مسلمان بھی ایک
فرقہ بندی ہے کہیں اور کہیں ذاتیں ہیں
کیا زمانے میں پنپنے کی یہی باتیں ہیں

One and common are the profit and the loss the people bear;

One and common are your Prophet, your religion and your creed;

One the Holy Sanctuary, one Koran, One God you share;

But But to act as one, and Muslims — that would every bound exceed.

Here sectarianism triumphs ; class and caste there rule the day;

Is it thus you hope to prosper, to regain your ancient sway?" In the end God addressing the poet speaks to the Muslims in an encouraging strain:

کی محمد سے وفا تونے تو ہم تیرے ہیں
یہ جہاں چیز ہے کیا لوح و قلم تیرے ہیں

'Be thou faithful to Muhammad, and We yield Ourselves to thee

Not this world alone—the Tablet and the Pen the prize shall be.

After these poems Iqbal adopted Persian language as the medium for his poetry and wrote in 1915 the famous poem *Asrar-i Khudi* followed in 1918 by

Rumuz-i Bekhudi. In *Asrar-i Khudi* Iqbal describes in beautiful poetry the philosophy of ego which is the basis of his philosophy. Iqbal is struck by the fact that there is individuality in everything that lives or exists ; the stars of heaven and the things of earth are all, according to Iqbal, individuals and do not merge in each other, but they do not possess individuality in an equal degree. Individuality becomes personality in man. Fortification of personality enables the ego to conquer environment and space on the one hand and time on the other, and to approach the greatest Ego of all egos — God, in His attributes, and thus produce Superman or as Iqbal terms it Mard-i Momin. Man who comes nearest to God is the completest person. Thus Iqbal starts with a strong faith in the evolution of man. In order to help this evolution Iqbal considers the following factors necessary:

- (1) Love:
- (2) Faqr which can be best defined by the Prophet's Tradition! Faqr is my pride.
- (3) Courage ;
- (4) Tolerance ;
- (5) Kasb-i Halal ;
- (6) Taking part in original and creative activities.

In *Rumuz-i Bekhudi* Iqbāl has described the essential requirements of an ideal human society. For such a society he considers the following requirements:

- (1) It must be based on spiritual considerations such as mono-theism.
- (2) It must centre round inspired leadership or prophethood.
- (3) It must possess a code for its guidance like the Koran,
- (4) It must have a spiritual centre like the Kaaba.

- (5) It must have a clear objective, and according to Iqbal the objective before the Muslims

is the propagation of Islam.

- (6) It must strive to gain supremacy over the forces of nature, According to Iqbal a society can attain immortality only by fulfilling these requirements.

In 1928-29 Iqbal delivered a series of lectures on Islam, which have been published under the title 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.' These lectures are a precious contribution to Islamic literature and as soon as they were published they brought recognition to Iqbal as the leading thinker in the Muslim world. In these lectures Iqbal has attempted to reconstruct Muslim religious philosophy with due regard to the philosophical traditions of Islam and the more recent in the various domains of human knowledge. He boldly challenges the attitude of the Muslim Ulema who admitting ijtehad in theory, claim finality for the popular schools of Muslim Law:

"Did the founders of our schools ever claim finality for their reasonings and interpretations? Never. The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to reinterpret the fundamental legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life, is, in my opinion, perfectly justified. The teaching of the Quran that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problem."

(The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, pp 168)

Iqbal published many other poems in Urdu as well as in Persian, in which he preached fervently that the salvation for mankind is to be found only in its response to the message of Islam. This message is contained in poetry of transcendent and sublime beauty. His *magnum opus* is *Javid Namah*, whose concept is based on the *Meraj*, or the Ascension of the Prophet, and Ibn-e-Arabi's *Fatubat-i-Makkia*. In a beautiful passage in *Javid Namah*, Abu Jehl, the inveterate enemy of the Prophet Muhammad, says in lamenting

tones:

سینه ما از محمد داغ داغ از دم او کعبه را گل شد چراغ
مذہب او قاطع ملک و نسب از قریش و منکر از فضل عرب
در نگاہ او یکے بالا و پست با غلام خویش بریک خواں نشست
قدر احرار عرب نشناخته با کلفتان حبش در ساخته
احمران با اسودان آمیختند آبروئے دودمانے ریختند
این مسارات این مواخات اعجمی است خوب می دانم کہ مسلمان مزدکی است

"Muhammad scared my soul, his breath blew out

The light that radiated from Holy Kaaba;

His faith doth cut across both fatherland

And race, He belongs to the Quraysh and

Yet denies the superiority of the Arabs. He even holds

Equal both high and low and with his slave he dines;

He does not recognise free Arab's worth,

And ever repulsive negroes befriends;

He mixes the brown with the black, disowns.

All noble ancestry. This brother-hood

And this equality are foreign things, Completely un-Arabian."

Iqbal once said that when poetry is of the man-making type it is actually an offshoot of prophethood. Of such a type was his own poetry. For him the gift of song was simply a means to an end, to convey a message. At first

response to his message was rather disappointing. But the magic of his breath at last set aflame the smouldering fires of the Millat's spirit. Not only did he gain phenomenal popularity in his own life-time but what is more important, his poetry brought about a re-awakening and renaissance of the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent in a way that had to be seen to be believed. He gave them back their self-respect and self-confidence, analysed and appraised the conflict of the East and the West, the old and the new, and gave us a new touch-stone as a final measure of value — the growth and integration of personality or the ego. The result was that a radical change came about among our people in their attitude toward life. The manners and morality, the religion and philosophy typical of a subservient people under the yoke of colonialism were replaced by the nobler ideals of a proud independent people. Physically we were not free but the spirit was emancipated, and once the mind has clearly imagined and firmly resolved an action, the formality of taking place follows as a matter of course. Within ten years of Iqbal's death, Pakistan was achieved. Iqbal, however, lived to see the spiritual revolution which prepared the way for this consummation. And today ninety million people of Pakistan regard him with love and gratitude as their spiritual father. But Iqbal's concern was not with one country alone. He was and claimed to be a citizen of the world. The entire spirit of his poetry is cosmopolitan. To the West in particular he had some home-truths to tell, from which it is not to be thought that his condemnation of Western civilization was wholesale and unqualified. There was a great deal in Western culture which he admired, just as there was much in the Eastern culture which he exposed as decadent and worthless.

As we have remarked above Iqbal preached universal brotherhood of mankind in which all distinctions of colour, race and nationality would be abolished. In order to attain this brother-hood he naturally turns to the brotherhood of Muslim people- That no serious student of Sociology can afford to ignore Islam as a system will be clear from the following remarks by Dr. Maude Royden, a Christian missionary:

"The religion of Mohamet proclaimed the first real democracy ever conceived in the mind of man. His God was of such transcendent greatness that before Him all worldly differences were naught and even the deep and the cruel cleavages of colour ceased to exist The Muslim, black, brown, or white alone finds himself accepted as a brother not

according to his colour but his creed."

There is no doubt that discrimination due to colour and blood differences was spreading amongst the people, and it was for this reason that Iqbal exhorted the Muslims to remember:

نه افغانيم و نه ترک و نتازيم چمن زاديم و از يك شاخساريم
تميز رنگ و بو بر ما حرام است که ما پروردهٔ يك نو بهاريم

"Not Afghans, Turks or sons of Tartary,

But of one garden, and one trunk are we ;

Shun the criterion of scent and hue,

We all the nurshings of one springtime be."

Emphasising the dignity of man Iqbal says:

تو امے کودک منش خود را ادب کن مسلمان زادهٔ ترک نسب کن
برنگ احمر و خون و رگ و پوست عرب نامزد اگر ترک عرب کن

"Leave childishness, and learn a better lore;

Abandon race, if thee a Muslim bore;

If of his colour, blood and veins and skin

The Arab boasts an Arab be no more."

Addressing the Arabs he says:

یہ نکتہ پہلے سکھایا گیا کس امت کو وصال مصطفوی، افتراق بولہبی
نہیں وجود حدود و ثغور سے اس کا محمد عربی سے ہے عالم عربی

"Which millat was taught this point;

Unity is the way of Mustafa and disunity the way of Abu-Lahab;

The Arab world is not prescribed by geographical boundaries;

The limits of Arab world are prescribed by Muhammad of Arabia."

Once Iqbal wrote:

"If the object of the human world is peace and security and to knit the various social units into one entity then it is impossible to think of any other system except Islam, because from what I understand from the Quran Islam does not claim merely to improve man's moral condition but to bring about a gradual but basic change in human society."

It was for this reason that Iqbal preached a Confederation of the Muslim world with the Arab world and Mecca as the nucleus. As already remarked Iqbal was one of the greatest thinkers of the world. He had drunk deep of Eastern and Western philosophy and so it is natural that his thought shows an affinity with the thought of the thinkers of the world. This has led many students of Iqbal to trace the source of his thought But Iqbal has left no doubts on this point. Again and again he emphasises that the source of his thought is Koran and Koran alone.

"Take this message from me to the Arabian poets;

I attached no importance to ruby lips;

From the light that I gathered from the Koran ;

I ushered a man after a night lasting over hundred years."

Thus it will be seen that Iqbal was one of those natural forces that shape the destiny of mankind. By his sublime poetry and other writings he made the Muslims of the world realise their great mission in the world and led ninety million Pakistanis to a free homeland. It is true that Iqbal's appreciation and popularity spread more rapidly in non-Arab countries first because he wrote mostly in Urdu and Persian. But now the Arab countries have taken his poetry to their heart as much as any other nation. Some of the earliest introduction that Iqbal got to the Arab world were through Al-Bashir, the

Arabic magazine of Pakistan, while Hasan-ul-Azmi, a Pakistan scholar who studied at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, did much pioneer work in translating Iqbal's poetry into Arabic. He brought out an anthology of Iqbal's poetry in Arabic which included translation of his *tarana* by himself and translations of *Shikwa* and *Jawab-i Shikwa* by an Egyptian poet Saddy Aly Shahla. Another anthology appeared later on in Baghdad by that talented poetess Amira Nureddin. But the great contribution made in this field is by the late Dr. Abdul Wahab Azzam Bey. This great scholar whose early death was a great loss to the subject of Iqbal studies, has translated in Arabic verse *Payam-i-Mashriq* and *Asrar-o Rumuz* besides many other poems. These translations while retaining the meaning as well as spirit of the original reflect the fire and colour of Iqbal, because the Arabic language is well suited to express such epic themes and sonorous rhythms as are found in Iqbal. It is only hoped that his other poems will also be translated in Arabic soon. As remarked above his one aim was to bring the Muslims of the world into closer relationship and to achieve this he has not only sung of the glories of Arab culture and the contribution to modern civilisation, but has also given messages to them which are beautifully summarised in the oration of the Mehdi of Sudan:

گفت اے روح عرب بیدار شو چوں نیاکان خالق اعصار شو
 اے فواد اے فیصل اے ابن سعود تا کجا برخویش پیچیدن چو دود
 زندہ کن در سینہ آن سوزے کہ رفت در جہاں باز آور آن روزے کہ رفت
 خاک بطحا خالدے دیگر بزائے نغمہ توحید را دیگر سرائے

("With a sigh on his lips) he said, "Arise

O Arabs' soul and like thy ancestors

Create new times. O Faysal and Fuad,

And Ibn-e-Saud, how long will you like smoke

Wind round thyself? Rekindle fire in hearts

And bring into the world the day that's gone:

O' Batha's land, Khalid new produce;

And sing the song of one God once again!"

To the Arabs of Palestine he said:

زمانہ اب بھی نہیں جس کے سوز سے فارغ
میں جانتا ہوں وہ آتش ترے وجود میں ہے
تری دوا نہ جنیوا می ں ہے نہ لندن میں
فرنگ کی رنگ جاں پنجنہٴ یہود میں ہے
سنا ہے میں نے غلاموں سے اُمتوں کی نجات
خودی کی پرورش و لذت نمود میں ہے

"The warmth of which this world cannot stand,

I know that fire is latent in thy existence.

Thy remedy is neither in Geneva nor London,

Europe's very life is controlled by the Jews.

I have heard that nations can get riddance of slavery

Only by developing their own selves,"

Iqbal worked for the resurgence of the Muslim people all his life, and before he died on 21st April, 1938, there were already signs of renaissance among the Muslims of the world. Colonialism and imperial-ism were disappearing and the hold of Western powers over Muslim countries in Asia and Africa was loosening.