

# THE GREATNESS OF IQBAL

*S. A. Vahid*

The poet's highest office is to be a revealer of truths or to be an unveler of truths which for some reasons have been forgotten or hidden from common eyes. It will be realised that to perform the latter function the poet needs as much prophetic insight as to perceive truths for the first time. It is the aim of all true poetry to come to the rescue of human nature when it is overborne by worldliness and cynicism by drawing its attention to truths that man has lost sight of. At the same time there is another function which poets fulfil, that of giving to thoughts and statements which all share beautiful and attractive expression. They set forth in graceful and attractive form the beauty which is there for all to see. Here the poet is discharging his artistic function, and according to those who believe in art for art's sake it is the poet's only function. A little reflection will be sufficient to convince any one that the greatest poets of the world could have never girded themselves to their great efforts merely to provide amusement to man-kind. No great poet will ever be content with any object less worthy than that of coming to the rescue of human nature by seeing and stating new truths for the first time or unveiling forgotten and concealed truths.

The two aspects of the poet, the prophetic and the artistic, co-exist in different proportions in all great poets, in one the prophetic insight predominates, in another the artistic utterance outweighs. And in the case of any single poet it may be an interesting question to determine in what proportions he possesses each of these two qualities. To attain perfection in both these roles, is given to few poets of the world, and the number of such poets in the world will not exceed a dozen. Iqbal takes his place in this select band. This is his greatness as a poet. But it must be realised that Iqbal is nothing if he is not a revealer of truths. The question arises if Iqbal was a revealer what did he reveal? All students of Iqbal know that the subject of his poetry is Man. But what did he specifically teach? To what truth did he draw the attention of mankind?

Iqbal always used to say that his Brahmin forefathers used to spend their lives in search of God, but he spent his life looking for Man, by which he meant that he concentrated all his energies, mental and spiritual, in working

for the uplift of man. Iqbal was so absorbed in the uplift of mankind that no aspect of human welfare escaped his attention. As Terrence, the Roman comic poet puts it:

"Horns sum, et nihil humanum, a me alienum puto."

I am a man, and I count nothing human indifferent to me.

So with Iqbal. Iqbal revealed to us the significance of man and his dignity. In lines of rare beauty he describes the warm welcome accorded to Man by Earth.

کھول آنکھ، زمین دیکھ فلک دیکھ فضا دیکھ  
مشرق سے اُبھرتے ہوئے سورج کو ذرا دیکھ  
اس جلوۂ بے پردہ کو پردوں میں چھپا دیکھ  
ایام جدائی کے ستم دیکھ جفا دیکھ  
بے تاب نہ ہو معرکہٴ بیم و رجا دیکھ  
ہیں تیرے تصرف میں یہ بادل بہ گھٹائیں  
یہ گنبد افلاک، یہ خاموش فضا  
یہ کوہ، یہ صحرا، یہ سمندر، یہ ہوائیں  
تھیں بیش نظر کل تو فرشتوں کی ادائیں  
آئۂ آیام میں آج اپنی ادا دیکھ<sup>9</sup>

Open the eyes; behold the earth, the stars,

and the atmosphere !

Behold the sun rising from the East !

Behold this unveiled effulgence hid in veils of light.

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<sup>9</sup> *Bal-i-Jibril*, p. 178.

Behold the anguish of the days of separation,  
But be not over-wrought, witness the contest  
of Hope and Fear.

Under thy control are the clouds, the thunders,  
The high vault of Heaven, and the stillness of Space;  
These mountains, these deserts, these oceans, these winds,  
Till yesterday the angels' charms attracted thee,  
Today in Time's mirror behold thy own attainments.

According to Iqbal man's fall was no fall at all. Actually it was an opportunity, but like any other opportunity it had pitfalls and dangers. It was by impressing upon Man his dignity and his significance that Iqbal revealed to him his destiny. This was a revelation which brought new light to mankind groping in the dark and seeking salvation in wrong remedies like materialism imperialism, fascism, and communism etc. Not only this, Iqbal went further. He revealed to us the way in which man can develop himself to work out his destiny. In short Iqbal realised that human personality can attain its full stature only in an atmosphere of freedom, and so he waged a relentless crusade against political subjugation, ecclesiastical thralldom and intellectual servility. At a time when the whole world was so used to life under Western domination that it took such domination for granted it was Iqbal who inculcated the moral and spiritual values of freedom. To gauge the true measure of his greatness we have to remember the circumstances under which Iqbal revealed this forgotten truth. He had to face the ire of a police-ridden administration, obloquy of fanatic mullah and misrepresentation of selfish and greedy compatriots who controlled the Press.

Iqbal wants to see human life take a stand on its human dignity and set itself free from narrow tribal, racial prejudice. He was a humanist and it is in his humanism that his greatness lies. His poetry, his philosophy, and his politics, all bear the mark of his human-ism. But this word has come to acquire more than one meaning and so we must be definite as to what it

means. Gilbert Murray defines Humanism as below:

"I understand Humanism as an interest in human and human things—that is in the spirit of man in the special sense, in which man shows himself higher than the animals, and indeed with all his possible imperfections, the highest thing yet evolved upon the earth."

Iqbal's interest in Man was so deep and intense that he proclaimed:

<sup>10</sup> بہر انسان چشم من شبہا گریست تا دردم پردہ اسرار نیست

For Man I have cried for nights,

Only then I could unveil the mysteries of Life.

Iqbal revealed to Man his own potentialities. He indicated to what heights he can rise:

سبق ملا ہے یہ معراج مصطفیٰ سے مجھے  
کہ عالم بشریت کی زد میں ہے گردوں<sup>11</sup>

This lesson from the Ascension of Muhammad I have culled:

Heaven lies but within the reach of mankind.

For Iqbal humanism meant human self-esteem. It indicated the endeavour of man to reconstitute himself as a free being and not as the thrall of theological despots and a slave of political adventurers, class or territorial attachments and evolve a brotherhood extending to the ends of the earth, which in spite of distribution into groups should hold together a common moral consciousness and be linked to each other by the ties of common humanity. Inspired by these ideals, Iqbal pre-ached against a narrow materialism and racialism at a time when partly political ends were inspiring

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<sup>10</sup> *Asrar-o-Rumuz* p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Bal i-Jibril*, p. 44.

men to preach these. A little reflection will show that even his advocacy of Pakistan was really based on humanistic considerations. He could not bear to see one religious group dominating over another simply because of numerical majority. And to avoid this the only solution he could see was to divide the country into two so that each religious group could live in freedom as far as practicable.

Thus it will be seen that whether Iqbal opposed Western suzerainty or Hindu domination, whether he fought against narrow materialism or stood up against Godless communism, he was always actuated by humanistic considerations. And it is in his humanism that his greatness lies. It was his humanism that led him to reveal the truths that were concealed from mankind due to short-sightedness or narrow-mindedness. Actuated by these noble motives he got busy on this Earth so much so that he told the Almighty that work here needed him and so He has to wait a while.

کار جہاں دراز ہے اب مرا انتظار کر

This only indicates a consciousness of his great mission.

Judging Iqbal's greatness from this point of view we feel inclined to agree with Sir Maurice Bowra when he says that: "The poet, it is now felt can do something that other man cannot do." And this Iqbal does both in his prophetic and artistic roles — the one helps the other. It is in the co-existence of these roles that his greatness lies to which his humanism adds a new dimension. And this combination is granted to few poets of the world. But it is his humanism that serves as a cornerstone to his greatness. It was his humanism which made him proclaim:

عجم از ہائے نغمہ من جوان شد  
 ز سودایم متاع او کران شد  
 ہجومے بود رہ گم کردہ در دشت  
 ز آواز دراہم کاروان آشد<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Payam-i-Mashriq*, p. 81.

My songs have restored to Orient its youth;  
Her fame is quickened by my heart's refrain.  
My trumpet-call turned into one orderly caravan  
The throng that had lost its desert plain.