

Iqbal, Muhammad (1877–1938)

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Muhammad Iqbal was an outstanding poet-philosopher, perhaps the most influential Muslim thinker of the twentieth century. His philosophy, though eclectic and showing the influence of Muslim thinkers such as al-Ghazali and Rumi as well as Western thinkers such as Nietzsche and Bergson, was rooted fundamentally in the Qur'an, which Iqbal read with the sensitivity of a poet and the insight of a mystic. Iqbal's philosophy is known as the philosophy of *ikhudi* or Selfhood. Rejecting the idea of a 'Fall' from Eden or original sin, Iqbal regards the advent of human beings on earth as a glorious event, since Adam was designated by God to be God's vicegerent on earth. Human beings are not mere accidents in the process of evolution. The cosmos exists in order to make possible the emergence and perfection of the Self. The purpose of life is the development of the Self, which occurs as human beings gain greater knowledge of what lies within them as well as of the external world. Iqbal's philosophy is essentially a philosophy of action, and it is concerned primarily with motivating human beings to strive to actualize their God-given potential to the fullest degree.

Life

Muhammad Iqbal was born at Sialkot in India in 1877. His ancestors were Kashmiri Brahmins; his forefathers had a predilection for mysticism, and both his father, Nur Muhammad, and his mother, Imam Bibi, had a reputation for piety. An outstanding student, Iqbal won many distinctions throughout his academic career. He passed the intermediate examination from the Scotch Mission School in Sialkot in 1893 and then moved to the Government College in Lahore, where he graduated in 1897. In 1899 he obtained a master's degree in Arabic. Having been deeply influenced by Sir Thomas Arnold, the well-known scholar of Islam, while he was at the Government College, Iqbal followed his advice and proceeded to Trinity College, Cambridge in October 1905, graduating in 1907 having studied philosophy under J.M.E. McTaggart. His doctorate was taken at Munich University, with a thesis entitled *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*.

On his return from Europe in July 1908, Iqbal took up the post of Professor of Philosophy and English Literature at the Government College in Lahore, and also began his law practice. In 1911 he gave up his teaching career because he felt that he had a message to deliver and could do it better if he adopted an independent profession such as law. However, he always remained interested in education and was associated with the Oriental College, the Government College and the Islamia College in Lahore, and with the Jami'a Millia in Delhi. During the sessions of the Round

Table Conferences in London he worked on the various committees connected with educational reforms. In 1933 Iqbal, along with some others, was invited by the Afghan government to visit the country and advise the government and Kabul University on educational matters.

Iqbal also took an interest in the workings of the Muslim League, but did not participate actively in politics. During the period 1910–23 he tried instead to create political consciousness and bring about an awakening of Indian Muslims. In 1924 Iqbal became a member of the National Liberal League of Lahore; in 1926 he was elected a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, and in 1930 was elected president of the All-India Muslim League, where he delivered a historic address. He took part in the Second and Third Round Table Conferences held in London, and was most disappointed with the outcome. Iqbal was knighted on 1 January 1923. His last years were clouded with ill health. After his death in 1938 he was buried near the gate of the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, with many attending and millions in mourning.

Works

A precocious youth, Iqbal began to write poetry at a very early age, and soon after he came to Lahore he became known through his participation in poetic symposia. As a young poet, he came under the influence of Mirza Dagh Dehalvi, one of the renowned exponents of Urdu poetry. An organization to which Iqbal was devoted all his life was the Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam (Society for the Support of Islam). The annual sessions of the Anjuman fulfilled an acute emotional need of Indian Muslims and became national festivals. Iqbal read his poems regularly at these sessions, and in fact his poems were the main attraction for the thousands who flocked to Lahore, almost on an errand of pilgrimage, to see and hear him. It was at an Anjuman meeting in April 1911 that Iqbal read his famous 'Shikwa' (The Complaint), a poem which commands such a unique place in Urdu literature that Iqbal's fame could rest securely on it alone.

The publication of *Asrar-e-khudi* (*The Secrets of the Self*) in 1915 was a significant event. It was followed by *Rumuz-e-bekhud* (*The Mysteries of Selflessness*), which dealt with the development of the communal ego, in 1918; *Payam-e-mashriq* (*The Message of the East*), Iqbal's answer to Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*, in 1923 (see Goethe, J.W. von); *Zabur-e-'ajam* (*The Persian Psalms*) in 1927; *Javid nama* (*The Pilgrimage of Eternity*), Iqbal's magnum opus modelled on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in 1932; *Musafir* (*The Traveller*) in 1934; *Bal-e-Jibril* (*Gabriel's Wing*) in 1935; *Zarb-e-Kalim* (*The Stroke of Moses*) and *Pas che bayad kard ai aqwam-i-sharq?* (*So What Should be Done, O Nations of the East?*) in 1936. *Armaghan-e-hijaz* (*The Gift of Hijaz*), containing both Persian and Urdu verse, appeared posthumously in 1938. As well as his poetical works, Iqbal wrote three works in prose. *'Ilm-ul-iqtisad* (*The Study of Economics*), which was the first book on political economy to be published in Urdu, appeared in 1903; Iqbal's doctoral thesis, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* was published in 1908; and his lectures, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, were first published in 1930. Iqbal also wrote numerous articles in Urdu and English in various journals and newspapers.

Philosophy of the self

Iqbal's philosophy is often described as the philosophy of *khudi*, or the Self. For him, the fundamental fact of human life is the absolute and irrefutable consciousness of one's own being. For Iqbal, the advent of humanity on earth is a great and glorious event, not an event signifying human sinfulness and degradation. He points out that according to the Qur'an, the earth is humanity's 'dwelling-place' and 'a source of profit' to it. Iqbal does not think that having been created by God, human beings were placed in a supersensual paradise from which they were expelled on account of an act of disobedience to God. Pointing out that the term 'Adam' functions as the symbol of self-conscious humanity rather than as the name of an individual in the Qur'an, Iqbal describes the 'Fall' as a transition from 'a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience' (Iqbal 1930: 85). For Iqbal, Adam's story is not the story of the 'First Man' but the ethical experience, in symbolic form, of every human being. Following the Qur'anic teaching that though human beings come from the earth, God's spirit has been breathed into them, Iqbal holds on the one hand that human beings are divinely created, and on the other hand that they have evolved from matter. Unlike dualists, Iqbal sees no impassable gulf between matter and spirit, nor does he see human beings as a mere episode or 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. Humanity's evolution has not come to an end, for the destiny of human beings lies 'beyond the stars'.

The purpose of life is the development of the Self. In order that they may achieve the fullest possible development, it is essential for human beings to possess knowledge. Following the Qur'an, Iqbal maintains that there are two sources of knowledge: the inner consciousness of human beings and the outer world of nature. Starting with the intuition of the Self, human beings become aware of the Not-Self, the confronting 'other' which provides a constant challenge for them. Nature, however, does not confront God in the same way as it confronts humanity, since it is a phase of God's consciousness. God is immanent since God comprehends the whole universe, but also transcendent since God is not identical with the created world. All life is individual. There is a gradually rising scale of selfness running from the almost inert to God who is the Ultimate Ego. God is not immobile nor is the universe a fixed product; God is constantly creative and dynamic and the process of Creation still goes on. The Qur'anic saying, 'Toward God is your limit' (Surah 53: 42), gives Iqbal an infinite worldview, and he applies it to every aspect of the life of humanity and the universe.

Iqbal distinguishes between two aspects of the Self, the efficient and the appreciative. The efficient self is that which is concerned with, and is itself partially formed by, the physical world. It apprehends the succession of impressions and discloses itself as a series of specific, and consequently numerable, states. The appreciative self is the deeper self, of which one becomes aware only in moments of profound meditation when the efficient self is in abeyance. The unity of the appreciative self is that in it, each experience permeates the whole. The multiplicity of its elements is unlike that of the efficient self. There is change and movement, but this change and movement are

indivisible; their elements interpenetrate and are wholly non-serial in character.

Corresponding to the two aspects of the Self are the two levels of time, serial time and pure duration. Serial time is spatialized or clock time, whereas pure duration is a ceaseless continuous flow in which all things live and move and have their being. As human beings perfect their egohood, they cast off the girdle of serial time and gain a measure of eternity.

Iqbal believes ardently that human beings are the makers of their own destiny and that the key to destiny lies in one's character. He constantly refers to the Qur'anic verse, 'Verily God will not change the condition of a people till they change what is in themselves' (Surah 13: 12). Humanity's mission on earth is not only to win greater freedom but also to gain immortality, which according to Iqbal 'is not ours by right; it is to be achieved by personal effort. Man is only a candidate for it' (Iqbal 1930: 119).

Though humanity is the pivot around which Iqbal's philosophy revolves, yet as pointed out by Schimmel, Iqbal's 'reevaluation of Man is not that of Man qua Man, but of Man in relation to God' (Schimmel 1963: 382). Iqbal's Ideal Person is the Servant of God. The relation between humanity and God is a personal one; hence the great importance of prayer in the thought of Iqbal. The belief in the one living God gives humanity freedom from all false deities and fortifies it against forces of disintegration. Iqbal sees his concept of the Ideal Person realized in the Prophet of Islam, whose life exemplifies all the principles dearest to Iqbal's heart. In his view art, religion and ethics must be judged from the standpoint of the Self. That which strengthens the Self is good and that which weakens it is bad. Iqbal does not admit the absolute existence of evil but regards it as being necessary for the actualization of moral purpose as vital activity in the world. His Iblis (or *al-Shaytan*, Satan) is the counterpart to his Ideal Person (see Free will; Self, Indian theories of).

Epistemology

Iqbal cannot be easily or exclusively classified as an empiricist, rationalist or intuitionist since he combines sense-perception, reason and intuition in his theory of knowledge (see Epistemology in Islamic philosophy). He defines knowledge as 'sense-perception elaborated by understanding' ('understanding' here does not stand exclusively for 'reason' but for all non-perceptual modes of knowledge). There are two ways of establishing connections with the Reality that confronts us. The direct way is by means of observation and sense-perception; the other way is through direct association with that Reality as it reveals itself within.

Iqbal compares the classical spirit with its contempt for sense-perception with the empirical attitude of the Qur'an 'which sees in the humble bee a recipient of Divine inspiration and constantly calls upon the reader to observe the perpetual change of the winds, the alterations of day and night, the clouds, the starry heavens and the planets swimming through infinite space' (Iqbal 1930: 91) The cultures of the ancient world failed, says Iqbal, because their approach to reality was entirely

introspective as they moved from within outwards. This gave them theory without power, and no durable civilization can be based on mere theory.

Iqbal distinguishes between 'logical understanding', which has a sectional nature and 'the deeper movement of thought', which is identical with intuition. He frequently points out (particularly in his poetry) the limitations of the former, but this does not mean that he was an anti-rationalist or anti-intellectual. Iqbal cites enthusiastically the Qur'anic verses (2: 28, 31) which state that Adam's superiority over angels lay in his power to 'name' things, that is, to form concepts. Concepts are not abstract logical entities: they are based on, and indissolubly linked with, facts of sensation. It is the knowledge of things and their inherent nature that exalted Adam over celestial creatures, and it is only through an unceasing struggle to attain the knowledge of things that humanity can maintain its superiority with justice in the world. Without discursive 'intellect' science would be impossible, and without science very little progress would be made in the material sphere. Iqbal believed strongly in the power and utility of science, but he did not regard science as the measure of all things. Science seeks to establish uniformities of experience, that is, the laws of mechanistic repetition, but does not take account of feelings, purposes and values. In Iqbal's opinion, the predicament of present-day humanity is that its life is wholly overshadowed by the results of its intellectual activity and it has ceased to live soulfully, or from within, having been cut off from the springs of life.

Like the existentialists, Iqbal sounds a warning that an idolatrous attitude towards reason and science leads in the direction of dehumanization. Since he puts great emphasis on intuition as a mode of knowledge, there has been much debate on the apparent conflict between reason and intuition in his works. However, Iqbal regarded reason and intuition as organically related and considered both to be necessary for the fulfilment of human destiny. Equating scientific knowledge with '*aq'l*' (reason) and mystic knowledge with '*ishq*' (love), Iqbal struggles constantly against separating the former from the latter since he believes that without love, reason becomes demonic.

Political philosophy

Of all the parts of his thought, Iqbal's political philosophy is perhaps the most commonly misunderstood. This misunderstanding is largely the result of dividing his political philosophy into phases, such as the nationalistic phase, the pan-Islamic phase and the last phase in which he pioneered the Muslim independence movement. By regarding each phase as being quite different from and independent of the other phases, one almost always reaches the conclusion that either Iqbal's political views changed with astonishing rapidity or that he could not make up his mind and was inconsistent. One can indeed see Iqbal first as a young poet with rather narrow parochial sympathies which gradually widened into love of homeland, and then gave way to love of Islam which later became transformed into love of humanity. However, he can also be seen as a visionary, whose ideal from first to last was the realization of God's Kingdom on Earth, who believed in the interrelatedness, equality and freedom of human beings, and who strove at all times to achieve these

goals; and by viewing Iqbal in this one light, one attains a much better understanding of his political philosophy.

Iqbal's interest in politics was secondary not primary. In his historic address at Lahore, in 1932, he made this clear:

Politics have their roots in the spiritual life of Man. It is my belief that Islam is not a matter of private opinion. It is a society, or if you like, a civic Church. It is because present-day political ideals, as they appear to be shaping themselves in India, may affect its original structure and character that I find myself interested in politics. (Iqbal 1964: 288)

Iqbal's impact on the political situation of the Muslims in India was so great that he is hailed as the 'spiritual' founder of Pakistan. Undoubtedly, there was much focus on the Islamic community in his major works written between 1908 and 1938. Nevertheless, when accused by Lowes Dickinson of being exclusive in his thinking, Iqbal denied the allegation and said:

The humanitarian ideal is always universal in poetry and philosophy, but if you make it an effective ideal...you must start, not with poets and philosophers, but with a society exclusive in the sense of having a creed and well-defined outline.... Such a society according to my belief is Islam. This society has so far proved itself a more successful opponent of the race-idea which is probably the hardest barrier in the way 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. The object of my Persian poems is not to make out a case for Islam: my aim is simply to discover a universal social reconstruction, and in this endeavour, I find it philosophically impossible to ignore a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race. (Iqbal 1964: 98–9)

Critical evaluation

Iqbal undertook the task of uniting faith and knowledge, love and reason, heart and mind. In the case of a writer at once so prolific and so provocative, there is bound to be considerable controversy in the evaluation of the measure of his success. Some regard Iqbal's thought as mainly eclectic, while others regard it as exciting and original. But surely it is true that if any thinker has succeeded – to whatever degree – in the task of building a bridge between East and West, it is Iqbal.

One of the most important questions to be asked regarding Iqbal's work as a philosopher is, from what point of view is it to be judged? Inevitably the work of every philosopher must be subjected to the test of coherence and consistency. On the whole, Iqbal's philosophy sustains this test. Like any other philosopher he has first principles which seem to him self-evident, and which he therefore does not seek to defend. Like most other philosophers, there are times and places where he is not very clear or is evasive and unwilling to commit himself. Many writers have also seen a number of contradictions (which appear in some specific part of his thought, usually in his socio-political philosophy) disappear when viewed in the larger context of his total philosophy.

List of works

Iqbal, M. (1903) *'Ilm-ul-iqtisad (The Science of Economics)*, Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1961. (Iqbal's first published book in Urdu was also the first book on economics to be published in Urdu, and contains a number of important socioeconomic ideas which were to become important elements of his philosophy of the individual and communal ego.)

Iqbal, M. (1908) *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Lahore: Bazm-Iqbal, 1964. (Iqbal's doctoral dissertation in which he traces the logical continuity of Persian thought.)

Iqbal, M. (1915) *Asrar-e-khudi (The Secrets of the Self)*, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons; trans. R.A. Nicholson, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1950. (Iqbal's first volume of poetry in Farsi, in which he laid the foundations of his philosophy of life based on the mysticism of the struggle, the continuing endeavour of the self to fully actualize its potential.)

Iqbal, M. (1918) *Rumuz-e-bekhudi (The Mysteries of Selflessness)*, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons; trans. A. Arberry, London: John Murray, 1953. (This volume of Farsi poetry is concerned with the role of the individual in a community and forms the basis of Iqbal's social and political philosophy.)

Iqbal, M. (1923) *Payam-e-mashriq (The Message of the East)*, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf. (This volume of Farsi poetry was inspired by Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*, and highlights those social and religious ideas which have a bearing on the spiritual development of individuals and communities.)

Iqbal, M. (1924) *Bang-e-dara (The Sound of the Caravan Bell)*, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons. (Iqbal's first collection of poetry in Urdu, which contains some of his best known and most inspiring poems such as 'Shikwa' (The Complaint) and 'Jawab-e-shikwa' (The Response to the Complaint).)

Iqbal, M. (1927) *Zabur-e-'ajam (The Persian Psalms)*, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons. (In this volume of Farsi poetry, Iqbal's philosophy of love finds exquisite expression.)

Iqbal, M. (1930) *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf. (This is one of the most important works of philosophy in modern Islam, in which Iqbal formulates a new Muslim metaphysics in the light of the philosophical tradition of Islam and recent developments in various domains of human knowledge.)

Iqbal, M. (1932) *Javid nama (The Pilgrimage of Eternity)*, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons. (This volume of Farsi poetry is Iqbal's magnum opus, modelled on the Prophet's *me'raj* or ascension to the presence of God, which is a symbol of self-realization.)

Iqbal, M. (1933) *Musafir (The Traveller)*, Lahore: Shaikh Mubarak Ali. (This volume of Farsi poetry records Iqbal's visit to Afghanistan at the invitation of King Nadir Shah.)

Iqbal, M. (1935) *Bal-e-Jibril (Gabriel's Wing)*, Lahore: Shaikh Mubarak Ali. (Iqbal's second volume of poetry in Urdu is an acknowledged masterpiece in terms of its literary quality and its prophetic call to action.)

Iqbal, M. (1936) *Zarb-e-alim (The Stroke of Moses)*, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons. (This volume of Urdu poetry contains Iqbal's critique of the modern age in the light of the symbol of Moses, a seeker of God who insisted on seeing God.)

Iqbal, M. (1938) *Armaghan-i-hijaz (The Gift of Hijaz)*, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons. (This volume, containing both Farsi and Urdu poetry, was published posthumously and sums up what Iqbal believed to be the teaching of the Prophet from the Hijaz, the symbol of the desert which represents a life of struggle and austerity.)

Iqbal, M. (1948) *Speeches and Statements*, ed. Shamloo, Lahore: Al-Manar Academy. (Collection of shorter works on a variety of subjects.)

Iqbal, M. (1961) *Stray Reflections*, ed. J. Iqbal, Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons. (Collection of Iqbal's reflections on a number of topics, ranging from the philosophical to the practical.)

Iqbal, M. (1964) *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, ed. S.A. Vahid, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf. (Contains Iqbal's historic addresses and significant writings on a number of subjects.)

References and further reading

Arnold, T.W. (1928) *The Islamic Faith*, London: Benn. (An important work on Islam by Iqbal's teacher, mentor and friend.)

Hassan, R. (ed.) (1977) *The Sword and the Sceptre*, Lahore: Iqbal Academy. (A collection of historic writings on the life and work of Iqbal.)

Hassan, R. (1979) *An Iqbal Primer*, Lahore: Aziz. (An introduction to Iqbal's philosophy, analysing the salient ideas in each of his works.)

Schimmel, A.M. (1963) *Gabriel's Wing*, Leiden: Brill. (By far the best treatment of Iqbal's poetic metaphysics.)

Sinha, S. (1947) *Iqbal, the Poet and his Message*, Allahabad: R.N. Lal. (Interesting discussion of Iqbal's poetic style and its philosophical relevance.)

Vahid, S.A. (1959) *Iqbal: His Art and Thought*, London: John Murray. (A comprehensive overview of Iqbal's literary and philosophical ideas by a noted Iqbal scholar.)

"Iqbal, Muhammad (1877-1938)," in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward Craig, Routledge, London, U.K., 1998.