IQBAL, THE HUMANIST

In Memoriam

Dr L. S. May

"He, whose mind is reared by constant adventures, Will rise above the whirlpool of the blue skies."

—Jāvīd Nāmah

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal's contributions to the Islamic and universal corpus of thought are enormous. They cover philosophy, psychology, ethics, politics and religion. By putting his ideas in translucent verse, he made great contributions to Urdu and Persian literature.

As a young student, he read voraciously. He became conversant with the English language and culture because of their inter-penetration into (Muslim) India. Arabic, Urdu and Persian, respectively the language of the Qur'an, his mother tongue, and the linguistic inheritances[25] of the educated Indo-Muslim elite derived from his Islamic roots. He became acquainted with the alien Greek and Latin, Germanic and French traditions; the complex philosophical thought of such Greek giants as Plato (427-347 B.C.) and his disciple Aristotle (384-322 B.C.); the German philosophers Kant (1724-1804); Hegel (1770-1831); Nietzsche (1844-1900); the Frenchmen Comte (1797-1857[26]) and Bergson (1859-1941)[27]; during his European studies (1905-1908) at Cambridge, where he prepared himself for the Bar, and Munich University which gave him his doctorate in philosophy. They and 'many others, including the renowned father of the relativity doctrine, Professor Albert Einstein (1879-1955),[28] and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the founder of the modern European school of psychology, both contemporary with him — stirred his mind as his famed Lectures published under the title: *The*

[25] It was the language of the Moghul court (Muslim) nobles and diplomacy. Relatively few Indian Muslims knew it well by Iqbal's time.

[26] Comte died in the year of the "Great Mutiny" (1857-58).

[27] Bergson died three years after Iqbal.

[28] Professor Einstein published his relativity theory in 1905 and received the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1922.

Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam[29] clearly show. His ability to digest this vast two-and-a-half millennia of Western, and thirteen-hundred-years' Islamic, compendium of knowledge attests to his mental porousness and his genius. He, therefore, may be called truly a twentieth-century humanist. How do we define this type of person? The earlier humanists were men of letters and thinkers, grammarians, logicians, and rhetoricians, doctors of philosophy — in contradistinction to the separate discipline of theology — jurists and physicians. Some Muslims, amongst them the celebrated physician-philosopher Ibn Sīnā' (latinised name Avicenna, 980-1036), were experts in almost all these disciplines.[30] Their linguistic knowledge in Renaissance[31] times included Latin and Greek[32] and for some, Westerners,[33] Hebrew as well as Arabic.[34] It permitted them to read and absorb a wide spectrum of literature and thought and give them an international intellectual perspective. They consequently, unlike the religious groups, no longer fed themselves upon Saints' lives and myths and dogmatic treatises. They accepted Revelation and wished to reform theology by their preferred return to the "Christian Classics, that is, the Bible and the Church Fathers."[35] This theme is basic to Modernism[36] which Iqbal strongly advocated. His theology in many ways radically departs from the traditional interpretation found in the medieval (Muslim) *tafāsīr* ("exegeses"). Not only did he call Allah by such philosophical epithets as "the all-inclusive Ego," or "the Ultimate Ego,"[37] but

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[29] Iqbal gave these Lectures by invitation of the Madras Muslim Association at Madras, Aligarh and Hyderabad in 1928. They have often been reprinted.

[30] Avicenna wrote commentaries on Aristotle ; scientific, including astronomical, treatises, and the "Canon of Medicine" (Qānūn al-Ṭibb) which remained the standard textbook in Europe until the seventeenth century C E.

[31] It started in Italy during the middle of the twelfth century C.E.—then spread to France, Germany, England, the Netherlands, and Spain ; and reached its zenith during the fifteenth and earlier part of the sixteenth century, by the end of which it had spent its force.

[32] The Renaissance also was marked by a revival of ancient Greek.

[33] The well-known Italian Neoplatonist Count Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), whose biography, for instance, Sir Thomas More translated into English, studied Hebrew and Jewish Mysticism (Kabbalah).

[34] The great Spanish-born theologian-physician Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (latinised name: Maimonides) (1135-1204 C.E.), wrote in Hebrew and Arabic. He was also versed in Latin.

[35] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought* (New York : Harper & Row, Harper Torch Books, 1961), p. 75.

[36] A movement which, like Jewish Reform, emerged during the nineteenth century C.E.

[37] *Reconstruction* (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1962 reprint), pp. 94 and 88, respectively.

he defined Divinity's nature in terms of vital activity or energy modes instead of solid substance.[38] He furthermore explained Creation as an endless evolutionary process. He flatly asserted regarding the legal aspects: "The primary source of the Law of Islam is the Qur'an "[39] He, in true Modernist fashion, thereby struck out the entire religio-legal medieval corpus considering it as invalid for the Modern Age. If he thereby got into trouble with the '*ulama*', so did Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522) in whom the German Renaissance found its ripest expression. The Dominican brethren in Germany, fearing that his erudite scholarship coupled with the knowledge of Hebrew might undermine their status and power, heartily denounced their eminent countryman. Such fear was the greater because the humanists developed a secular and a critical spirit, with which they scanned and scrutinised every aspect of life; every institution and group. Erasmus in his "Praise of Folly" (Encomium Moror)[40] attacked his people for the way in which they built their houses, the food they ate, their lack of manners, their educational system, ignorance, the scholars' snobbishness, etc., etc. His friend Sir Thomas More (14711-1535) in his *Utopia*[41] indirectly deplored his countrymen's rudeness, lack of pity and charitableness, their war-like tendencies, societal inequalities, for which he held Royalty and Church responsible. Iqbal also harshly denounced the political authorities:

پرانی سیاست گری خوار ہے زمیں
میر و سلطاں سے بیزار ہے[42]

[The hoary arts of politics sink,

In earth's nostrils, kings and sultans stink.]

He, too, deplored poverty aided by taxation which he called the robbing

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[38] Ibid., p. 72, for instance, also for evolution defined as "the perpetual flow of Divine life".

[39] Ibid., p. 105.

[40] He wrote it in one week (in Latin) while abed at the home of Sir Thomas More, to whom he dedicated this work.

[41] It also was composed in Latin, and published in 1516. The first English edition came out posthumously for the justified fear of royal wrath.

[42] "Sāqī Nāmah," *Bāl-i Jibril*, p. 167. English translation by V.G. Kiernan, Poems for Iqbal (London : John Murray, 1955), p. 47.

of one's bread,[43] and further strengthening inequality. If Erasmus' ideal order was symbolised by any small Dutch town of his time; and for Sir Thomas More, it was "nowhere land" (Utopia's meaning), whose fictional capital was Amaurote[44]; for Iqbal it was the mythical city of Marghadīn set on Mars:

نے قلم در مرغدیں گیرد فروغ
از فنِ تحریر و تشہیرِ دروغ!

نے بیازاراں ز بے کاراں فروش
نے صدا پائے گدایاں دردِ گوش[45]

[In Marghadīn no pen wins lustre
from inscribing and disseminating lies;
in the market-places there is no clamour of the workless,
no whining of beggars afflicts the ear!]

Here,

سخت کش دہقاں، چراغش روشن است

از نہابِ دہ خدایاں ایمن است!

کشت و کارش بے نزاعِ آبجوست

حاصلش بے شرکتِ غیرے ازوست![46]

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[43] Cf. *Jāvīd Nāmah* (JN), p. 70, 11. 1093 and 1096.
[44] French *amour*= "love".
[45] IN, p. 122, 11. 1945-48.
[46] Ibid., p. 121, 11. 1939-42.

[The lamp of the hard-toiling farmer is always bright,

he is secure from the plundering of the landlords!

His tillage is not a struggle for water,

his harvest is his own, no other shares in it!]

It is an egalitarian society following the Prophet Muḥammad's precept:

در نگـــــاهِ او یکـــــے بـــــالا و پســـــت
بـا غـلامِ خـویش بریـک خـوان نشسـت[47]

[In his eyes lofty and lowly are the same thing;

he has sat down at the same table with his slave.]

It lastly knows internal and international contentment and peace:

فـــوج و زنـــدان و سلاســـل رہزنی اســـت
اوسـت حـاکمِ کـز چـنیں سـاماں غنـی اسـت[48]

[Armies, prisons, chains are banditry;

he is the true ruler who needs no such apparatus.]

The humanists clearly were severe critics openly daring to attack Church and State. It cost poor Chancellor More his head.[49] They regarded their critique as strengthening instead of under-mining society's foundations.

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[47] Ibid., p. 59, 11. 927-28. The reference undoubtedly is to the Prophet Muḥammad's adopted son Zaid ibn al-Ḥārith.

[48] Ibid., p. 108, 11. 1749-50.

[49] By order of the last Tudor king Henry VIII (1491-1547), because Sir Thomas refused to swear to the Act of Supremacy making England's royalty its Church heads. It was a reform movement and meant a formal break with Rome's Papacy. It also implies a strong feeling of nationalism.

They lastly were not ignorant of contemporary national and even international political developments. Erasmus, for instance, began to realise that West Europe in his time was undergoing a fundamental transition from Nation-States to more modern States. Politically-minded Iqbal similarly felt that, given "Europe's turmoil," "a new world" was dawning in "this whirling of time". His vision comprised another world war which he bemoaned:

زانکه حق در دلبری پیدا تر است
دلبرئ اذ قاهرئ اولیٰ تر است![50]

[Because God is more manifest in love,

love is a better way than violence!]

Yet,

عذرِ ایں اسراف و ایں سنگیں دلی
خلق و تکمیلِ جمالِ معنوی[51]

[The excuse for this wastefulness and cruelty

Is the shaping and perfecting of spiritual beauty].

The post-War era saw his dream's fulfilment: the rise of an independent sovereign Pakistan out of "Islam's ashes, cold and dark"[52]:

باش تا بینی که بے آوازِ صور
ملتے بر خیزد از خاکِ قبور[53]

[Wait till you see, without the sound of the Trumpet,

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[50] 1N, p. 153, 11. 2395-96.

[51] *Asrār-i Khudī* (AK), p. 13. English translation by R.A, Nicholson, Tr., *Secrets of the Self* (Lahore: Sh Muhammad Ashraf, 1972), p. 17.

[52] Cf. his Urdu, `Sāqī Nāmah" in *Bāl-i Jibrīl* and *Zabūr-i `Ajam* (ZA), p. 203.

[53] J N, p. 195, 11. 3049-50.

a nation rising out of the dust of the tomb!]

He furthermore foresaw the East's industrialization and its entry into the new Technological Age.

As a humanist, he welcomed the spirit's or self's freedom to rule itself, to think, express itself, follow its own religious and cultural traditions, and unfold itself through time. This he called genuine "self-realisation":

از خـــود آگـــاهی یـــد اللّســـهی کنـــد
از یـــــد اللّســـــهی شهنشـــــاهی[54]

[Through self-knowlenge he acts as God's Hand,

and in virtue of being God's Hand he reigns over all]

The humanists' secular orientation, in conclusion, does not necessarily signify an irreligious outlook. "The view that the humanist movement was essentially pagan or anti-Christian," or anti-Islamic in the case of Muslims, "cannot be sustained".[55] They did not leave the faith into which they were born.[56] Sir Thomas More staunchly defended the Catholic Church, which ill-fitted his sovereign's designs.[57] Erasmus, apparently feeling sympathetic toward the then nascent Prostestant Reform hewed by the German malcontent Martin Luter (1483-1546), felt his colleague's animosity,[58] because he refused to support the Papal cause. "Granted [he wrote] your friends will be disappointed. Yet you will soon find more pleasant and reliable ones. ...If your reputation in the world is not what it was, the friendship of Christ will more than make up for this."[59]

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[54] AK, p 53 : English translation by Nicholson, op. cit., p. 88.

[55] Kristeller, op. cit., p. 74.

[56] Presumably by preference, as did Sir Thomas More, although ecclesiastical compulsion may have enforced it in many cases.

[57] Because of King Henry VII's lust to wield Power also over the Church of England. (CF. also earlier footnote.)

[58] At Louvain and at Basle which Swiss City he had to leave after eight years` residence. He arrived in April 1529, broken in spirit and health, in Freibrugh in Breisgau. He died in Basle on 12 July 1536, having returned hither in 1535 for work on the Latin edition of his work on the Greek Father Origen (d. 254 C.E.)

[59] Erasmus, *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* ("The Handbook of the Militant Christin"), 1503 under

He thus fervently agreed with Luther that Church reforms were essential and that they meant a return to the pristine Christianity. He (unlike the Reformation's founder) nevertheless died a Catholic. Iqbal ardently desired Islam's theologico-legal — apart from its political and socio-economic— rejuvenation. He lashed out against some of the religious leaders (*mullās*) and theologians ('*ulamā*') for refusing to change their traditional (medieval)

mould of thought:

دینِ حق از کافری رسوا تر است
زانکه ملا مومنِ کافر گر است![60]

(The religion of God is more shameful than unbelief,

because the *mullā* is a believer trading in unfaith!]

He held them consequently responsible for political inertia of the Muslim masses during their colonialist subjugation. They rejected his new theology, at first his "Pakistan idea," meaning their coreligionists', fun her division, his secularist orientation, and his accusations which heightened their animosity toward him. They countered with the charge that he was not true to the faith. He insisted that he was a genuine Muslim, and that Modernism was essential for Islam's survival in a wholly new world. He felt that his love for God and His Prophet(s) would sustain him in his dark days:

از پدر تا نامِ تو آموختم
آتشِ این آرزو افروختم[61]

[. . . since first I learned Thy [Allah's] name from my sire's lips,

the flame of that desire kindled and glowed in me....]

He, in true humanist fashion, burned with the desire to trans-form the world

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"Third Rule", p. 57 in op cit.

[60] JN, p. 84, II. 1355-56: cf. Ibid., p. 93,11 1531-32.

[61] AK. (Rumūz), p. 197: English translation by A.J. Arberry (Mysteries of Selflessness [London : John Murray, 1953], p. 82).

so that an element of idealism is inherent in his (as in Erasmus' and More's) thought. They extolled Divine mercy[62] side by side with human foibles, longed for order and peace,[63] while carrying on their vast intellectual labours amidst conflict and disorder. Sharing their great interest in the foundations of knowledge and its processes, or, as Erasmus put it beautifully, "the purer pleasures of the mind,"[64] they lectured at universities, or held high government posts, and wrote prominently. Iqbal carried on this rich tradition. He, as said, "drank deep of good letters; and as a young man, he applied himself to the study of ... philosophy"[65] and diverse languages. "Meantime he applied his whole mind to religion...."[66] "In early youth" and thereafter "his principal compositions were in verse.... It would be difficult to find anyone more successful in speaking extempore."[67] He remained loyal to God and humanity teaching them the preciousness of learning and of the freedom to live, think, work, express oneself meaningfully through poetry and art:

گر ہنر میں نہیں تعمیرِ خودی کا جوہر
وائے صورت گری و شاعریی و نائے و سرود![68]

[If art is devoid of that substance which fosters self,

woe be to such painting, poetry and music.]

"However averse he may be to superstition, he is a steady follower of true piety, with regular hours for his prayer, which are uttered not by rote, but from the heart. He talks with his friends about a future life in such a way as to make you feel that e believes what he says ...."[69]

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[62] Cf Erasmus, *Echiridion* in op cit.

[63] Erasmus, *The Complant of Peace*. Also. Sir Thomas More's Utopia and Iqbal's description of Marghadīn.

[64] Erasmus, *Enchiridion*. In op.cit., p. 57.

[65] Letter written by "Desiderius Erasmus to Ulrich won Hutten," in about 1519, and quoted as an addendum to Walter J. Black's edition of the *Utopia* (1947). pp.187 ff. Quotation from p. 194.

[66] Ibid., p. 195.

[67] Ibid. pp. 199-200. |These description well fit Iqbal!

[68] *Ḍarb-i Kalim*, p. 112.

[69] Erasmus' cited letter to U. von Hutten, in op. cit., p. 201.

Iqbal agreed once more with Erasmus' dictum: "We must be watchful in life."[70] Otherwise "the inhabitants of earth" lose "the wealth of 'self'."[71] To prevent such a tragedy's recurrence, humanity must continue to improve themselves and their institutions and never forget that the intellect's application will remain arid unless it is warmed by a loving heart nourished by God:

عقلِ تو حاصل حیات عشقِ تو سرِ کائنات[72]

[Your reason is the fruit of life, your love is creation's mystery.]

Iqbal's scholarliness and profound concern with the destiny of his coreligionists' humanity, his continued love for learning and his aim: to illumine the mind and soul, mark him (as shown) as a brilliant modern humanist.

کشـــــودم از رخِ معنـــــی نقـــــابے
بدســـــــتِ ذرہ دادم آفتـــــــابے[73]

[I lifted the veil from the face of "Reality,"

I handed the sun to the atom.]

SPEECHES, WRITINGS AND STATEMENTS OF IQBAL

Compiled and Edited by

LATIF AHMED SHERWANI

This is the third revised and enlarged edition of the book, previously entitled: *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal* and published under the compiler's pseudonym "Shamloo".

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[70] Preface to the *Enchiridion*.

[71] JN, p. 123, 1. 1959.

[72] Ibid., p. 23, 1 443; cf. p. 83, 1. 1341 ; p. 139, 11. 2201-02, et al.

[73] ZA ("Gulsban-i Rāz-i Julie), p. 204. "Atom" signifies the human soul or self, and is borrowed from Einsteinian physics.

These speeches, writings and statements contain matter of great political and cultural importance. lqbal stands in the front rank of Muslim thinkers of all times and the Muslims cannot afford to ignore or lose sight of anything that the great sage has said.

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