

# IQBAL'S RELEVANCE TO THE 21ST CENTURY

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An International Conference on Dr. Mohammad Iqbal was held on 6-7 September 1999 under the auspices of the Islamic Cultural Center that is an affiliate of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural. Iqbal Scholars from Pakistan, India, Russia, France, UK and Egypt read papers on various aspects of the philosophy of Iqbal within the theme of the seminar: Iqbal's relevance to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The seminar was inaugurated by the President of the Republic of Mauritius, Mr. Vassam Uteem and was attended by a number of cabinet Ministers, Scholars and Mauritian public (mostly Muslim).

The ambassador of Pakistan hosted a dinner at the residence on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> September 1999 for all the participants of the seminar. The dinner was hosted at the request of the Islamic Cultural Center. The Minister of Arts and Culture, Hon. Tsang Fan Hin Tsang Mang Kin, Minister of Public Utilities, Dr. Hon. Ahmad Rashid Beebeejaun, Mr. Mohammad Vayid, Chairman of the Islamic Cultural Center, a number of Mauritian intellectuals, journalists, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and prominent Pakistanis attended the dinner.

The President of the Republic of Mauritius, Mr. Vassam Uteem also hosted a Reception for the participants in the evening of 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1999. A souvenir magazine was published by the organizers, to which the ambassador contributed a message.

The scholars from Pakistan very effectively projected Allama Muhammad Iqbal as the national poet of Pakistan while scholars from other countries, projected the international aspects of the message of Iqbal.

The Muslim population of Mauritius see in Iqbal, as a beacon for their ideological inspiration as a separate community in this Hindu dominated country. We shall continue our efforts to project and propagate the message of the poet of the East, Allama Iqbal in Mauritius.

“The aim of this conference is to give to Mauritians the possibility to understand the place which Iqbal holds in the pantheon of poets and international philosophers,” declares Ahmad Ramtally, Director of the

Islamic Cultural Center (ICC), the organizer of the Conference. The aim is also to popularize the poetry of Iqbal and to create an interest for his poetry in Mauritius.

A pamphlet circulated by the Islamic Cultural Center indicates that the poet has lived from 1877 to 1938. “ He was born during the decade which was the most productive in the history of the Indian sub-continent. He has grown up with the expansion of the British power and has seen the decline of the Muslim world”, indicates this document.

Several other similar activities were organized: publication of a souvenir magazine, sale-exhibition of books on Iqbal in different languages.

Among the foreign participants, the presence of David Mathews of University of London, Great Britain, Saeed Akhtar Durrani of University of Birmingham, Great Britain, Yahyah Michot of University of Oxford, Great Britain, Sheila McDonough of University of Concordia, Canada; Ludmilla Vassileva of University of Moscow, Russia, Feroze Dehlvi and Syed Neaz Ahmad of University of New Delhi, India, Ariff Chowdary of Polygon Art Foundation, Pakistan, Hafizi El-Arab of the University of Al Azhar, Egypt, Jaganath Azad, of University of Kashmir, Sri Nagar ; Hashim Mehdi, Honorary Consul of Mauritius in Saudi Arabia is noted.

The Conference was held in three languages –English, French and Urdu.

At the opening of the international conference on the poet Mohammad Iqbal, at the auditorium of MGI, President Mr. Uteem said in his inauguration speech: “Iqbal has almost fallen into oblivion in Mauritius”. “It is regrettable”, he said, “that 40 years after that young Mauritians have tried to propagate the works of this great poet, this world famous literary figure is still unknown in Mauritius”. “Except”, he added, “of some lover of the Urdu language who continue to study the works of this great personality of Urdu and Persian literature.” Uteem said that this international conference, organized by the Islamic Cultural Center, would help the people to know better the poetry of Iqbal. The latter continues, he added, to be a source of inspiration for the successive generations throughout the world.

The President has quoted the work of Moontaz Emrith, Mauritian author on the Muslims of Mauritius, which refer to the activities of the National

Urdu Institute for the promotion of Urdu language and also of the creation of an Iqbal Circle for the propagation of the work of the poet.

Mr. Uteem thinks that Iqbal is a giant of the poetry “stayed for too long at the periphery of our interest... I hope that this international conference will do him justice,” he added.

The minister of Education, Kadress Pillay, has, on his part, explained that for Iqbal all was poetry. He has quoted politics, economy, literature, among others, before adding: The list grows longer more we go into the depth of his poetry”. The poet was, according to him, a genius with multiple facets that have contributed enormously to the awakening of Asia after years of colonization.

Previously, the President of Islamic Cultural Centre, Mohammad Vayid, has spoken of the life and the works of Iqbal whereas the Director Ahmad Ratally, in favour of a study on the relevance of Iqbal to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. He said the poetry of Iqbal conveys to the world a message of hope, struggle and of the human dignity.

The conference continued, the same morning, with the intervention of Yahyah Michot, of Oxford University on the theme “Mohammad Iqbal: what Muslims thought for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?”.

In the afternoon, Sheila Mc Donough of University of Concordia, Canada and Saeed Durrani, President of the Iqbal Academy, Great Britain, intervened. (The paper that Dr Durrani presented is included in this issue of Iqbal Review; see the section on “Guest Scholar Iqbal Studies”).

The Conference continued the next day, Tuesday, with the interventions of David Matthews of University of London, Ludmilla Vassilieva of the Sciences Academy Russia; Jagganath Azad of University of Kashmir, India; Ariff Chowdary, President of the Polygon Art Foundation; Hefizi El Arab of University of Al-Azhar, Egypt, and of Syed Neaz Ahmad of University of New Delhi, India.

The Conference ended in the afternoon.

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