

CLOSING ADDRESS

H. E. MR. SHAHARYAR M. KHAN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests

I am greatly honoured to be present here with you tonight, partly because of the reasons that my dear friend, Saeed Durrani, has just mentioned, but also because I feel that the Iqbal Academy (UK) has really produced a wonderful seminar today.

I must tell you of my association with the Iqbal Academy. It was, in its early years when I was here last, that I became associated with it. And I recall, very clearly, the day I drove up with Iqbal's son, Javid. I drove him from North London to Coventry Cathedral, where the function took place, and where Javid made a beautiful address, recalling his father's poetry, his philosophy, his thoughts.

I am very grateful, Mr. Chairman, that you have recalled this association which Allamah Iqbal had with my family; and I can assure you that my own association with his family continues, and my own association with Iqbal and all that he stood for stands as deeply committed as that of my forebears. But I want, first of all, to thank all the very distinguished office-bearers of the Iqbal Academy for having organised this wonderful seminar today.

I want to thank particularly my dear friend, Saeed Durrani, whom I have known for nearly 40 years, since we were both students at Cambridge. And he was as mad and dedicated about Iqbal then as he is today [Clapping].

I want also to tell you that he has recently written a book on Iqbal. He's too modest to mention it, but I can tell you that (although I haven't as yet read it, but have only glimpsed it) that he has produced a great deal of research. He has shown Iqbal's life and thoughts and ideas in a European light, and I am sure that those of you who have the time will gain a great deal by reading Saeed's book.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not a scholar of Iqbal; and I will not even attempt to make a speech which in any way would denigrate from the exalted standards that we have seen from the speakers earlier today. I don't say this merely out of form, but I am sure that I echo and reflect the sentiments of all of you here when I tell you that the speeches by the very distinguished speakers today have really been outstanding. And I request Saeed Durrani if he could, please, let me have a compendium of these speeches, which I will have the honour to send back to Pakistan, to let readers in Pakistan know how much and how deep, how erudite and sophisticated research on Iqbal is in this country. I am quite sure that our people will greatly benefit by the thoughts and by the ideas that have been stated today in these speeches.

My own brief statement, ladies and gentlemen, will reflect one theme that has been, if I may call it, the basic undercurrent of today's ideas and thoughts. It really concerns Iqbal's message and Iqbal's attitudes. As I said, I am not a scholar of Iqbal or his work – greater men have been able to put these ideas and thoughts before you. But what I am aware of is that Iqbal has conceptualised the very entity of Pakistan, and Iqbal has conceptualised the ethos of what we understand to be Pakistan today.

Now' these are the vital roots for Pakistan and the Pakistani people, and rightly Iqbal has been elevated to a status far beyond anyone else's, perhaps with the exception of Quaid-e-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Now here is his rightful place in our society. But this is where I think we must tread carefully, be-cause we in Pakistan – when we elevate people to a status like that – tend to allow reverence and that state of virtuous saint-hood, to prevent us from

actually understanding and rationalizing what the man said. We make him into a demigod, a saint, and we say it and we take his word as the final authority and we turn it into a certainty. I was extremely moved by the speakers who earlier today said that the need for us in Pakistan is the need to understand what Iqbal said. And the way to understand, the way to knowledge, is to question; and as the speaker – the main speaker [Dr. Muhammad Ajmal] – said, seek knowledge through doubt, not through faith, because faith is blind.

Doubt creates that questioning that leads you to rationalisation; and in a ‘very crude way I am trying to say, in a few words, what Dr. David Kerr has brilliantly articulated in his speech. I was deeply moved by what he said, because if you or I had arrived at belief through rationalisation, it is far deeper, far profounder, than if you arrived there through blind faith.

And this is what Iqbal is asking you to do.

Credit, the Prophet, with the idea that we can rationalise Islam, and that we can arrive there and project Islam in a totally rational manner. But if we do it simply through blind belief, we are doing a dis-service to Islam and a dis-service to Him. We must try and understand; we must try and open up our minds: we must ask questions; we must raise that issue of doubt to be able to understand.

I think today’s message is a very profound one and a very deep one, because Iqbal has asked us to search for God’s message. He has asked us to rationalise what one means by one, what is religion, what is statehood, what is the meaning of life? All these searchings are something that Iqbal’s message carries forth. Dr. David Kerr just mentioned an example of what Abu Jahl felt about Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him). He raised certain questions and doubts and criticisms; would this not be true of apartheid today? Would this not be true of racism today? Would this not be true of the great spiritual movements that take place in the world today against oppression, against colonialism, against racism?

This is the message of Islam. It has been badly misunderstood; it has been wrongly projected. It is for us, and I come to my concluding point that I want to make: we, and when I say we I mean we in Pakistan and those of us who understand Islam and its relevance, it is incumbent on us to project Islam in its true face; it is incumbent on us to lead the way, to show the path. And in order to do so, I come back to my original thought; we have to understand what we are; and I think the role the Iqbal Academy is playing today, and has played, is vital; and I for one am deeply impressed, deeply honoured to be here. And I say in conclusion: Let this be the message to the youth, and the young because they are the new generation, growing up by the help of Pakistani parents, who want to know, who want to understand. And let Iqbal’s message be the pathfinder: let it be the beacon in the darkness so that they can search for themselves, and then throw light for the rest of the world.

I thank you very much.