

# IQBAL, THE GREAT SERVANT OF HUMANITY\*

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Today's commemoration is particularly rejoicing and significant in that it is being held on the noble soil of the People's Republic of China which herself, and for centuries, has been fashioned by humanitarian mystique and traditional hospitality. This is why I would like to pay a fervent homage to this great assembly consisting of so many eminent personalities who seek to penetrate the secret of the genius and the depth of thought, the revolutionary impulse of Iqbal, while at the same time cherishing his memory in offering him the respect and veneration that we all owe to this great servant of humanity.

The great servant of humanity was also an eminent man of letters, both a poet and a writer, and able to express himself marvellously well in three languages — Urdu, Persian and English.

Iqbal wrote his poetry as well in Persian as he did in Urdu and held the pen with authority and competence in the English language.

His two well-known works edited in the English language, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* and *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, are sufficiently well known and are a proof of the perfect mastery with which he expressed all the nuances of his thought in the language used by Shakespeare.

In Iqbal we admire not only a poet with an exquisite talent but also a philosopher who used poetry as a means of expression enabling him to give better expression to his inner meditations. Iqbal opened eyes to the world at a time when the entire Indian subcontinent was plunged into distress and destitution. India could only oppose the injustice of which it was the object for endless centuries with a more or less passive resistance. It was probably

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\* Being the English translation of a speech delivered during Iqbal Day Programme in Peking. Courtesy of the Embassy of Pakistan.

the display before his eyes of the scenes of misery and distress of his fellow human beings which made Iqbal revolt and aspire for liberty and to throw himself bodily into the political melee. Pakistanis accord him recognition for having proclaimed the necessity for the formation of an Islamic State on the Indian subcontinent. Alas! it was only (nine years) after his death that the independence of Pakistan as an Islamic Republic was proclaimed. It certainly would have been a consolation for him to see emerging from this ocean of races, cults and dialects that India is, a nation motivated not only by common ethics but also expressing itself in one language.

All those who know Iqbal accord him the recognition for having worked with courage and abnegation for the independence and spiritual development of his country.

It is of interest to follow Iqbal in the long and difficult march which led him to the summit of talent and towards a recognition which we will always accord him.

In 1905, Iqbal left his home for England where he studied philosophy at Cambridge University. His thesis for the doctor's degree entitled *Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, written in English, crowned the end of his studies in England. He left for Munich in 1908, where also he obtained a Doctorate in Philosophy.

During his stay in Europe, Iqbal was struck by the technological development in the West without, at the same time, allowing himself to be paralysed by the purely materialistic aspects of the European civilisation.

As a young man Iqbal fervently devoted himself to regenerating and shaping the nationalist sentiments of the peoples of the sub-continent.

Imbued with brotherly love, his nature overflowed with compassion; his pure and sensitive soul was painfully disturbed by the tyranny inflicted in different regions on the masses, with whom he identified himself.

His words and deeds laid the foundation of a social, spiritual and moral institution, that of a regenerated humanity.

His prime objective was the salvation of the Muslim population of the subcontinent and, next, the liberation of the oppressed people throughout the world.

His mission, the mainspring of which was fraternal love and unity of all humanity, was to be realised in stages, beginning with the unity of Muslims throughout the world, as inspired by the great leader of Islam.

His passion for independence and unity, deeply rooted in all his being,

compelled Iqbal towards lyrical creations that uphold heroism and bravery and condemn weakness and indifference.

Iqbal's first piece of work, *Asrār-i Khudī*, is purely a means of self-realisation, and thereby one of achieving predominance of mind over matter. Through poetry, the philosopher tries to make the people in the East conscious of the richness of their cultures and the grandeur of their civilisations. "To know your country, know yourselves!" — this is substantially Iqbal's message to all those who respect and admire him. One who denies humanism is a non-believer. But one who doubts himself is worse still, says Iqbal in one of his poems. In conclusion, he adds: To penetrate the secret of creation is nothing else than striving to know oneself.

Iqbal's philosophy develops also in another book, *Payām-i Mashriq*, which is in a way a reply to Goethe's *West Ostlicher Divan* which claimed that nothing can save the peoples of the East.

Though his writings such as *Jāvid Nāmāh* and *Pas Chih Bāyad Kard Ay Aqwām-i Sharq*, Iqbal attacks the negative elements of Oriental philosophy such as "determinism," according to which life on earth is transitory and non-consequential. Iqbal considers this indifference to life irrational and attacks it with the full force of his talent:

Don't waver on the shore

Listening to the fury of the waves,

Plunge yourself into the sea,

For eternal life resides in hard struggle.

Says Iqbal in one of the collections of his poems:

A man sleeping on the seaside said:

"I have been living since a long time,

But I do not know exactly what I am."

A wave came to crash against the coast,

Shouting, "I move, otherwise I would have no chance to exist."

And finally, in his *Payām-i Mashriq* (Message to the East), is the optimistic note full of hope, like a mystic rose that blossoms in his palm:

Oh people of the East, what should be done?

Will the East once again be illuminated?

Yes!

Because deep within its nature the revolution sparkles,

The dark night will go away

And give place to light and eternal brightness.

Motivated by the mysteries and purity of humanism, his soul ceaselessly searched in the crucible of life's challenge for new modes of self-expression, and did not waver an instant on the threshold of the conventional and traditional manifestations of life.

His life succeeded in overcoming all physical and material obstacles that separate men and peoples, so that the audacious promise, the supreme harmony which springs from reconciliation and through which rises a new world based on unity and humanism, could flower and be born.

Having explored all the intricacies of the labyrinth of the human soul, devoured and consumed by the ardent desire to create a more just and a more equitable world, Iqbal was finally attached to this school of meditation and vision which calls itself mysticism and whose essential aim consists in promoting human virtues and eternal union through love for universal understanding.

Under the passionate impulse of this school of thought, as well as under the impulse of living as true human beings, pushed by love for his fellow men, Iqbal sought to discover the laws and the links of causality that rule the relationships between individuals and peoples as well as with their social environment.

It was during this period of meditation and contemplation that his soul found an outlet in the otherwise unfathomable depths of truth, an outlet towards the very source and nature of things, hoping thereby to find in the

micro-world of particles and molecules which he had not been able to find in a world where inequality ruled over the human conditions. What he looked for were the secrets of this harmony and the magnetic effects of this universal law which can only establish and exercise itself for the benefit of all.

In the end and after a long period of mystic contemplation and research, that always found expression in vibrant lyricism, he discovered this universal and human law.

This law was none other than the virtue of the soul to profess fraternity and love for the neighbours and to learn to live in co-existence, friendship and peace both in individual and social relations as well as on the political and international scene.

One can, therefore, say that long before the principles of peace and cooperation were born in the international community, the Poet and Thinker of Lahore had composed the sweet songs of humanism and fraternity through his poems full of beauty and dreams.

These were the songs that he offered to humanity as a token of happiness and universal salvation.

Iqbal was a thinker and at the same time a poet strangely initiated into the secrets of music and the consonance of Persian poetry, particularly in that genre and that poetic form which is full of enthusiasm and is called lyricism.

It is for this reason that on reading his poems we rejoice in the discovery of the profound affinities with the two great Persian poets, Sa'dī and Ḥāfīz — with Sa'dī, because he was eternally sanctifying the wisdom and human solidarity, who, like Iqbal, has said:

Human beings are limbs of the same body,

Because through their creation, they participate in the same essence.

If misfortune strikes one limb,

The others will also feel its pain.

You, if you are indifferent to the misfortunes of others,

You are not worthy of the name of Man —

with Hāfīz, because he was the very essence of the poetic and mystic imagination, which urged him, as in Iqbal, not to stop at the surface of things, to reveal the unfathomable reality of things, because one who struggles to gain the light of truth has to defy the evils of darkness.

In their search for perfection and refinement in mystic devotion, Iqbal and both thought that human beings must apply themselves to a constant and creative meditation on the Hāfīz world of eternal change until they have forgotten themselves or at least succeed in dominating their ego, in order to serve humanity and their fellow beings.

Iqbal portrays the essence of this idea when he says:

Whether I am living or not

I am not conscious of it,

Because if I feel I exist or if I speak of it,

I will be an egotist;

But with a plaintive and harmonious tone

Someone murmurs within me that I exist.

The same idea is lyrically expressed by Hāfīz:

What is this voice which rises in my exhausted soul

And in my being at the end of its force?

I do not know at all its plaintive airs nor the vibrant music!

That it should not cease to pour out tumultuously

While silence reigns on my lips.

His soul constantly regenerated by the perfume of love, Iqbal's affinity with another great thinker and Persian poet grows more and more. This is Mawlānā Jalāl-ud-dīn, generally known as Rūmī.

Having similar sources of inspiration as Rūmī, Iqbal also chose this simple form of rhythmic poetry called *Mathnawī* in order to pour into it

successive waves of his aesthetic emotion and of his mystic and revolutionary ecstasy.

In a suave voice and seductive images he says:

Come and see how I have transformed the world

Drinking from the pitcher of Rūmī the sage.

This sparkling wine which wipes away even memory of your lost hope.

This mystic wine that constitutes henceforth

The noble ethic of an erring humanity.

Iqbal was quite right, because the international community has begun to be conscious of this ethic and this belief, which can be nothing other than the aspiration for social justice and for happiness of human beings without any discrimination whatsoever.

As his centenary draws nearer, his revolutionary zeal, his enthusiasm and his humanism urge us to meditate, and his voice, which knows no frontiers but echoes freely across the world, invites us to reflect, when he murmurs:

When I am no longer there

People will read my poems and say

A lucid man has shaken the world.

In that there is, I think, a vibration of love of one of the greatest initiates who belongs to the entire humanity.

Let us cherish his memory because he gives us strength and comfort, while hoping that the interdependent destinies of peoples and nations, travel together harmoniously towards horizons more luxuriant with love and with happiness, with justice and with peace,