

Remembering Iqbal's Legacy

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Allama Iqbal, the spiritual founder of Pakistan, like the world's great thinkers and artists, belongs not only to Pakistan or the Muslims, but to humanity. In the vast annals of history, it is hard to find a person like him who took such joy and pride in being human that he was not willing to exchange his humanity even for the glory of Godhead.

In order to understand fully Iqbal's role as a philosopher, one needs also to understand the present times. "The modern predicament," says H. J. Paton, "is that man seems to be faced with an unbridgeable gap between knowledge and faith." (*The Modern Predicament*, London, 1935, p. 374) In today's world, there are a large number of people who 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.

In Paton's view, 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." (E. Caird, "The Problem of Philosophy at the Present Time," in *Essays on Literature*, Glasgow, 1909, p. 184). It is the traditional aim of philosophy to enter into different points-of-view and to fit 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 one of Iqbal's great merits 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 R. Whittmore 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." "Iqbal's Panentheism" in *Iqbal Review*, Volume 7, No. 1, April 1966, p. 76)

Iqbal, no doubt, begins and ends with Islam. But it must be pointed out that his interpretation of Islam differs from the narrow meaning that is sometimes given to it. For Iqbal, Islam 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 a person who does not love creative activity is not a Muslim. He also said that "the infidel with a wakeful heart praying to an idol, is better than a religious man asleep in the sanctuary." (*Javid Nama*, p. 30)

In other words, Iqbal begins with Islam because he regards it as a universal religion which repudiates the idea of race, colour and country. If Iqbal never went beyond Islam, it is only because he believed that Islam, if properly understood and practiced, 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. As 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." ("Muhammed Iqbal," in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, London, 1961, p. 296). His breadth of vision and deep wisdom lifts his philosophy to a plane where the great minds of all times meet despite differences of environment and circumstance.

Iqbal 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 some 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, 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 human beings were at peace with themselves, with their 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 people of the world. Whenever he saw injustice and exploitation, he protested against it. Iqbal's sympathy for his fellow beings flows through the pages of his work. He 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 frustration of those whose struggle was inadequately rewarded by people who wielded power over their lives. Few people have championed the cause of the wronged people of the world as passionately as Iqbal did, and for this reason alone, if for no other, he deserves to be remembered by all.

In trying to assess Iqbal's legacy to the world, we can hardly do better than the late Zakir Hussain, a former President of India, who said, "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." Quoted in S. Sinha, *Iqbal, The Poet and His Message*, Allahabad, 1947, p. 449)

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