

REMEMBERING IQBAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON IQBAL AND HIS UNIVERSAL VISION INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, MALAYSIA

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Sir Dr. Muhammad Iqbal was born in November 1877 in Sialkot, Punjab (now Pakistan). He was one of the greatest of Urdu and Persian poets of the 20th century and one of its brightest philosophers. Iqbal set before him an ideal of combining poetry with doctrine. He took it upon himself to inspire the Muslims to consolidate themselves in order to imbibe the true spirit of Islam. He taught in London and in Lahore. He was an 'Allamah (the greatest *'alim*) and a Doctor in philosophy. He was a lawyer and a leader. He struggled against British colonialism and yet he received a knighthood from the British government. Sir Muhammad Iqbal is the spiritual founder of Pakistan which gained independence in 1947, nine years after he passed away in April 1938. As a poet, Iqbal was unrivalled. People bestowed on him the title of Shair-e-Mashriq (Poet of the East) and Malik al-Shu'ra' (the king of poets). He was also a jurist, a politician, a social reformer, and a great Islamic scholar. There is much more that can be said in praise of Muhammad Iqbal which has been said by many. The important thing is that Iqbal lived in the twentieth century, tried to solve the problems he encountered, and thought about the challenges Muslims would face in the twenty-first century. He addressed such burning issues as the relationship of the Ummah to the West; of pluralism and toleration and of living in a multi-ethnic society, and of the nature and feature of an Islamic state that Muslims are currently debating.

Iqbal had a multi-dimensional personality. He was a mystic, a rationalist, a philosopher, and a rebel. Conversant with all the traditions of Islam, Iqbal believed that all contributed to an understanding of the relation between God and Man, but none did so exclusively. Thus he extolled mysticism for demonstrating to the self the inner experience of God. He faults it, however, for not understanding the concreteness of nature. Iqbal praised the

philosophical school of Islam for demonstrating to the self, the rational structure of the universe, but faults it for neglecting the inner experience of the divine. He believed that law is a means for the self to find its fulfilment, but faults it for hardening into unyielding rigidity. He was a great mystic, with a pure spirit, delivered from materialism and, at the same time, a man who respected and honoured science, technological progress, and the advancement of human reason.

Iqbal was a person with a world view based upon the Qur'an. He developed philosophical-spiritual interpretations based upon it which he offered to the world and its people. The Qur'an, to him, was not only a book of religion but also a source of foundational principles upon which the infrastructure of an organization must be built as a coherent system of life. That system of life when implemented as a living force is what Iqbal called Islam. Based on permanent (absolute) values as stipulated in the Qur'an, this system provides perfect harmony, balance, and stability in the society. It also provides freedom of choice and equal opportunity for the development of personality for everyone within the framework of the Qur'an. For Iqbal, religion was not simply a matter of faith but a way of life, which has to be tested in accordance with the strictest moral and scientific standards. Iqbal was not a thinker who debases science, reason, and scientific advancement. Neither was he a proponent of "dry" factual science like the science of Francis Bacon or Claude Bernard, which is limited to the discovery of the relationships between phenomenal or material manifestations and the employment of natural forces for material life. Likewise, he was not a thinker who links philosophy, illumination, science, religion, reason, and revelation together in an incongruous way. Rather, in his outlook and attitude towards this world, he regarded reason and science as complementary and supplementary to each other. One of his unique contributions to the contemporary Islamic thought is his linking of modern science with "God-consciousness" which he considered more precious than mere belief in God. He equated the scientist's observation of nature with seeking a kind of intimacy with God, a kind of mystic search in the act of pray. He believed that scientific observation of nature would help maintain "a close contact with the behaviour of reality, and thus sharpens our inner perception for a deeper vision of it." If Muslims had heeded Iqbal's advice and considered

scientific advancement as an act of prayer, the road map of world power today would have been very different.

Iqbal was despaired with the Muslim religio-philosophic tradition of his time, which he called a “worn-out and practically dead metaphysics” with its peculiar thought-forms and set phraseology producing manifestly “a deadening effect on the modern mind.” God had created the universe so that man could play a creative role with passionate zeal for the higher ideals of truth, justice, and social good. Iqbal emphasised that the conventional view of Islam, so sedulously propagated, needs re-examination to bring it in accord with the advanced scientific and philosophical knowledge. He stressed the interrelatedness of some of the fundamental Islamic concepts such as prophethood, revelation, knowledge, faith and its efficacy which serve as potential means for the apprehension of reality. For Iqbal, the illumined mind awakened by meditation over the essentials of Islam, self-realisation and self-affirmation are the pointers for the perfectibility of man which is the aim, goal and master-passion of human existence. The only alternative for Muslims, then, is to tear off from Islam the hard crust which has immobilized an essentially dynamic outlook on life, and to rediscover the original verities of freedom, equality, and political ideals with a view to rebuild their moral, social, and political ideals out of their original simplicity and universality. Iqbal called upon Muslims to transcend their history. He believed that a participatory system is the natural form of government for Islam and that Islam’s message has been corrupted by centuries of autocratic empires.

He, therefore, called for a new jurisprudence, a new *ijitihad*, which he defined as movement. Iqbal’s contribution to the Muslim world as one of the greatest thinkers of Islam remains unparalleled. In his writings, he addressed and exhorted people, particularly the youth, to stand up and boldly face life’s challenges. Humanity, as a whole, has never faced the challenge posed by the enormity and the complexity of human problems, such as it is facing in the twenty-first century. The problems have now assumed a global dimension transcending the barriers of race, colour, language, geography, and social, political and religious ideologies. Most of the problems of mankind are universal in nature and, therefore, require a universal approach to the solution. Iqbal’s universal message of love, self-development, perseverance,

dignity and freedom is an attempt to address this challenge faced by humanity.

To introduce this universal vision to the youth, the International Islamic University Malaysia organized an international conference on Iqbal. Some of the papers read in this conference are presented in the special issue of *Intellectual Discourse*, on Iqbal and his universal vision, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2002. Also available at www.iiu.edu.my/irkhs/publication/PSCI/main.html. A brief report is given in the following pages.

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON IQBAL AND HIS UNIVERSAL VISION

A one day conference on Iqbal and his Universal Vision was organized by the International Islamic University Malaysia and Pakistan High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, in collaboration with the Iqbal Academy Pakistan. The conference, which was held on 22 Rabiul Akhir 1423/July 3, 2002, included a seminar on Iqbal, exhibition of Iqbal's books and memorabilia, multimedia presentation, recitation of Iqbal's poetry, and presentation of poetry in honour of Iqbal by various poets.

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of this international seminar was performed by Yang Berhormat Datuk Seri Panglima Syed Hamid bin Syed Jaafar Albar, the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who congratulated the University for organizing such an important seminar. The Minister emphasized that Iqbal was one of the greatest poet and a philosopher who had an open mind and always willing to accept the inflow of new ideas as knowledge advances. Iqbal

challenged the conventional and reactionary thinking of Muslim scholars and presented a new approach for political, social, cultural and spiritual rejuvenation of Islam. Iqbal emphasized acquisition of knowledge, good governance, social justice and tolerance. Iqbal's message for Muslims was to forge unity and to acquire scientific knowledge to contribute for the betterment of the world. Iqbal's message is as relevant and applicable in the

contemporary period as it was during his time. Speaking on the occasion, the Pakistani High Commissioner General (R) Nasim Rana said that Iqbal was a revolutionary poet who inspired the slave nations to rise up and steer their ships towards the shores of liberty and freedom. Earlier Prof. Dr. Kamal Hassan, Rector of International Islamic University Malaysia, welcomed the honourable guests.

Seminar

The conference started in the morning with an academic session of papers presented by distinguished scholars from various countries. The first paper was by Tan Sri Dato' Seri Sanusi bin Junid, President of International Islamic University Malaysia, who spoke on "Iqbal and Muslim Unity." Tan Sri mentioned that according to the Qur'an, Muslims form one brotherhood because they are fused together by their beliefs. This is one of the major themes emphasized by Iqbal who started as a nationalist but later on, turned into an Internationalist. His internationalism is based on the fusion of politics with higher moral values derived from religion. He started writing on problems beyond that of Indian Muslims. His vision was to have a unified millat composed of individuals who have reached the stage of development of khudi and have gone over the state of be-khudi.

According to the speaker, Iqbal, known as the poet-philosopher of Pakistan, was not a narrow nationalist, and his vision was not limited to Pakistan. Iqbal's vision was ummatic and hence he should be referred to as "the poet-philosopher of Muslim unity." Iqbal had a distinct conception of Muslim unity and suggested clear-cut guidelines to attain that cherished goal. These ideas were as much as relevant to his times as they are to the contemporary Muslim world which is characterized by disunity.

The second paper was by Mr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, Director of Iqbal Academy, Lahore. His paper entitled "*That I May See and Tell*": *Significance of Iqbal's Wisdom Poetry*. According to Mr. Umar Iqbal was unique among the Muslim poets in the sense that, while almost all of his contemporaries were singing praises of the high ups or indulging in indolent love poetry, Iqbal was concerned with issues that were of vital importance to the Muslim Ummah, both on the theoretical as well as the practical level. It is the "conscious concern" which provides the key to understanding the psycho-dynamics of

Iqbal's mind, and leads us to appreciate the reasons for which Iqbal's poetry has become significantly important and meaningful to us.

The third paper was on "Iqbal and the Challenge of Reform within the Muslim World" by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar. According to Dr. Muzaffar, fundamental to Iqbal's reconstruction of religious thought was his challenge to Muslims to understand *tawhid* and to re-think their entire concept of, and approach to, Islam. He pleaded for the return of the spirit of *ijtihad* in the interpretation of the law. He was impressed by Western civilization's passion for self-consciousness, social justice and egalitarianism though he distanced himself from its atheistic strain and from the ideas that were a hindrance to the spiritual and moral advancement of the human being. Iqbal abhorred imperialism, democracy and race-based nationalism. He equally attacked the fossilized religious dogmatism that had sapped the spirit of Islam. Iqbal sketched a blue print of a polity to give life and meaning to tawhidic values.

Dr. Altaf Husain Ahangar, Professor in the Faculty of Laws, presented a paper on "Iqbal's Approach to Legislation in Islam." He said that while *ijma'* is an established principle in Islamic legislation, Muslim jurists are divided on the format of *ijma'*. According to Ahangar, Iqbal contends that at present *ijma'* is possible only through legislative assembly.

Ustaz Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady, a Very Distinguished Fellow of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, presented an interesting paper on the relevance of Iqbal to the Malay World. He said that Iqbal attracted the attention of the Malay World as well as the Muslims in Southeast Asia through his prose works and his poetic compositions that were translated into Bahasa Malaya and Bahasa Indonesia. Most Indonesian and Malay front ranking leaders were influenced by his ideal of serving the cause of the Ummah. They used Iqbal's arguments to mobilize the Muslims for reforms of their respective societies particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Basit B. Koshul, a scholar from the University of Virginia, USA, presented a paper on "Iqbal on Faith in the Modern World." According to him, Iqbal was acutely aware not only of the fact that modern society was facing a crisis of faith, but he was aware of the root cause of this crisis as well. Iqbal saw an intimate relationship between the modern crisis of faith

and modernist epistemology. Hence, he tried to articulate an epistemology that meets the critical rigour of modern philosophical and scientific thinking and also attempts to account for the reality and verity of religious experience as the most subtle and reliable source of knowledge. Iqbal's proposed epistemology is rooted in the Qur'anic narrative and the interpretation of this narrative by the "more genuine schools of Sufism." Iqbal combines the insights garnered from a study of these "religious" sources with his first-hand understanding of modern philosophic and scientific thought to recover and re-present an understanding of "knowledge" that is a companion to "faith" rather than its adversary.

Dr. Azizan Baharuddin, Professor in the Department of Science and Technology and the Director of the Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya, presented the paper on Iqbal's ideas regarding his perceptions of space and time. According to Dr. Azizan Baharuddin, the subject of science and belief has always been part of the *elan vital* of Islam. From hundreds of Qur'anic verses, Muslim scholars and thinkers have embarked on the exercise to understand scripture in the light of His creation (the study of nature or science).

When talking about space and time in the empirical and spiritual sense, it is indeed these "signs" that Iqbal was interested in. This paper presents some of the ideas Iqbal had elaborated upon regarding religion and science especially on the subject of the meaning and spiritual implications of the concepts of space and time.

Dramatisation, Poetry Recitation and Exhibition

The seminar was followed by a program of dramatisation and poetry recital in the evening. A multimedia presentation was made to introduce Iqbal and his contributions. This was followed by poetry recitation and *nashid*. A number of guests, students and faculty members recited poems of Iqbal and on Iqbal. The distinguished participants included Prof. Dr. Kamal Hassan, who recited his poem "Complaining to Iqbal: A Dialogue with the Dead," and the renowned Malay poet Dato' A. Samad Said, who recited a special poem on Iqbal composed for the occasion in the Malay language.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azmi Omar, Dean Faculty of Economics and Management and Chief Organizer of the conference gave the closing remarks and congratulated the organizing committee members for a job well done.

During the day, the HUM library held an exhibition of its inventory of books on Iqbal. Another exhibition was held simultaneously in the Central Administrative Building showing the memorabilia of Iqbal, including his books in various languages, his manuscripts, letters, photographs and personal belongings. This exhibition was organized by the Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore.

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