

Iqbal's Legacy to the World

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Iqbal, the spiritual founder of Pakistan, belongs not only to the Pakistanis and Muslims but like the great thinkers and artists of the world, Iqbal belongs to all men. Iqbal had great respect for humanity and believed that, imperfect and weak as Man was, of all creation he alone dared to accept God's "Trust" and he often refers to Sura 33:72 of the Qur'an which reads, "We proposed the faith unto the heaven, and the earth, and the mountains, and they refused to undertake the same, and were afraid thereof; but Man undertook it". In the vast annals of history, it is hard to find a person who took as much joy and pride in being a man as Iqbal did. He even had the courage to do what Milton did not do, to propose a challenge before the Almighty and say;

"Priceless treasure is the agony and burning of desire.
I would not exchange my manhood for the glory of Godhead."

Iqbal's philosophy is the philosophy of the self. For Iqbal, Man is not either a mere episode nor an accident in the huge evolutionary process. On the contrary, the whole cosmos is there to serve as the basis and ground for the emergence and perfection of the Ego. The universe has waited for Man for a long time:

"You are the late-discovered meaning of the universe,
The world of hue-and-scent have been searching for you."
(*Bal-e-Jibril*, P.155)

As E. M. Forster observes, Iqbal believes in "The self as a fighting unit".¹ Man's mission on earth is to win for himself greater freedom and to gain immortality by fortifying his personality. The quest of man is not to become God or Superman but to become a Man. "True religion," says R.G. Collingwood, "lies not in making God in our images but in making ourselves in God's Image"². The Prophet's saying: "Create in yourself the attributes of God" is the basis of Iqbal's philosophy.

In order to understand fully Iqbal's role as a philosopher one needs also to understand the present times and the problems confronting our age. "The modern predicament," says H. J. Paton, "is that man seems to be faced with an unbridgeable gap between knowledge and faith".³ Those who are capable of a completely blind faith, or who are perfectly content with the findings of science and the reduction of life to a process of scientific or syllogistic reasoning, do not find themselves in such a predicament. But though there are people who do not suffer the traumatic experience brought about by the divorce between mind and heart, the masses feel a deep and urgent need for a synthesis of faith and knowledge so that they can find both intellectual and emotional peace and satisfaction.

If anything can bridge the gulf between science and religion, it is philosophy - provided it assumes its ancient task of rising "to such a general view of things as shall reconcile us, or enable us to reconcile ourselves, to the world and to ourselves".⁴ It is the traditional aim of philosophy to enter into different points of view and to fit the different vistas as far as possible into one coherent whole. But this aim has been forgotten or forsaken by most philosophers of the modern world. It is perhaps Iqbal's greatest merit as a philosopher that he sets out, with unswerving determination, to build a conceptual scheme in which religion, science and philosophy all have a place.

Iqbal is sometimes described as a "committed" poet which means that he is committed to a defence or vindication of Islam. As Professor Whittermore rightly observes, Iqbal's work is "from first to last, the work of a Muslim. At every point he is at pains to indicate his conviction that his teaching is in all respects harmonious with the spirit and teaching of the *Qur'an*. He speaks and writes always from a standpoint within Islam".⁵ That Iqbal writes always as a Muslim is inevitable since one's faith can hardly be separated from one's philosophy. Iqbal, no doubt, begins and ends with Islam. But it must be pointed out that Iqbal's interpretation of Islam differs very widely from the narrow meaning that is sometimes given to the creed. Islam, for Iqbal, is not just the name for certain beliefs and forms of worship. The difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim is not merely a theological one - it is a difference of the fundamental attitude toward life. We hear Iqbal saying repeatedly that he who does not love or does not participate in creative activity, is not a Muslim. We also hear him saying in classic lines

"The infidel with a wakeful heart praying to an idol
is better than a religious man asleep in the sanctuary." ⁶

Although Iqbal "thinks and feels as a Muslim"⁷ and speaks mainly to or for the Muslims, yet the ideal of his philosophy is universal. Lowes Dickinson while reviewing Iqbal's *Asrar-e-Khudi* said, "Thus while Mr Iqbal's philosophy

is universal, his application of it is particular and exclusive. Only moslems are worthy of the Kingdom. The rest of the world is either to be absorbed or excluded.”⁸ This, in fact, is not Iqbal’s position and he took pains to explain himself to Lowes Dickinson.

“The humanitarian ideal is always universal in poetry and philosophy but if you make it an effective ideal and work it out in actual life you must start, not with poets and philosophers, but with a society exclusively in the sense of having a creed and well-defined outline, ever-enlarging its limits by example and persuasion. Such a society according to my belief is Islam. This society has so far proved itself a more successful opponent of the humanitarian ideal. All men, and not Muslims alone, are meant for the Kingdom of God on earth, provided they say goodbye to their idols of race and nationality and treat one another as personalities”.⁹ In other words, Iqbal begins with Islam because he regards it as a universal religion which repudiates the idea of race, colour and country. Furthermore it does not recognise the division between the religious and political life of Man. If Iqbal never went beyond Islam it is only because he thought that Islam, if properly understood and practised, could satisfy all human needs and aspirations. Though a devout Muslim, there is in Iqbal’s words a message even for those who do not share his religious beliefs. E. M. Forster points out about Iqbal, “whatever his opinions, he was no fanatic, and he refers to Hindus and Christians with courtesy and respect”.¹⁰ His breadth of vision and deep wisdom lifts his philosophy to a very wide plane—a plane where the great minds of all times meet despite the differences of environment and circumstance which separate them otherwise.

In the modern world, the trend in art, like philosophy, has become separated from the problems of living. With his eyes always on life Iqbal reminds us that “the ultimate end of all human activity is life-glorious, the purpose and the value of everything being determined in reference to its life-yielding capacity. The formal art is that which awakens our dormant will force, and helps us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to reality around us—on the mastery of which alone life depends—is a message of decay and death. There must be no opium-eating in art.”¹¹

This may seem like didacticism, but there are few poets whose work has the life-transforming power that Iqbal’s poetry has and if the criterion of philosophy is not just truth, Herbert Read’s comment, while speaking of Whitman’s critical ideal of workability, is of relevance here. “Applying it here and now”, he says, “I can think of only one living poet who in anyway sustains the test... I mean Muhammad Iqbal, whose poem *Asrar-e-Khudi* crystallizes in its beauty the most essential phases of modern philosophy, making a unity of faith out

of its multiplicity of ideas, a universal aspiration out of the esoteric logic of the schools.”¹²

Iqbal, then, as a poet and as a philosopher, undertook the task of uniting faith and knowledge, love and reason, heart and mind. It would be true to say that in modern times if any thinker has succeeded to whatever degree in the task of building a bridge between East and West, it is Iqbal. For this task few are qualified, and even for those who are qualified as Iqbal pre-eminently was - the journey is full of hazards and the road is long, lonely and arduous. In his own field, Iqbal's work is that of a pioneer. He saw the vision of a world no longer divided into irreconcilable oppositions, a world in which Man was at peace with himself, his fellow beings, and with God.

While we are reflecting on the universality of Iqbal's message, it would be pertinent to point out that throughout his life Iqbal identified himself with the oppressed peoples of the world. Whenever he saw injustice and exploitation, he protested against it with all the eloquence of his feeling heart.

Like Rousseau, Iqbal saw that man, born free, was everywhere in chains. A few months before his death, Iqbal said, “the tyranny of imperialism struts abroad, covering its face in the masks of Democracy, Nationalism, Communism, Fascism and heaven knows what else besides. Under these masks, in every corner of the earth, the spirit of freedom and the dignity of man are being trampled underfoot.....the so-called statesmen to whom government and leadership was entrusted have proved demons of bloodshed, tyranny and oppression. The rulers whose duty it was to higher humanity to prevent man's oppression of man and to elevate the moral and intellectual level of mankind, have in their hunger for dominion and imperial possession shed the blood of millions and reduced millions to servitude simply in order to pander to the greed and avarice of their own particular groups.

After subjugating and establishing their dominion over weaker peoples, they have robbed them of their possessions, of their religions, of their morals, of their cultural traditions, and their literatures. Then they sowed divisions among them that they should shed one another's blood, and go to sleep under the opiate of serfdom, so that the leech of Imperialism might go on sucking their blood without interruption.....National Unityis not a very durable force. Only one unity is dependable and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language. So long as this accursed nationalism and this degraded imperialism is not shattered, so long as men do not demonstrate by their actions that they believe that the whole world is the family of God, so long as distinctions of race, colour, and geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely they will never be able to lead a happy and contented life, and the beautiful ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity will never materialise.”¹³

It is profoundly moving to note how, having described the various causes of human misery and exploitation, Iqbal once speaks of the brotherhood of men. These words coming from a man suffering from the prolonged agony of a fatal illness, who had seen the passing away of many golden dreams and hopes, beset on all sides by anxiety and disappointment, must find their place in history as a magnificent testament to the vision of Love. As Keats had clung to the principle of Beauty even as sickness and sorrow consumed his mortal self, so Iqbal, through a life filled with hardships and disillusionment, never lost faith in the principle of universal Love.

Iqbal's sympathy for his fellow beings flows through the pages of his work. He defined "Humanity" as "Respect for man" and never spared those who sought to undermine or violate the basic dignity of others. Though he had no pity to waste on those who would not strive to improve their lot in life or whose attitude to life was one of passive resignation, yet he could well understand the anger and frustration of those whose struggle was inadequately rewarded by callous masters. Few people have championed the cause of the wronged people of the world as earnestly as Iqbal did, and for this reason alone, if for no other, he deserves to be remembered by all.

If we ask finally: what is it that Iqbal gives us? we can hardly do better than answer in the words of the late Mr. Zakir Hussain: "What is it that Iqbal does not give to him who seeks? He gives strength to the weak and a meaning to strength. He awakens the urge for a full, all - round, harmonious development of personality, for the devoted and selfless service of social ideas which alone make life worth the living. He gives to the pale, anemic calculations of the intellect the possibility to draw upon the unlimited resources of emotion and instincts, disciplined, chastened, ennobled by faith, and by creative activity."¹⁴

That, then, is Iqbal's legacy to the world.

FOOTNOTES

1. E.M. Forster, "Mohammad Iqbal," in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London, 1961), p. 296.
2. H.C. Collingwood, *Concerning Prayer* (London, 1916), p. 74.
3. H.J. Patton, *The Modern Predicament* (London, 1935), p. 374.
4. E. Caird, "The Problem of Philosophy at the Present Time," in *Essays on Literature* (Glasgow, 1909), p. 184.

5. R. Whittemore, "Iqbal's Pantheism," *Iqbal Review*, VIII (1966), 76.
6. M. Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, trans. A. J. Arberry.
7. R.A. Nicholson, "Introduction" to *The Secrets of the Self* (Lahore, 1960), p. x.
8. H. Lowes Dickinson, review of *The Secrets of the Self*, *The Nation* (London, December 24, 1920), p. 458.
9. M. Iqbal, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, ed. by S. A. Vahid (London, 1946), pp. 98-99.
10. E.M. Forster, *op. cit.*
11. M. Iqbal, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.
12. Herbert Read, quoted by M. R. Anand, "The Poetry of Muhammad Iqbal," *Indian Art and Letters*, V (1937), 31.
13. M. Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal* (Lahore, 1848), 220-227.
14. Z. Hussain, quoted by S. Sinha, *Iqbal: The Poet and his Message* (Allahabad, 1947), p. 449.