

IMPORTANCE OF ‘ALLAMAH IQBAL’S WORK, IN THE PROPAGATION OF ISLAM IN THE WESTERN WORLD

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The fact that ‘Allamah Iqbal’s importance in the spreading of Islam is an aspect of his work which has up till now materialised in only a few isolated cases does not make it any less relevant to us for ‘Allamah was essentially a poet of the future as he himself indicated in his introduction to *Asrār-i Khudī*:

نعمه ام از زخمه بے
پرواستم
من نواے شاغرِ فرداستم
غصر من داندءه اسرار
نیست
یوسف من بهرِ این بازار
نیست⁷⁸

* Read on ‘Allamah Iqbal’s Death Aniversary held on 21 April 1981.

⁷⁸ *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl Farsī*, p. 6. English translation by R.A. Nicholoon: *Secrets of the Self*, pp. 3-4.

[I have no need of the ear of Today

I am the voice of the poet of Tomorrow;

My own age does not understand my deep meanings,

My Joseph is not for this market.]

History testifies to the fact that for any movement to transform society it must combine in itself the dual qualities of 'ishq and 'aql. Iqbal had acquired the first quality by virtue of his inherently Islamic spirit to which his mad devotion to the Messenger of Allah (may blessings of Allah be upon him) and natural and spontaneous understanding of the Holy Qur'an bear testimony. The second quality, besides being inbred in him, was further cultivated by the opportunities that he utilised to the utmost of benefiting from some of the greatest intellects of his day. The hope that this combination might ensure success for his movement for an Islamic renaissance can be derived from such excerpts of his works as the following from Jāvīd Nāmāh:

غربیاں را زیرکی ساز

حیات

شرقیان را عشق راز

کائنات

زیرکی از عشق گردد

حق شناس

عشق چوں با زیرکی
ہمبہر شود
نقشبندِ عالمِ دیگر شود
خیز و نقشِ عالمِ دیگر
بنہ
غشق را با زیرکی
آمیزدہ⁷⁹

[For Westerners intelligence is the stuff of life for Easterners love is the mystery of all being.

Only through love intelligence gets to know Allah, love's labours find firm grounding in intelligence ; when love is companioned by intelligence, it has the power to design another world.

Then rise and draw the design of a new world, mingle together love with intelligence.)

In his Reconstruction lectures Iqbal has proposed three things which are needed by humanity 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.”⁸⁰ He observes that it is due to the fact that thought put forward on a purely rational level

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 65/653.

⁸⁰ Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), p. 179.

does not possess the human quality to appeal to the individual and transform society that the idealistic system which Europe has built up on these lines has always lacked the spark to ignite everyday life and enlighten the mass mentality; it is naql (Divine revelation) rather than ‘aql (intellect) which brings that fire of living conviction needed to elevate individuals and transform societies, so this can be accomplished only by religion which works through the agency of personal revelation. “Believe me,” Iqbal writes, “Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man’s ethical advancement,”⁸¹ and the same verdict has been delivered elsewhere in poetical form:

اَدْمِيتِ زارِ ناليدِ از
 فرنگ
 زندگيِ پنگامه برچيدِ از
 فرنگ
 يورپِ از شمشيرِ خود
 بسملِ فتاد
 زيرِ گردونِ رسمِ لادينى
 نهاد
 مشكلاتِ حضرتِ انسان
 ازوست
 اَدْمِيتِ را عمِ پنهان

⁸¹ Ibid.

ازوست
در نگاہش آدمی اَب
و گل است
کاروانِ زندگی بے منزل
است⁸²

[Humanity has groused from the effect of Europe
Life has raised a commotion on account of Europe...
Europe fell, slaughtered by its own sword
Having initiated irreligiousness under the heavens,
The afflictions of noble man are due to her
as are the inward griefs of humanity.
In her sight man is but water and clay.
And the caravan of life without any destination.]

Compared to this pitiful state of affairs, however, “The Muslim ... is in possession of these ultimate ideas on the basis of a revelation, which, speaking from the inmost depths of life, internalizes its own apparent externality. With him the spiritual basis of life is a matter of conviction for which even the least enlightened man amongst us can easily lay down his life ; and in view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation

⁸² Ibid. (Pas Chih Bāyad Kard), p. 43/839.

binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated people on earth.”⁸³

From this passage we can see how essential the finality of prophethood is to the full spiritual emancipation of the individual. The idea of finality is expressed within the Muslim ummah in the abolition of such clerical institutions as priesthood and monasticism, and their replacement by jihad, as is clear from the Hadith:

لا رهبانية في الاسلام ولكن رهبانية هذه الامة الجهاد في
سبيل الله

[“There is no monasticism in Islam but the monasticism of this ununai: is Thad in the path of Allah.”]

By striving to emulate the Prophet by practising *amr bi'l-ma'rūf* and *nahī 'anal-munkar*, the ummah of Muhammad has the potential to become “the best community extracted on behalf of mankind”. This vital link between the perfection of prophethood in Islam and the consequent excellence of the Muslim ummah has been expressed in various ways by 'Allamah Iqbal. For instance, in *Reconstruction* he writes:

“In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the seed of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be

⁸³ *Reconstruction*, pp. 179-80.

kept in leading strings ; that in order to reach full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own resources.”⁸⁴

And in *Rumūz-i Bekhudī* the same theme is put another way:

لا نبی بعدی ز احسانف
خدا است
پرده ناموسِ دینِ مصطفی
است
قومِ سرمایه قوت ازو
حفظِ سرِ وحدتِ ملت ازو
حقِ تعالی نقش بر دعوی
شکست
تا ابد اسلام را شیرازه
بست
دل زعیر الله مسلمان بر
کند
نغره لاقومِ بغدی مے
زند⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁸⁵ *Kulliyāt-i Iqbāl Fārsī*, p. 102. English translation by A.J. Arberry: *The Mysteries of Selflessness* (London :John Murray, 1958), p. 21.

[No Prophet after me is of God's grace,
And veils the modest beauty of the Faith
Muhammad brought to men. The people's strength
All rests in this, that still the secret guards
Of how the Faith's Community is one.
Almighty God has shattered every shape
Carved by imposture, and for evermore
Stitched up the sacred volume of Islam.
The Muslim keeps his heart from all but God
And shouts abroad, No people after me.]

In his book *Rūh-i Iqbāl*, Dr Yūsuf Husain has written: "If we wish to trace the origin of Iqbal's philosophy of *Khudī*" (individuality), then we must look solely to Islamic traditions. In the Holy Qur'an the grandeur and excellence of man's individual personality has been described in various ways.

Naturally enough, the traditions to which we must refer concern the very origin of man's appearance on the scene of the worldly spectacle. Every aspect of the Islamic concept of the creation of man is conducive to elevation of his personality and individual status: the blowing into him of the spirit of Allah ("and I blew into him of My spirit" [xv. 28]) ; the angels being commanded to prostrate to him ("and remember When We said to the angels: 'Make sajdah before Adam, and they did so except for Ibīīs [vii. 10]) ; the bestowal upon man of special knowledge concerning the reality of things

(“and We taught Adam all the names” [ii. 30]) and the command to inform angels of these realities so that man should fully assert his superiority over them (“We said: O Adam ! inform them of the names” [ii. 32]).

‘Allarmah Iqbal has explained in a captivating passage of Payām-i Mashriq how the creation of Adam was also the creation of man’s individuality, and this was the secret of man’s superiority over the angels and the reason why a tumultuous commotion occurred in the cosmos on the sensational occasion of his creation:

نعره زد عشق کہ خونیں جگرے
پیدا شد
حسن لرزید کہ صاحبِ نظرے
پیدا شد
فطرت اَشفت کہ از خاک
جہانِ مجبور
خود گرے خود شکنے خود
نگرے پیدا شد
خبرے رفت ز گردوں بہ شبستانِ
ازل
حذر اے پردگیانِ پردہ درے پیدا
شد
اَرزو بے خبر از خویش بہ

اَعُوْشِ حَيَاتِ
چشم وا کرد و جهانِ دگرے پیدا
شد
زندگی گفت کہ در خاک تپیدم
ہمہ عمر
تا ازیں گنبدِ دیرینہ درے پیدا
شد⁸⁶

[“Here is one with a bleeding heart,”

Rang abroad Love’s joyous cry.

Beauty trembled and said, “Look.

Here’s one with a seeing eye,”

Nature was surprised to see

From its passive dust appear,

All of a sudden, one who was

Of himself maker, breaker, seer.

Whiseprs travelled all the way

From Eden to night’s dark abode,

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 85/255. English translation by M. Hadi Hussain : A Message from the East (Lahore : Iqbal Academy. 1977), p. 47.

“Look out, veiled ones, here comes one
Who will tear up every shroud.”
Not yet self-aware, Desire
Lay curled up in Being’s lap.
Opening its eyes, it saw
Before it a new world unwrap.
Life exclaimed, “O happy day
I writhed in dust aeon after aeon.
Now has opened at long last
A door out of this ancient prison.]

The descent of Adam to the world is also not in a state of ignominy for his repentance was totally accepted. Rather it was so that he may fulfil his enormous potential and be established as Khalīfah on earth.

نائب حق در جهان بودن
خوش است
بر عناصر حکم را بودن
خوش است⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Ibid. (Asrār-i Khudī), p. 44. English translation by R.A. Nicholson, op. cit., p. 79,

[‘Tis sweet to be God’s vicegerent in the world

And exercise sway over the elements.]

From Iqbal’s commentary on the event of the Fall of Adam in the Reconstruction it is clear how radically and significantly the Quranic narrative of the incident differs from the Biblical version. Whereas the former elevates man’s position, the latter relegates him to an inherently sinful creature incapable of earning his own salvation, for which he is dependent upon a saviour. The Qur’ān exonerates Adam of all sin and defines the initiation of individuality in his actions. The Bible on the other hand incriminates him for having involved the whole of the human race in trial and affliction. Whereas the Old Testament curses the earth for Adam’s act of disobedience, the Qur’an declares the earth to be the dwelling place of man and a source of profit for him:

ولكم في الارض مستقر و متاع
الى حين

[“And you are to have in the earth a dwelling-place and a source of profit for a while” (ii. 29).]

So we can see how the Quranic legend of the Fall does not deal with man’s first appearance on this planet. “Its purpose,” Iqbal says, “is rather to indicate man’s rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man’s transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one’s own being.

Nor does the Quran regard the earth as a torture-hall where an elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned for an original act of sin. Man's first act of disobedience was also his first act of free choice; and that is why, according to the Quranic narration, Adam's first transgression was forgiven. Now goodness is not a matter of compulsion; it is the self's free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing cooperation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly determined like a machine cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus a condition of goodness. But to permit the emergence of a finite ego who has the power to choose, after considering the relative values of several courses of action open to him, is really to take a great risk; for the freedom to choose good involves also the freedom to choose what is the opposite of good. That God has taken this risk shows His immense faith in man; it is for man now to justify this faith."⁸⁸

How different this encouraging, stimulating and challenging interpretation is to the Christian notion of a sinful undignified fall unatonable for by man's actions. The Qur'ān states that man's status is inherently lofty:

لقد خلقنا الانسان في
احسن تقويم

[“We have fashioned man in the best of forms” (xcv. 4).]

He may either endeavour to maintain that position or stoop to the lowest of the low.

⁸⁸ Reconstruction, p. 85.

One example of the deterioration of the quality of the individual in the West is the general consideration of art and other forms of entertainment as ends in themselves, where excess social energy is channelled and ineffectually expires. Iqbal sought to put this matter in its true perspective by pointing out that art should be judged according to the standpoint of personality, that which fortifies it being good and that which weakens it bad. In the New Era he writes: “The ultimate end of all human activity is Life—glorious, powerful, exuberant. All human art must be subordinated to this final purpose and the value of everything must be determined according to its life-yielding capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force, and nerves us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to the reality around—on the mastery of which alone life depends—is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in Art. The dogma of Art for the sake of Art is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power.”⁸⁹

And in his poem Din-o I-lunar (Darb-i Kalīm) he writes:

سرود و شجر و سیاست کتاب و
 دین و ہنر
 گہر ہیں ان کی گرہ میں تمام
 یک دانہ!
 اگر خودی کی حفاظت کریں تو
 عین حیات

⁸⁹ The New Era, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, p. 251. Reproduced from Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal (Lahore : Iqbal Academy, 1977), p. 125.

نہ کر سکیں تو سراپا فسون
وافسانہ!

ہوئی ہے زیرِ فلک امتوں کی
رسوائی

خودی سے جب ادب و دیں
ہوئے ہیں بیگانہ!⁹⁰

[Melody and poetry, politics, literature, religion and accomplishment Are pearls in the knot of which is one seed...

If they protect individuality, then they are life itself,

If not, then they are just enchantment and tales.

Communities have been disgraced under the heavens

When literature and religion have been separated from individuality.]

As Iqbal himself repeatedly predicted, it seems as if it will only be a matter of time before the decrepit, swaying ship of Western civilisation finally capsizes. We Muslims must endeavour to ensure that their battered ship is rehabilitated inwardly and outward by means of the Islamic strategy which Iqbal has laid out for us, so that the desperate passengers will settle for the seemingly easier, but eventually more disastrous course of social and political revolution without spiritual rectification to support it. The Qur'ān has laid down a very important principle of revolution:

⁹⁰ Kulliyāt-i Iqbal Ueda (Darb-i Kalīm), p. 100/562.

ان اللہ لا یعیّر ما بقوم حتی
یعیّر ما بانفسہم

[“Indeed Allah does not change the conditions in which a people live until they change what is in themselves” 12).]

So how can there possibly be political and social upheaval with spiritual rectification first. Iqbal ridicules the claim of Communism that it is a social improvement as capitalism for “it rises up in revolt against the very source which could have given it strength and purpose”. It is Islam alone which provides real and lasting equality in a society, for it looks at equality as an expression of Tauhid in man’s social life. The contrast between Islamic equality and communist/ capitalist versions of the same slogan is clear from this excerpt from Javīd Nāmāh:

عریباں گم کردہ اند افلاک
را
در شکم جویند جان پاک را!
رنگ و بو از تن نگیرد جانِ
پاک
فرہ تن کارے ندارد اشتراک

دینِ اَن پیغمبرِ حقِ ناشناس
بر مساواتِ شکمِ دارد اساس
تا اخوت را مقامِ اندر دل
است
بیخِ او در دل نه در آب و گل
است!⁹¹

[The Westerners have lost the vision of heaven,
they go hunting for the pure spirit in the belly,
The pure soul takes not colour and scent from the body;
and Communism has not to do save with the body.
The religion of that prophet who knew not the truth
is founded upon equality of the belly;
The abode of fraternity being in the heart,
its roots are in the heart, not in water and clay.]

It is my deep conviction that the millions in Europe and America who are deeply disillusioned by the failure of Western religion to fulfil the spiritual needs of man, and of Western political institutions to solve his economic and social problems, would be strongly influenced by ‘Allamah Iqbal’s novel presentation of Islam’s all-healing teachings. It is our responsibility to convey

⁹¹ Kuliyyāt-i Iqbal Fārsī (Jāvīd Nāmāh), p. 69/652.

these teachings to them in the same vein that the 'Allamah did, and do our best to implement them in our everyday life, so that no one will be able to claim that it is an impractical ideal not feasible in the modern day and age.