

IQBAL IN ENGLAND

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Professor R.A. Nicholson of Cambridge once remarked about Iqbal that in him “East and West met, though it would be too much to say that they were united”. Very rarely in the history of human thought do we come across a great personality so deeply and equally versed in Eastern and Western thought and culture. Iqbal’s contact with Western culture generally, and English culture specially, began very early in his career, when he joined the Scottish Mission College in Sialkot. This first contact deepened when Iqbal moved to the Government College, Lahore, and met Sir Thomas Arnold, who was Professor of Philosophy there. Sir Thomas Arnold did not take long to recognise Iqbal’s talents and took great interest in his education. Iqbal took his M.A. degree in Philosophy in 1899 and joined the Oriental College, Lahore, as McLeod Reader. But Sir Thomas Arnold advised him to go to England for further studies. Accordingly he went to England in 1905 and joined the Trinity College, Cambridge. The Trinity College, Cambridge, has produced some great men like Bacon, Newton, Byron, Tennyson, Fitzgerald, Whitehead and McTaggart, and Iqbal’s name is associated with those of these giants. At that time Cambridge was well known as a great centre for the study of Western philosophy in Europe, and Iqbal started his studies under the great Hegelian philosopher, McTaggart, who was at that time a member of the Trinity College. Besides McTaggart, there were at that time in Cambridge Professors Whitehead and Ward, great names in the history of Western philosophy. Professor McTaggart was a sufi and he and Iqbal used to have long talks on Sufism.

Iqbal remained in Cambridge from 1905 to 1906. During this time Syed ‘Alī Bilgrāmī of Hyderabad Deccan, the renowned translator of *Tamaddun-i Arab and Tamaddun-i Hind*, was a lecturer in Marathi at Cambridge. His house was a centre of social activities for all students from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Syed ‘Alī Bilgrāmī and his talented wife extended their hospitality to Iqbal.

Cambridge has always been a great centre for the study of Persian and Arabic and during this period there were two great scholars,

Professors Browne and Nicholson, whose names are well known to

Orientalists all over the world. Iqbal had friendly relations with these eminent scholars. These friendly relations continued till the end.

Iqbal joined the Middle Temple for legal studies and had to come from Cambridge often to attend dinners or to take examinations. During these visits he stayed with his teacher, friend and guide Sir Thomas Arnold who was working as Professor of Arabic in the London University. Iqbal was called to the Bar in 1908 before returning home.

When Sir Thomas Arnold went on six months' leave, Iqbal officiated for him, and taught Arabic in the London University. During his stay in England Iqbal gave six lectures on Islam in London, at least one of which was delivered in Caxton Hall.

Iqbal was not a book-worm. He enjoyed his stay in England and spent most of his time in the libraries of the British Museum and Cambridge. He read voraciously, and passed most of his time in the company of his renowned teachers.

It was during his stay in England as a student that Iqbal adopted Persian as the medium of expression for his poetical thought. Before coming to England Iqbal had written some poetry in Persian, and most of his poems were in Urdu. On return from England most of his poetry was written in Persian.

His outlook on life underwent two important changes about this time. His admiration for a life of action and struggle became very pronounced. He wrote:

جنہش سے ہے زندگی جہاں کی
یہ رسم قدیم ہے یہاں کی

The life of this would consists in movement;

This is the established law of the world.]

Whereas previously he had said:

زندگی جس کو کہتے ہیں فراموشی ہے یہ
خواب ہے، غفلت ہے، سر مستی ہے، بیہوشی ہے یہ

[That which is called life is nought but forgetfulness;

It is slumber, indifference, intoxication and unconsciousness]

now he was singing:

Another important change was the feeling of aversion that he developed for narrow nationalism as understood in the West. This feeling was expressed by him later on in the following words:

“I am opposed to nationalism, as it is understood in Europe, not because, if it is allowed to develop in India, it is likely to bring less material gain to the Muslims. I am opposed to it because I see in it the germs of atheistic materialism which I look upon as the greatest danger to modern humanity. Patriotism is a perfectly material virtue and has a place in the moral life of man. Yet that which really matters is a man’s faith, his culture, his historical tradition. These are the things which, in my eyes, are worth living for and dying for, and not the piece of earth with which the spirit of man happens to be temporarily associated.”

His reactions to pride of race and colour were beautifully summed up in the following lines:

جو کرے گا امتیازِ رنگ و خوں مٹ جائے گا
ترکِ خرگاہی ہو یا اعرابی والا گمہر

[He who will make distinction of colour and race will perish,

He may be a nomadic Turk or a pedigreed Arab!]

Professor R.A. Nicholson of Cambridge has remarked:

“During his stay in the West he studied modern philosophy, in which subject he holds degrees from the Universities of Cambridge and Munich, His dissertation on the development of metaphysics in Persia — an illuminating sketch — appeared as a

book in 1968. Since then he has developed a philosophy of his own.”

This philosophy is generally known as the philosophy of ego, and is Iqbal’s greatest contribution in the realm of thought. In Cambridge, Iqbal was deeply interested in Hegelian thought and was a pantheist. He believed in *Wahdat al-Wujud*. After leaving England in 1908 Iqbal changed his views, and he actually developed his philosophy of ego. But his studies in Cambridge, Munich and Heidelberg paved the way for his philosophy of ego. After reading the translation of Iqbal’s first Persian poem *Secrets of the Self* his teacher, McTaggart, wrote to him in 1920:

“I have been reading your poems [*Secrets of the Self*]. Have you not changed your position very much? Surely in the days when we used to talk philosophy together, you were much more of a pantheist and mystic. For my part I adhere to my, own belief that selves are the ultimate reality, but as to their time context and their true good, my position is as it was, that is to be found in eternity and not in time, and in love rather than in action.”

It is true that towards the end Iqbal was no longer a pantheist, but he continued to be a mystic all his life. While Iqbal had, as a result of his stay in England, come to believe in action he still believed in Love. In fact, the most powerful emotion with Iqbal is Love. On the wings of this lofty emotion his poetry soars to resounding fullness. But there were changes in his views as regards Love. For Neoplatonist Iqbal, Beauty was the creator of Love, for the budding vitalist Iqbal it was the creator of Love, but not its goal. For full-fledged vitalist Iqbal, Love is everything. Thus it will be seen that even scholars like McTaggart have at times made mistakes in understanding Iqbal. Iqbal was by nature essentially synthetic, he brought together the seemingly opposites And it can be said that his stay in England developed this synthesising nature.

While his stay in England had great effect on his thought, the effect on his art was no less. Iqbal was a great student of English poetry and even before going to England he had translated some poetry from Longfellow, Emerson and Tennyson in Urdu. During his stay in England his poetry

underwent a definite change. Iqbal's poetry is generally divided into three periods. The first period reveals imitation of classical works, although his poems even as a child reveal a markedly different personality. The second period which extends from 1905 to 1908, and with his stay in England, shows a deepening and broadening of his creative genius. He is breaking away from convention and new spaciousness is apparent. Romanticism revealed in the first period becomes dominant now. The third period is generally regarded to last from 1908 to his death in 1938. But it will be more correct to divide this long period into sub-periods for the purpose of studying Iqbal's poetry. But it can be safely said that the third period is actually an extension of the second and in this period Iqbal's genius shows maturity. The poet becomes conscious of his mission. Now his peculiarity is that he lifts us to a height from which we re-evaluate all life, all emotion, and all thought. During this third period Iqbal visited England only twice and that too for short periods. It can be said that the third period is a natural combination of the second, that is his stay at Cambridge.

English poets, especially Wordsworth, exercised great influence on Iqbal's poetry. When we read passages in Iqbal depicting natural scenes we are reminded of Wordsworth's poetry. In "*Guristan-i-Shahi*" ("Royal Graveyard") written after Iqbal's return from England, we are reminded of lines in Grey's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard". In lines of great beauty and charm Iqbal paid his homage to Shakespeare. But the greatest resemblance is to be found between Iqbal and Milton. Very rarely in the literary history of the world do two great poets born at different times, belonging to different races, writing in different languages, professing different religions and having sprung from different cultures show as many points of similarity in their art and thought as Milton and Iqbal. Both have dealt with the problem of good and evil and the story of Satan. Iqbal admired Milton from his youth and wanted to write a poem on the model of Paradise Lost. As early as 1902 Iqbal wrote to a friend that he was thinking of writing a great poem on the model of Paradise Lost. This wish could not be fulfilled, but, instead of writing one large poem, Iqbal wrote a number of smaller poems dealing with the same theme, especially "*Taskhir-i-Fitrat*," in *Payam-i Mashriq*, "*Iblis wa Jibriil*" in *Darb-i Kalim* and "*Iblis ki Majlis*" in *Armughan-i Hijaz*.

As already mentioned, Iqbal visited England twice in 1931 and 1932 as a member of the Round Table Conference. These visits were short and Iqbal was very busy; still he found time to meet eminent scholars of England. He

also gave an address before the Aristotelian Society of England.

Iqbal had always had great admiration for English literature and the work of English philosophers, but it can be safely said that it was his studies in Cambridge which enabled this admiration to blossom into works of immortal beauty and charm. Iqbal is one of those natural forces that shape the destiny of mankind, but it must be gratefully acknowledged that Iqbal's genius developed during his stay in England and as a result of his studies with English masters there. Today England is doing great work in taking Iqbal's poetry and message to the Western world. Iqbal's poem *Asrār-i Khudī* translated into English by his friend, Professor Nicholson of Cambridge. His quatrains and portion of *Zabūr-i-'Ajām* and *Rumūz-i-Bekhudī* have been translated into English by Professor Arberry who has also translated *Jāvid Nāmāh*. A selection of Iqbal's poems has been translated by V.G Kiernan of Edinburgh. This selection has been published in "The Wisdom of the East" series by John Murray. Iqbal's lectures on *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* were published by Oxford University Press.

It must be made clear that while Iqbal drew inspiration from the works of English authors and teachers, his background was essentially Islamic. And in the light of this background he never hesitated to point out the defects of European culture and civilisation. Sometimes he was so violent in his criticism that many of his readers are inclined to underestimate the part played by England in the development of Iqbal's genius. In the first instance he condemned in clear terms all Imperialism and Colonialism wherever found. In the second instance he believed that in the interests of mankind the basis of a society must be spiritual. In one of his Lectures he said:

“Humanity needs three things today — a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis.”

He wrote:

کوئی پوچھے حکیم یورپ سے
ہند و یونان ہیں جس کے حلقہ بگوش
کیا یہی ہے معاشرت کا کمال

مرد بیکار و زن تہی آغوش

[One might ask the sage from Europe,

Whose genius even Hind and Hellas admire;

Is this the goal of social evolution?

Unemployment amongst men and sterility amongst women?]

In another place he wrote:

وہ قوم کہ فیضانِ سماوی سے ہو محروم
حد اس کے کمالات کی ہے برق و بخارات

[People who are not blessed with Divine guidance,

Their progress is confined to electricity and steam.]

Iqbal saw the salvation of mankind in the synthesis of East and West and always said so:

غریبان را زیرکی سازِ حیات
شرقیان را عشقِ رازِ کائنات
زیرکی از عشقِ گردد حق شناس
کارِ عشق از زیرکی محکم اساس
خیز نقشِ عالمِ دیگر منہ
عشق را با زیرکی آمیزدہ

[In the West Intellect is the source of life,

In the East Love is the basis of life.

Through Love Intellect grows acquainted with Reality,
And Intellect imports stability to the work of Love.
Arise and lay the foundations of a new world,
By wedding Intellect to Love.]

Iqbal wants to bring the life-giving waters of Love to the arid intellectualism of the West, and the dynamics of Western life to the static and often ascetic Eastern view of life. He is never tired of preaching the gospel of everlasting activity to his people who had forgotten the words of the Qur'ān: "Verily God does not change the destiny of a people unless it does change itself" (xiii. 11). There is no doubt that it was the education that Iqbal received in the West, and especially in England, that enabled him to arrive at the right interpretation of the Qur'ān.