

ALLAMA IQBAL – REFUSING TO BE CALLED A POET

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Late Sayyed Nazeer Niazi lays down in the biography of Allama Muhammad Iqbal that he was a born poet. Mr. Niazi maintains that Allama Iqbal, when still a school student, had begun to compose verses. It was something natural with him. It looked as if sentences flowing out of his mouth were regular and rhythmical. Continuing, Mr. Niazi relates that Allama Iqbal's renowned teacher Maulana Sayyed Mir Hassan, to whom he was tremendously devoted, had a highly refined taste of poetry. He came to know that Iqbal composed verses. This made him happy and he encouraged him impressing upon to continue. Sayyed Mir Hassan had intuitively visualised that Iqbal's fame as a poet was to overwhelm the whole world. It did not mean, that he encouraged every student to write poetry. Sayyed Nazir Niazi states that a certain classmate of Iqbal also made bold to approach Sayyed Mir Hassan and told him that he too was a poet, and if permitted he would recite some verses. At this the sage teacher who knew the boy's worth took up his stick, gave him sound beating and warned him never again to indulge in composing verses. But the appreciative teacher continued attending to Iqbal's verses, suggesting modifications and corrections where needed. As is obvious Sayyed Mir Hassan could very clearly distinguish between inborn talent for poetry and belaboured versification. Once Iqbal recited to the school audience in Sayyed Mir Hassan's presence. Thus in his early youth, Iqbal had become known as a poet. There was in Sialkot a society of poets (بزمِ مشاعرہ) and Iqbal began to take part in poetic symposiums held under the auspices of that society. Sayyed Mir Hassan continued to guide Iqbal in respect of poetical delicacies, rhythmic niceties, prosody, graces of expression and its flaws. In short he, as a student at Sialkot, had learnt all about poetic art that he needed. Sayyed Mir Hassan, although he himself did not compose poetry, yet had keen inborn sense for the understanding of poetry and deep insight for appreciating poetic beauties. Iqbal admitted many a time that it was Sayyed Mir Hassan from whom he had learnt a lot about literary qualities. It was he who had

cultivated and refined his poetic talent. Iqbal eulogised this aspect of his teacher, saying “whatever Shahji (Mir Hassan) said was poetic”. But the matter had not been left at that by Sayyed Mir Hassan relating to Allama Iqbal’s upbringing as a poet. He looked around to find out some proper guide who himself should be a poet of high calibre. He chose for him Mirza Dagh of Delhi, one of the most accomplished poets of that era, as a mentor in respect of poetic excellencies.⁸¹

As is a well-known fact, this relationship of teacher and disciple did not last long. Mirza Dagh wrote to Iqbal that he had attained sufficient mastery over the language as well as the art of poetry therefore he did not feel he could improve upon his verses. This meant that Allama Iqbal’s own inherent taste for poetry could very capably serve him as his mentor. Allama Iqbal by now came to Lahore to continue his studies and had joined the Government College, Lahore. In Lahore his poetry attracted the attention of all the literary figures and circles worth the name, in that city. He, during that period, wrote innumerable ‘Ghazals’ and a number of poems. His poetry, as it now began to appear at the pages of several newspaper, literary tracts and magazines, was now being appreciated and esteemed out of Lahore, rather even out of the Punjab as well. ‘Anjumani- Himayat-i-Islam’ Lahore used to hold its annual meetings where the national and literary heroes of those days came to deliver speeches, read discourses and recite poetry. This all was done for the good of Indian Muslims who had been left behind on almost all paths of life; education, trade, services; politics etc. Allama Iqbal attended these sessions of the ‘Anjuman’. By and by he began to recite his poems on those occasions. The first poem was “نالئہ یتیم” Nala-i-Yatim’ in 1899. This Forum of the Anjuman enhanced his prestige as a poet, as a patriot and as a sympathizer of his community i.e. the Muslims of the Sub-continent. This sense of significance made him assess his lot of poetry ---was it worth while, especially what he wrote in the form of ‘ghazals’. He by now had started to feel his responsibility towards his country and particularly towards Muslims. In this regard his poem “سید کی لوح تربت”⁸² (the tombstone of Sir Sayyed)

⁸¹ Dana-i-Raz, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore 1979, pp.76-78-

⁸² Bang-i-Dara, Ghulam All & Sons, p.52.

and “شاعر”⁸³ (The poet) can be referred to. The former one contains many pieces of advice for the people. The last three verses are especially addressed to the poets. Allama Iqbal imparts his message through the Tombstone of Sir Sayyed’s grave to his comrades i.e. his coterie of poets. Poets, here, are reminded that they have been given a mighty pen that can work wonders. They have been given brilliant minds and pure hearts. They as poets are direct disciples of God, hence they should not compose anything which would undermine their prestige. It is their duty to wake the asleep peoples of their society with their miraculous verses. They, with the burning spirit of their poetry, should render all which is wrong into ashes.

As far as the latter poem captioned “The Poet” is concerned, Allama Iqbal writes as under:

“Society is like the body and the individuals are like different parts of it. Those engaged in industrial works are the hands and feet of the society. The administrative organisation is similar to the beautiful face of the same, while a poet who writes impressive and colourful verses is like the observing eye. Whatever part of the body should ache, it is the eye that weeps. How sympathetic is the eye, to the whole body.”

This shows the extent of the responsibility of a poet towards his nation, society and the country.

When in Europe, Allama Iqbal composed a poem captioned “To Abdul Qadir”⁸⁴ and then a ‘Ghazal’⁸⁵ which contained the message of hope for Muslims and was written in March 1907 as indicated by the poet himself. The poem begins thus:

The horizon of the East has darkened. Let us with the flames of song give light to the people of the East.

As far as the ‘Ghazal’ alluded to, is concerned, it was much expressive and direct. Its verses are like this:

⁸³ Ibid., p.61.

⁸⁴ Bang-i-Dara, p.132.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.140-142.

“At last the silent tongue of Hijaz has announced to the ardent ear, the tiding that covenant which had been given to the desert-dwellers is going to be renewed in strong terms.”

“The lion who had emerged from the desert and had toppled the Roman Empire, is, as I am told by the angels, about to get up again (from his slumbers).”

“You the dwellers of the West, should know that the world of God Almighty is not a shop (of yours). Your imagined pure gold is about to lose its standard value (as fixed by you).”

“Your civilization will commit suicide with its own dagger.

A nest built on a frail bough cannot be durable.”

“The caravan of feeble ants will take petal for a boat. And in spite of all blasts of waves, it shall cross the river.”

“I will take out my worn-out caravan in the pitch darkness of night. My sighs will emit sparks, and my breath will produce flames. (And it will be light all around)”

Leaving aside the prophecies he made in this ‘Ghazal’ which, with the passage of time, unfolded into near reality, the most important declaration was his determination to give a lead to the Muslims of the world. He now had bent upon employing his potentialities to bring Muslims out of the dark dungeons of slavery and guide them to sunny vistas of independence and glory. This was a gigantic decision. It gave him a totally new light. He now had to re-evaluate his performance, especially as a poet; a quality he was renowned for. Here he found that almost all the ‘ghazals’ he had been writing smacked of something like a pass-time device, remote from realities of life, not embodying what the milieu demanded. After that he no longer displayed fondness of traditional poetry. Writing to one Mr. Shatir (شاطر صاحب) on August 29, 1908 i.e. not long after he returned from England, he stated:

“Sometimes I do compose some verses for the pleasure of others.

During the last three years I have written poetry very rarely.

And now the profession I am about to join, has no relation with poetry”⁸⁶(the profession alluded to was that of a Lawyer).

On July 7, 1911, he wrote in reply to a demand from Atiya Faizi in respect of a selection of his poetical works for publication.

“Selection (of poetical works) for publication is for me a hard task. During the last five to six years, my poems have been of private nature and I understand that public has no right to read them. Some of them I have already destroyed lest some body should steal and publish them. Anyway I will see what can be done in this regard. My respected and kind father has directed me to write a Mathnawi on the pattern of the Mathnawi written by Hazrat Bu-Ali Qalandar. I know the difficulties I have to face in the process of its completion. Anyway I have begun to write it.”⁸⁷

Some of the verses he wrote for that Mathnawi were later on included in ‘Asrar-i-Khudi’ which he had started writing in 1910.⁸⁸ This clearly shows that what he had tried on the lines of Bu-Ali Qalandar’s Mathnawi turned out to be Asrar-i-Khudi in the long run.

It indicates he said good-bye to his old traditional poetry which consisted mainly of ‘ghazals’ expressing stray thoughts relating mostly to love, beauty, the cup of wine, the cupbearer, or the master of the wine-house, hopes and promises relating to meetings with the beloved and resulting frustration, the pangs of separation, deserts where the mad lovers roam about etc. These ‘ghazals’ did contain, here and there some pieces of advice and moral lessons too. But mainly it dealt with what was generally not real, having nothing to do with the hard facts of life and especially what the times and circumstances demanded.

Allama Iqbal had now as a responsible and a gifted poet forsaken his former style of poetry. ‘Ghazals’ he had composed in the style of Dagh and

⁸⁶ Iqbal Nama, Vol.II, p.306.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.148-149.

⁸⁸ Gu f tar-i-Iqbal.

Amir, now looked to him of no value. This is why he discarded them when he

compiled *Bang-i-Dara*, keeping only a few of them just to show the stages he had passed through.

He took to a new path. It was not a sheer chance or an inadvertent action. It was his deliberate and well thought out decision. He formerly was a poet with stray thoughts, but now he no longer was a poet of that type. Writing to Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, he explained:

“In poetry, literature for the sake of literature has never been my aim. There is no time left to me to attend to the delicacies of art. The purpose is to revolutionise modes of thinking. That is all. Keeping this principle in view I try to express what I find useful. No wonder if the coming generations may not recognise me as a poet.”⁸⁹

This letter had been written on October. 10, 1919. Allama Iqbal remained consistent in this regard and wrote to many people that truths pertaining to national welfare and Muslim Umma’s morals were much dearer to his heart than expression of art. To bring about a revolution in the thinking of Muslims had become his sole purpose because they were living in slavery of the British. They were overwhelmed by Hindus in all fields of life. Morally they had little knowledge of real Islam., They, according to Allama Iqbal, had fallen prey to rigid Mullas and greedy Sufis. Misguided guides were misguiding the blind followers. Educationally, the Muslim community had been left far behind by other nations, not only in India rather all over the world.

Explaining again and again this stance of his in writing poetry, he tried to bring into bold relief the puposes he held so dear. For example on August 20, 1935 while writing to Sayyed Nadvi, he stressed the same point:

“I have never known myself as a poet. Therefore I have no rival competitors and I do not recognise any as such. I have no interest in the art of poetry. Yes, I have some specified goals to achieve which I always keep

⁸⁹ Iqbal Nama, I, p.108.

before me. I took to poetry to explain these goals with reference to the conditions and traditions obtaining in the country, otherwise

نه بینی خیرازان مردِ فرودست
که برمن تهمتِ شعر و سخن بست⁹⁰

You will not find any good coming from that low-minded person who accuses me of writing poetry”)

Here we are face to face with an intriguing scenario. A great poet refusing to be called a poet. The why of it is sufficiently manifest. As already stated, Allama Iqbal believed that he had to perform some benevolent duty towards the society, the nation and then the humanity at large. A poet with a sense of responsibility and accountability to God is essentially different from the one who is just a poet. A poet with some definite message to impart to others is unlike the one who has no such message. A poet who finds purpose in life and follows some clear cut ideology is an entity separate from the one who is bereft of all such obligations. Allama Iqbal knew the difference. He knew perfectly well the distance between one sort of poetry and the other. For a poet it is the art of poetry which is the only requirement i.e. he composes poetry for the sake of poetry. For him poetic art is its own reward whereas for a poet with a purpose, a goal, an ideology and a message, makes use of poetic capability as a means to that end. Hence the difference, a poetry pure and simple confronting another which is a vehicle for the transmission of something beyond art. One sort of poetry pleases, the other one teaches. But one thing is still quite obvious that to make impressive, a poetry with a message, is much more difficult than to write pleasing and plausible verses relating to Love, Beauty, Nature etc. Generally the verses carrying moral lessons do not attract that much of attention as is earned by a fascinating piece of poetic composition which touches the chords of hearts with the key of sensual sentiments and emotions. Allama Iqbal changed over to a teacher-poet. His qualification is that he neither subordinated his poetry to his purpose nor did he do the opposite. Dr. Yusuf Hussain Khan writes:

⁹⁰ Iqbal Nama, I, p.195.

“In the history of the world literature Allama Iqbal is amongst the very rare examples of a poet who left such a deep influence through his captivating songs; on a society so large as that of Indian Muslims. The cause is nothing but the fact that Allama Iqbal took those basic truths as subject-matter of his poetry which go a long way in shaping the behaviour of societies and lead to the abode of welfare and happiness.”⁹¹

But this Allama Iqbal did artistically. Ethical, social and religious lessons he imparted, were clad in beautiful words that sang the meanings. To quote Dr. Yusuf Hussain Khan again:

“Usually the literature which aims at achieving some particular purpose is dry, tasteless and if artistically examined, of low degree. But Iqbal has put, forward his subjects in such a delicately colourful style which attracts the heart and vision.”⁹²

People who were not accustomed to this type of poetry proclaimed it as something unpoetic because for them it were the style, the words and the beauty of expression which was the real thing. They thought that purposive subjects suited only to prose and not at all the poetry. The trends of poetry inherited by the contemporary poets of Allama Iqbal, did not interpret hard facts of life around. In the words of Dr. M.D. Taseer:

“The poetry repudiated by Allama Iqbal is characterized by him as idolization and worship i.e. a poetry which in itself becomes the sole purpose, a poetry which is just old fashioned and traditional. It is a literature whose only aim is playing upon words wherein appreciation and applause consists in saying: “What a beautiful rhyme”, “how attractive is the style,” ““how fascinating is the expression,” “what a befitting idiom,” “look at the purity of language” etc. Poetry that attracted this kind of appreciation was rejected by Allama Iqbal.”⁹³

Here it was the parting of the ways. For Allama Iqbal poetry, like all other human capabilities was to be used for the good of man, for making life healthier and more beautiful. It was a divine gift and thus it was light and

⁹¹ Rooh-i-Iqbal, Aina-i-Adab, Lahore, 1977, p.15.

⁹² Ibid, p.20.

⁹³ Fazl-i-Haq (Compilation), Iqbal Ka Fih-r-o-Fun, Munib Publications, Lahore, 1977, p.88.

power. This gift from God, if put to wrong uses, could do unimaginable harm to the society of human beings for whose good this faculty had been inculcated in human nature. This leads us to believing that there are two camps in respect of Art. One the “art for art’s sake” and other the “art for the sake of life”. Allama Iqbal belonged to the second camp. After he returned from England, he took up his poetry very seriously. *Asrar-i-Khudi* was the first book epitomizing the new look of Allama Iqbal upon poetry, its function and his own responsibility as a repository of this sacred treasure vested in him.

In his Foreword to *Muraqqa-i-Chughtai*, Allama Iqbal made this view manifest unequivocally:

“Unfortunately I am not competent enough to judge the technical side of painting, and refer the reader to Dr. Cousen’s admirable Introduction in which he had analyzed some of the more important forces that are shaping Chughtai’s artistic ideal. All that I can say is that I look upon Art as subservient to life and personality. I expressed this view as far back as 1914 in my *Asrar-i-Khudi*, and twelve years later in the poems of the *Zabu-e-Ajam*. I have tried to picture the soul-movement of the ideal artist in whom Love reveals itself as a unity of Beauty and Power.”

دلبری بے قاپری' جادوگری است
دلبری باقاپری، پیغمبری است

Continuing, Allama Iqbal takes a mighty step forward and declares:

“The inspiration of a single decadent, if his art can lure his fellows to his song or picture, may prove more ruinous to a people than whole battalions of an Attila or Changez. As the Prophet of Islam said of Imra-ul-Qais the greatest poet of pre-Islamic Arabia.”

ءاشعُرُ الشعراء قاءدهم الى النار⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Abdul Wahid Mueeni, Thoughts and Reflections of

(The best of poets and their guide to Hell)

As Allama Iqbal has himself referred to in the foregoing lines, it was ‘Asrar-i-Khudhi’, his first book coming out with his new ideas about the art of poetry.

شاعری زین مثنوی مقصود نیست
بت پرستی بت گری مقصود نیست⁹⁵

“In this Masnawi I am not aiming at the display of my poetic talent. My aim is neither idol-building nor idol-worship..”

And while explaining the significance of a poet, as he desires him to be, he says:

سینئه شاعر تجلی زارِ حسن
خیزد از سینائے او انوارِ حسن⁹⁶
از نگاهش خوب گردو خوب تر
فطرت از افسونِ او محبوب تر
از دمش بلبل بو آنوضت است
غازه اش رخسارِ گل افروخت است
بحروبر پوشیده در آب و گلش
صد جهانِ تازه مضمَر دردش¹

Iqbal, Sh. M. Ashraf Lahore, 1964, pp.144, .145.

⁹⁵ Asrar-i-Khudi, p.11.

⁹⁶ Asrar-i-Khudi, pp.35,36.

درد ماغش نادمیده لاله با
ناشنیده نغمه با، هم ناله با 1
فکر او باماه و انجم هم نشین
زشت رانا آشنا، خوب آفرین 1
خضر در ظلمات او آب حیات
زنده تراز آب چشمش کائنات
کاروان با از در ایش گامزن
دریے آواز نایش گامزن
اہل عالم را صد بر خوان کند
آتش خود راچوں بادارزان کند

“In the heart of a poet divine beauty manifests its lustre. Lights of beauty burst forth from his Sinai.”

“His glance turns beautiful into more beautiful. Nature on account of his charms becomes more attractive.”

“His breath had taught the nightingale to sing. His rouge has set the rose aglow.”

“In his body is hidden the ocean and the earth. And his soul is the abode of innumerable new worlds.

“In his imagination there are tulips which have not yet budded and there are unheard of melodies as well as wailings.”

“His thought is as high as the moon and the stars. He keeps aloof from all that is ugly, he creates beauty.”

“He Is like Khizar, in his inner depths there lies the Spring of Life.”

“It is his bell that keeps the caravan moving. The caravan follows his melodies,”

“He invites the world to his dinner-table. ‘He makes his burning fervour as cheaply available as air.’”

This briefly is Allama Iqbal’s conception of a poet. He showered unbounden applause on him. He holds a poet in such a high esteem.

God knows if any other poet has ever eulogised poets in such brilliant terms and extolled them so bounteously. How important is the existence of a poet for the good of humanity. The verses given above need no elucidation. They are self-explanatory. But we are aware of the fact that it is only one side of the coin. Allama Iqbal’s balanced temperament and view of life could not let go the other side of the coin unexamined. So here we have what Allama Iqbal offeres pertaining to poets who do not jealously guard and improve upon the luminous element of this divine grace. How much dangerous can an artist-poet prove to be for the society if he behaves irresponsibly and especially when he stoops to bestiality and rat race. A mentally ailing poet is far more devastating than the invading armies at’ the uncivilized hordes.

وائے قومے کز اجل گيرو برات
شاعرش و ابو سداز ذوق حیات
خوش نماید زشت را آئینه اش
بوسئه او تازگی از گل بُرد ۱۱۱
ذوق پرواز ازدل بلبل بُرد ۱۱۱
سست اعصاب تو از افیون او

می رباید ذوقِ رعنائی زسرد
جرّه شاهین از دم سروش تدرود
نغمه هایش از دلت دزدو ثبات
مرگ را از سحرِ او دانی حیات⁹⁷

“Woe unto a nation who takes deed of death for life. This is a nation whose poet has become wearied of the taste for life.” “His mirror displays ugly things as fair. His honey hurts the heart like arrows.”

“His kiss deprives the rose of its fragrance. It takes away the urge to fly, from the heart of the nightingale.”

“Your nerves have been weakened by his opium. You pay with life for his subject-matter.”

“He highjacks the elegance of the sypress tree. His deep cold sighs turn the falcon into a partridge.”

“His songs steal away strength of your heart. You deem death as life on account of his ‘magic.’”

It is crystal clear that Allama Iqbal held the faculty of poetry in high esteem. He knew that the positive aspect of poetry was of great use for strengthening a society as well as an individual. But alongwith it he was equally sure that a poet with an ailing spirit and a diseased brain could leave devastating effect on the society and the individual. The devastation could not be measured in terms of material loss or loss in honour only. A poetry portraying life as something to be shunned and death to be embraced was, on account of lyrical magic capable of inculcating defeatist attitude in the surrounding human groups.

⁹⁷ Asar-i-Khudi, p.36.

If poetry can do lot of good as well as evil, it means poetry is a highly forceful skill vested in man. Every force can be used for doing good and creating good. Similarly every force can be put to wrong uses. That creates many sorts of trouble, turmoil and dismay. Allama Iqbal eulogised the skill of poetry as an endowment from above. He wished he, in actual fact could see poets as he visualized and depicted them. He himself, by and by, advanced towards the first cotery of poets whereas the overwhelming, not only that, rather almost the whole cotery of his contemporary poets who were innumerable, belonged to the second category i.e. the decadents who created decay. Only two or three honourable exceptions to that encompassing general rule can be cited e.g. Hall and Akbar and Zafar Ali Khan. In other words, in the light of prevailing attitude of poetry and poets this forceful endowment meant a source of escape, defeat and death. This made him declare, he was not a poet and hence should not be called as such. If a poet epitomised all that was soul-killing and depressing, all that was irresponsibility and loll he stood aloof from him. So he proclaimed he was not a poet. Apparantly it is a paradox, but with reference to what Allama Iqbal stood for, the paradox evaporates. He was not a poet in the sense the poets were known to be. This is why he deplorably explained:

آشنائے من زمن بیگانه رفت
 از خمستانم تہی پیمانہ رفت
 من شکوہ خسروی او را دہم
 تخت کسریٰ زیر پائے او نہم
 او حدیث دلبری خواهد زمن
 رنگ و آبِ شاعری خواهد زمن
 کم نظر بے تابئی جانم ندید
 آشکارم دید و پنہانم ندید
 حق رموزِ ملک و دین برمن کشود

نقشِ غیر از پرده چشمِ ربود
برگِ گل رنگین ز مضمونِ من است
تانه پنداری سخن دیوانگی است
از پندر سرمایه دارم کرده اند
در دیارِ هند خوارم کرده اند
لاله و گل از نوایم بی نصیب
طائرَم در گلستانِ خود غریب

“Even he who was my friend did not know my reality hence he went away without having tasted of wine from my flagons.”

“I offer him imperial majesty and want to place the throne of Kisra under his feet.”

“He (on the contrary) demands from me the poetry pertaining to beauty and love. He wants from me decorated expressions (which-are the hallmark) of poetry.”

“He is weak-sighted, hence could not see the agitation in my soul.

He saw my appearance and could not visualize what it was within.”

“God has made manifest to me the riddles of rule and religion. God removed all ungodly imprints from the curtains of my eyes.”

“My verse is my blood. Hence my words make the rose-petal look more colorful.”

“Poetry is not a part of sheer madness and ends thereat. Do not think so; Madness, when perfect, becomes wisdom.”

“Lot of talent has been showered on me. But I have been put in India to be disgraced (because I have not been able to uplift the people here).”

“I am a singing bird, stranger ever in my own garden because the roses and tulips of this garden do not recognise me (and my worth).”

A man of faith and vision as Allama Iqbal was, he was placed among people who had lost all will to wake up from their slumbers in which slavery and lack of faith in themselves had lain them. They, therefore, liked things conforming to their state of nonchalant lethargy. Allama Iqbal wished he could drag people out of the den of their deathless demise but they as is naturally the behaviour of decaying societies refused to be disturbed. They were comfortable in their longed for disgrace. Their plight had become their delight. Hence Allama Iqbal complained he had been made to live among people who were bereft of all sense of honour as against those societies alive to the situation trying rather striving hard to ameliorate their condition. This phenomenon upset him and at times he felt as if providence had given him over to such people only to feel low. Yet, the thoughts like this were just passing shadows of disquiet. Otherwise he never gave way. He had to perform his duty. It did not bother him whether he succeeded or went away unsuccessful. As a responsible human being and as an artist conscious of his accountability to God he went on disseminating his message till the last day of his life. He had foreseen something which others had not and could not. Therefore, he protested in vehement terms if people thought of him as a traditional poet, like other ones who were just professionals and had no notion of their duty towards their people.

نگاہم انقلابِ دیگرے دید
طلوعِ آفتابِ دیگرے دید
کشودم از رُخِ معنی نقابے
بدستِ ذرّہ دادم آفتابے

نہ پنداری کہ من بے بادہ مستم
 مثالِ شاعرانِ افسانہ بستم
 نہ بینی خیرازانِ مردے فردوست
 کہ برمن تہمتِ شعر و سخن بست
 بکوئے دلبرانِ کارے ندارم
 نہ خاکِ من غبارِ راہگزارے
 نہ در خاکم دلِ بے اختیارے
 بجزیلِ امین ہم داستانم
 رقیب و قاصدِ و دریاں ندانم⁹⁸

“My eyes visualized another revolution brewing up. I could see a new Sun about to rise.”

“I uncovered the face of mystery (or hidden reality). I placed a sun in the hands of an atom.”

“Do not imagine I am like poets who show off as intoxicated even without drinking and like them have woven fictitious stories.”

“You will not find good coming from him who accuses me of writing poetry.”

“I have nothing to do in the lane of a beloved. I do not have a heart broken by the beloved and am not aggrieved on account of that.”

“My existence is not like the dust of a pathway. My earthen body has no restive heart in it (like that of a bumptious love addict).”

“My narration is what the arch Angel Jibril-i-Amin has been narrating.

⁹⁸ Javed Nama, pp.146/538.

Therefore, I in traditional sense have no co-sharer in love, no messenger and doorkeeper at the door of the beloved.”

Aziz’Ahmad in this very context says:

“Nowadays discussion on art for life had assumed lot of magnitude. This discussion came along with socialist impact on literature. But as far as Iqbal is concerned he had initiated it long before as an integral part of general mode of thought. According to Iqbal life is out and out an expression. It seeks expression likewise in poetry and picture drawing. Thought without it is nothing but death. What is vehemently needed is that art should help in the undersharing of life. Not only that, it should support its evolution. It should assist life in the process of its growth and the manner it assumes shapes. To interpret it in different terms we can say that life is the touchstone on which the gold of literature is to be rubbed.”⁹⁹

As has been referred to above Allama Iqbal was a “progressivist” in respect of art much before the “progressivism” of the socialist impact which had appeared in the subcontinent or even in Europe. His *Asrar-i-Khudi* had come to light in 1915, but he had begun writing it since 1910, as mentioned in the foregoing pages.

Rumuz-i-Bekhudi was being shaped during years 1915-1917 i.e. before Socialist Revolution took place in Russia. For him literature was to be subservient to life. It were as if a part of his creed. In his letter to Prof. Nicholson written on January 24, 1921, he explained his view point about life vis-a-vis Dickson’s points raised’ pertaining to his ideas of force and hardness. He quotes Prof. Mackenzie:

“We need prophets as well as teachers, men like Carlyle or Ruskin or Tolstoy, who are able to add for us a new severity to conscience or a new breath to duty Perhaps we want a new Christ. It has been well said that the prophet of our time must be a man of the world,’ and not merely a voice in the wilderness. For indeed the wilderness of the present is in the streets of our crowded cities, and in the midst of the incessant war by which we are trying to make our way upwards. It is here that the prophet must be.”

⁹⁹ Iqbal Nai Tashil, Globe Publishers, Lahore, pp.476, 477.

“Or perhaps our chief want is rather for the poet of the’ new age that for its prophet or far one who should be poet and prophet in one. Our poets of recent generations have taught us, the love of nature, and enabled us to find in it the revelation of the Divine. We still look for one who shall show us with the same clearness the presence of the Divine in the human. We still need one who shall be fully and in all seriousness what Heine playfully called himself “Ritter Von dem Heiligen Geish”, one who shall teach us to see the working out of our highest ideals in the everyday life of world and to find in devotion to the advancement of that life, not merely a sphere for an ascetic self-sacrifice, but a supreme object in the pursuit of which all thoughts, all passions, all delights may receive their highest development and satisfaction.”¹⁰⁰

Prof. Mackenzie looks about in search of a poet who should do the job of a prophet, who should tell people to search within their own bosoms for knowing their own reality, which is a reflection of the Divine. That could teach man to realize his inborn faculties. Such a poet prophet-cum-teacher in Mackenzie’s view was essentially to be a man of the world and not an ascetic, cut away from the life in a society. These words of Mackenzie were certainly of Allama Iqbal’s liking. No person can grow into a useful individual of his society unless he gains experience pertaining to social problems by throwing himself into the turmoil of life’s trials. A person is truthful only theoretically unless proved practically as such. And he cannot do it without living in a society and without dealing with its people in different concerns. A person puts up with others if he lives in and with others. He is tolerant only when he tolerates vagaries of others with grace. He has a spirit of sacrifice but this spirit cannot be put into practice by a hermit who dwells in a cave. The spirit of sacrifice has to be demonstrated in a society. An individual can be accepted as a man of integrity with reference to his deeds and dealings with other individuals or groups then and then only it transpires that a particular person led a useful life... life of truthfulness forbearance, tolerance, integrity and selflessness. A hermit cannot concretize morals, cannot set a good model for it. Morals deal, with actions. Morals are not preserves of philosophy and hence are not kept at a respectable distance, high and dry, like philosophy itself.

¹⁰⁰ Thoughts and Reflections, pp.95, 96.

Allama Iqbal was almost that poet prophet who, was desired by Mackenzie. He had variegated experiences of life in its so many aspects. His study of man was minute. His study of his own self was deep. He plunged into the down-reaching waters of the sea of soul. He came out with hands full of pearls which he scattered among peoples near and far. The question is how many of Allama Iqbal's predecessors among poets had tried to read "man" so minutely including his ownself and then tried to bring about a healthy change in individuals as well as societies, convinced that it was his duty which he had to perform as a person endowed by Almighty Allah with acute understanding and highly refined poetic capabilities.

Writing to Akbar Allahabadi on June 11, 1918 Allama Iqbal explains:

"I believe that the literature of Muslims in all Muslim countries needs to be reformed. Pessimistic literature cannot live for ever.

For a nation its literature must be optimistic and it is essential for the literature itself."¹⁰¹

فطرتِ شاعر سراپا جستجو است
خالق و پروردگار آرزوست
شاعر اندر سینہ ملت چودل
ملتے بے شاعر سے انبارِ گل
سوزومستی نقش بندے عالم است
شاعری بے سوزومستی مساتم است

¹⁰¹ Iqbal Nama, Vol.II, p.56.

شعروا مقصود اگر آدم گری است
شاعری ہم وارث پیغمبری است¹⁰²

“A poet by nature is always on the look out for something He is the creator of hope, its sustainer as Well.”

“In a nation the place of a poet is like the heart in the breast. Without a poet a nation is like a mound of dust.”

“Burning and rapture can design a new world.

A poet bereft of burning and rapture is nothing but a funeral song.”

“If poetry aims at reconstruction of man (turning man into a genuine man) then this too is an heir to prophethood.”

There are many verses by Allama Iqbal carrying same connotation. Here is a couplet from Dharb-i-Kalim;

میں شعر کے اسرار سے محروم نہیں لیکن
یہ نکتہ ہے تاریخِ امم جس کی ہے تفصیل
وہ شعر کہ پیغامِ حیاتِ ابدی ہے ا
یا نغمہ جبریل ہے یا صورِ سرافیل¹⁰³

“I am not fully acquainted with the mysteries of poetry, yet (I may say) it is a subtle point of which the history of nations is the detail.”

“Poetry carrying the message of eternal life is either the song of Jibrail i.e. the guidance and light from Above or the Trumpet of Esraphil i.e. it resurrects the dead.”

¹⁰² Kulliyat-i-Iqbal (Persian),

pp.44/632 (Javed Nama).

¹⁰³ Ibid., (Urdu), pp.132, 133.

This shows that poetry, when genuine, does two things. It guides and sustains. It enlivens and resurrects. It is life giving force. It invigorates. It exuberates and resuscitates the, dying forces of life and strengthens a society. But this all is the quality of a poetry which deserves praise and not the one which Allama Iqbal condemns. In an article captioned, “The literary opinions of the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) “Allama Iqbal refers to Imraul Qais (امرء لقيس) about whom the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) had stated that he was the best of poets and their guide to Hell. This opinion he held on account of the brilliance of Imraul Qais, his mastery over the expression, his creativity on the one side and his lascivious, rapacious and dipsomaniac subjects on the other. His poetic magic could enthrall those who heard or read his verses, thus left unhealthy influence on minds, making it easy for the enthralled to go astray.

The second opinion of the Holy prophet (S.A.S.) as quoted by Allama Iqbal was about a verse of Antra-ibn Shaddad, a poet of the Jahiliyya era, like Imra ul Qais. It is recorded that once the following verse of Antra was recited in the presence of the Holy Prophet:

ولقد ابیت علی الطوی واطلله
حتی اخال به الکریم الماکل

“I worked very hard whole nights, without going to bed so that I may earn an honourable meal.

Allama Iqbal adds that the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) on hearing this verse of ‘Antra was highly pleased. The only purpose of his prophethood was to make human lives graceful and turn the hardships and vicissitudes into something pleasant and natural. The Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) wished vistfully if he could see the author of that verse. He had been hearing praises of poets but about none he had felt the urge to see him.

In the words of Allama Iqbal, the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) had bestowed such a unique honour on ‘Antra because of one verse and which depicted a

life healthy and fresh as if life itself stood before us conversing. To earn one's legitimate living by dint of one's hard labour and to face the difficulties one has to, in this regard is a fact explained beautifully by 'Antra. The praise which the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) bestowed on the verse, explains to us the principle that art is subservient to life and not its superior.

Every potentiality vested in the nature of man by the Divine Grace and all force man is invested with, must be used entirely for the sole purpose of turning national life into a sunshine, invigorative, perfectly efficient and fullblooded. The value of every art is to be determined with reference to its enlivening and invigorating aspect. All objects that make us lethargic and asleep, oblivious of all what goes on around us, are messengers of decline and harbingers of death. This worn out cliché that perfection of art is its own reward is a deceptive method invented only to deprive us of life and force in a treacherous manner. In short the veritable intuitive truth of the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) by recognizing the merits of Antra's verse has set down the principle of all principles and it is that every art should evolve to perfection and the manner in which it should evolve.¹⁰⁴

With this arch-principle in view and with firm belief in its authenticity Allama Iqbal surveyed what was around him in the shape of poetry books and poets themselves. He felt fed up with all that. If that was all poetry which almost every poet in his country was persistently writing and reciting then he for one, was certainly not prepared to be called a poet. Now, we are in a position to understand his stance. And perhaps he was right. He had nothing common with traditional, professional and decadent poets who spread decay and dismay. He shunned to be one of them. He implores very humbly to the Holy Prophet in the following words:

بآں رازمے کہ گفتم پیے نبردند
زشاخِ نخلِ منِ خرسانخور دند

¹⁰⁴ Maqalat-i-Iqbal, pp.187-190. (The article was written in 1917 and published in a periodical Sitara-i-Subh issuing from Amritsar).

من اے میرا مہ داد از تو خواہم
مرا یاران غزا لخوانے شمردند¹⁰⁵

“Friends did not pay heed to the secret I disclosed to them. They did not pluck and eat dates from the branches of my tree.”

I seek justice from you, O! Lord of all nations my friends count me among the professional poets of Ghazal”.

BOOK REVIEWS

¹⁰⁵ Kulliyat-i-Iqbal (Persian) Armughan-i-Hijaz, pp.43/925.