

LIFE AND WORK OF IQBAL
WHY MUHAMMAD IQBAL HAS CONTEMPORARY VALUE

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HIS LIFE

Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was born on 9th November 1877 in Sialkot, now in Pakistan's Punjab province. His father, Sheikh Noor Muhammad, was a tailor by profession and a pious individual with a mystic bent – he had received no formal education but could read Urdu and Persian books and treasured the company of scholars and mystics, some of whom called him an “unlettered philosopher”. Iqbal's mother, Imam Bibi, was illiterate but was highly respected in the family as a wise and generous woman who quietly gave financial help to the poor and needy and arbitrated in neighbours' disputes.

A few days before the birth of Iqbal, his father had a dream: “I saw a big crowd gathered in a large field. A magnificent coloured bird was flying over our heads and everyone was admiring it and trying to catch it, but none succeeded, and at last, it got tired of its flight and fell into my lap.” He understood this to be a message that God was about to bless him with a world-famous son. Hence, the “unlettered philosopher” gave his son the name Muhammad Iqbal – the word Iqbal, whose origins lie in the Arabic language, means recognition, stature, respect, and fortune.

About four hundred years before Iqbal's birth, his Brahmin ancestors, who lived in Kashmir (Northern India), had converted to Islam. In the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when Afghan rule in Kashmir was being replaced by Sikh rule, Iqbal's great grandfather emigrated from Kashmir to Sialkot.

Stage One: Sialkot 1877–1895

At the age of four, Iqbal's parents sent him to a mosque where he learnt how to read the Quran, and in later life Iqbal fondly related several anecdotes to show how his attitudes were subtly but decisively influenced by his early training. At the age of five, Iqbal became a student of Sayyid Mir Hasan, a distinguished scholar of religion and literature who headed a *madrassa* (religious school) in Sialkot city. Mir Hassan instructed Iqbal in the Islamic religious heritage, and also helped him

cultivate a highly refined literary taste. Furthermore, Mir Hassan also spotted the talent of the young Iqbal and persuaded Iqbal's father to have Iqbal admitted to Sialkot's Scotch Mission College, where Mir Hasan himself was a professor of Arabic. From there, Iqbal passed his intermediate or F.A. in 1895.

While at Scotch Mission, Iqbal started composing poetry at the age of 15 or 16 years, and became a student by correspondence of Mirza Dagh of Delhi, a famous Urdu poet, who was also known as the "Nightingale of India." By the age of 18 years, Iqbal had acquired all that Sialkot had to offer him, and Dagh had also advised that Iqbal's poetic art needed no further correction.

These Early years and his parents' training gave Iqbal a deep religious and mystical orientation, which he was to retain for the rest of his life. His love for the Islamic scripture, the Quran, is well-known. Iqbal has himself claimed that his poetry is no more than an elucidation of the Quranic message. His father once advised him to read the Quran as if it were being revealed to him direct from God, for only then, he said, would Iqbal truly understand it. This remark left an indelible impression on Iqbal's mind. In one of his verses, Iqbal pleads to the Prophet Muhammad:

If indeed there is anything in my words other than the Quran,
Then, O Prophet... ... Disgrace me on the day of reckoning,
And do not allow me the honour of kissing your feet.

Iqbal always attributed his love for the Islamic scripture to his father's spiritual influence, saying that he had not formed his view of life through philosophical investigation but had 'inherited' it. The influence of Mir Hasan on Iqbal, too, was formative. A committed and enlightened scholar, Mir Hassan instilled in Iqbal the love for Islamic heritage and also introduced him to modern learning. When the British government offered Knighthood to Iqbal in 1922, he made his acceptance conditional upon recognition of Mir Hassan's scholarship. When asked at that juncture to name Mir Hassan's most famous work, Iqbal replied, "I am his most famous work." Accordingly, when Iqbal received the Knighthood in 1923, Mir Hassan received the title of *Shams-ul-Ulama* (the Sun of the Scholars).

Stage Two: Lahore 1895 –1905

Iqbal moved to Lahore in 1895 to study at the famous Government College, where he spent four years, earning his B.A. in 1897 (reading English, philosophy, and Arabic), and his M.A. in philosophy in 1899. He was appointed the MacLeod Arabic Reader at Lahore's Oriental College, where he taught history, philosophy, and economics, and worked on research and translation projects. Iqbal also served as Assistant Professor of English at Government College Lahore for a short while.

It was in Lahore that Iqbal's intellectual and literary talents blossomed as he was exposed to the broad and vigorous tradition of European learning. The most important influence on Iqbal here was the able mentorship of Sir Thomas Arnold, who had taught at Aligarh until 1898 and coached and encouraged Iqbal to undertake several research projects. So writes Mustansir Mir, "The precious stone discovered by Mir Hasan in Sialkot was polished into a glittered jewel by Sir Thomas Arnold in Lahore."

Lahore boasted several literary societies where poets presented their work before the general public. Iqbal quickly established his credentials there as a fine poet. He started with conventional themes of Urdu poetry – love, suffering experienced on separation from the beloved, and desire to re-unite with the beloved, employing the form of *ghazal* (or love poem) to that end. Later on, he chose and perfected the form of *nazm* (or narrative verse), as the principal form of his poetry. He ripped apart the rigid framework of convention with his novel images that enthralled his audience, winning him praise from noted poets and critics of that time.

Iqbal's poetry showed an increasing influence of English literature, and political thought (both European and Indian) started figuring in his message as he started to deal with themes of patriotism. Most importantly, his work received a new direction through his association with the Society for the Support of Islam (the *Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam*), which was established in 1884 to offer financial aid to students, widows, and orphans, and to offer vocational training to the poor. The Society's annual fundraising events were widely attended, and it was at such an annual event held on 24th February 1900 that Iqbal famously read his poem 'The Orphan's Lament', described to the following effect:

Iqbal stood up and took place. He was a thin, fair skinned, handsome and bespectacled young man who had adorned a black *achkan* and a Turkish fez over a white *shalwar qameez*. The subject of his verse bore sadness, his language was simple, his voice loud and clear, and his powerful delivery created pin-drop silence. When he drew his picture of the pitiful condition of the orphans, all eyes were filled with tears. Thereafter in this poem when he presented the orphans before the Prophet Muhammad, the audience started howling and screaming in sorrow, and when finally the Prophet Muhammad appealed for the orphans' aid, every pocket in the audience was emptied in contributing to the cause."

The audience was so moved that Iqbal was asked to re-read the entire poem, and the Society's fund-raising event that year was more than successful. This also won Iqbal tremendous acclaim, and he became instantly famous as an accomplished poet and thinker in pre-independence India.

Under Arnold's tutelage, Iqbal the poet also now became Iqbal the academic. He taught and wrote prolifically on a range of diverse subjects, and wrote and published his first Urdu book on the principles of economics in 1903. Arnold motivated Iqbal to pursue higher studies in the West, even though Iqbal had probably already begun the process of intellectually synthesizing the Eastern and Western traditions. Thus writes Mustansir Mir, "In the fertile soil of Lahore, the sapling of Sialkot had become a sturdy tree."

Stage Three: Europe 1905 – 1908

In 1905, Iqbal arrived in Cambridge, entering Trinity College as a research scholar. Cambridge was then a renowned centre of Arabic and Persian studies. Its luminaries included the orientalist Reynold M. Nicholson, who later translated Iqbal's Persian poetical work *Asrar-i Khudi* into English in 1920, and the philosopher John McTaggart who Iqbal met with and whose lectures Iqbal attended. Iqbal also enrolled as a student of law at Lincoln's Inn in London, and, at Sir Thomas Arnold's

suggestion, registered as a doctoral student at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in Germany.

In June 1907, Iqbal earned an M.A. from Cambridge, in November 1907 Munich University awarded him a Ph.D. for his thesis on The Development of Metaphysics in Persia, and in July 1908, Iqbal was called to the Bar in London. Thus, in three intense years, Iqbal remarkably earned three degrees from three prestigious institutions, which none of his famous contemporaries like Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru, or Rabindra Nath Tagore, could accomplish in such short time.

Iqbal also acquired sound knowledge of the German language. Already familiar in translation, now he was in a position to make a first-hand, in-depth study of the German philosophical and literary tradition. References to German writers and their thoughts thereafter became more frequent in his works, and he began to see himself playing in India a role similar to that played in Germany by Goethe, whom he greatly admired.

Sir Thomas Arnold continued to play an important role in Iqbal's education and intellectual upbringing. Iqbal frequently stayed with Arnold on visits to London, and also stood in for Arnold as professor of Arabic when Arnold was on leave for six months. Iqbal's doctoral thesis, upon publication, was dedicated to Sir Thomas Arnold.

In his three years in Europe, Iqbal made close and critical study of Western civilization, on which he was to comment in much of his later work. While he admired certain aspects of that civilization, he was critical of its secular character and warned Muslims of blindly imitating the West. "The storm from the West has transformed Muslims into real Muslims" wrote Iqbal in his landmark poem *Tulū-i Islam* (The Rise of Islam), an observation that applied first and foremost to Iqbal himself as he underwent a major change in his view and estimation of nationalism.

He had previously championed the cause of Indian nationalism and had worked to Hindu-Muslim unity. To him, loyalty to the country could co-exist without any serious tension with one's commitment to one's religion. But here he witnessed

first hand the deep discord that jingoistic nationalism had caused among the major European powers and that, several years later, was to climax in World War I. Iqbal's dedication thus turned to the ideological universalism of Islam, and this transformation had far-reaching consequences for his poetry and thought. In a letter dated 28th March 1909 Iqbal famously wrote:

I have always believed that this country (India) should rise above communal differences and even now I am adhering to the same principle in my private life, but I do believe at the same time that it would be best for Muslims and Hindus to keep their separate national identities intact and that the idea of a common Indian nation might look charming and romantic but was totally impracticable in view of ground realities and the inadvertent tendencies of both communities.

Stage Four: Lahore 1908 – 1938

Iqbal Returned to India in July 1908, and set up legal practice in Lahore. He also started teaching philosophy at his alma mater, the Government College. In 1911, the British government under Hindu pressure reversed the 1905 partition of the Bengal province, which caused grave disappointment to the Muslims. The International scene, too, was depressing from the Muslim perspective: Italy had occupied Libya, France annexed Morocco, and several Balkan states attacked Turkey, divesting it of its East European possessions. So to speak, local and international events had caused incredible despair and helplessness in many sensitive Muslims, including Iqbal, whose life from this point on is marked by a growing earnestness of purpose.

In both poetry and prose, Iqbal thus began to address the global plight of Muslims, and, in this process, his philosophical and political ideas started to take more definite shape. His first book of poetry was published in 1915 in the name and style of the Persian work *Asrar-i Khudi* (Secrets of the Self), which addressed the worldwide Muslim community. Upon publication of the English translation of this work by Nicholson in 1920, Iqbal was introduced in the West as a major literary and philosophical writer. Reviewing the English version, Herbert Read compared Iqbal to

the famous American poet Walt Whitman. Several other of Iqbal's Persian and Urdu collections of poetry followed.

Becoming heavily engaged on the intellectual, educational, and social fronts, Iqbal gave public talks and academic lectures, wrote articles for journals and newspapers, assisted in the production of textbooks for students at school and college levels, and corresponded with many people, expressing a wide range of views. His major philosophical work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* was published in 1934. He was also invited to give the Rhodes lectures in 1934, but ill health prevented him from travelling to England.

The worldwide Muslim community – the *Ummah* – became a major focus of Iqbal's attention, and became his sense of mission, in the post-Europe period. From being an Indian nationalist who had written "We are Indians and India our country is the best in the whole world..." he now wrote the Islamic Community Song, proclaiming, "We are Muslims, and the whole world is our country."

In 1926, Iqbal was elected as a member of the Punjab Legislative Council, a position he retained until 1930. He also played an important role in determining the course of the All-India Muslim League, which was to become India's largest Muslim political party. Formerly a supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity, Iqbal eventually become doubtful about the viability of the project – he stood for Hindu-Muslim rapprochement but did not think Hindu-Muslim unity a practical proposition – concluding that the Muslims of India must maintain their distinct religious and cultural identity as he spoke of the need of a separate electoral system for Hindus and Muslims.

In December 1930, at the annual meeting of the All-India Muslim League held at Allahabad, Iqbal delivered his famous presidential address in which he proposed the creation of a separate homeland for at least the Muslims of northwest India. In 1931, he represented the Muslims of India at a meeting of the World Islamic Congress held in Palestine. In 1931 and 1932, again representing India's Muslims, Iqbal participated in the London Round Table Conferences held to decide India's political future. In 1933, he travelled to Afghanistan at the invitation of Nadir Shah, who wished to consult with Iqbal about Afghanistan's political system.

Although he did not live to see the creation of Pakistan in 1947, he is revered as its spiritual father and as its national poet. Iqbal died in Lahore at about dawn on 21st April 1938. His funeral, which was led by the Imam of the historic Badshahi Mosque at Lahore, Maulana Ghulam Murshid, was attended by more than fifty thousand people. He is buried beneath the high walls of the Badshahi Mosque, Lahore, in simple mausoleum designed by Nawab Zain Yar Jang of Hyderabad, Deccan, the exterior of which is made of red stone imported from the city of Dholpur in India and the white marble inside is gifted by Nadir Shah of Afghanistan.

HIS PERSONALITY

In an autobiographical poem “Piety and Impiety” (*Bang-i-Dara*), Iqbal tells of a neighbour, a religious scholar, who had heard that Iqbal, though well-versed in Islamic law and religion, was not exactly a pious individual; that he recited the Quran at dawn, but was also fond of music, which Islam forbids; that, under the influence of his philosophical training, he refused to regard Hindus as infidels; that he was not averse to associating with beautiful women; and that he had Shiite leanings. On accosting the scholar in this poem one day, Iqbal confessed that he himself did not know the truth about himself and that he wished someday ‘to see Iqbal’. There is undoubtedly some humour here, but the essential point made is that Iqbal is a multifaceted personality, and a man of serious disposition by nature and training.

Iqbal had profound respect for the religious and mystical figures of Islamic history – in fact, of world history – as his poetry testifies. While intellectually as well as emotionally, he was devoted to the ideals of Islam, which his early training had inculcated in him, and this devotion only grew with time, he was by no means a religious obscurantist. Several writers have commented on his acceptance of broad humanity, his closest friends included not only Muslims, but also Christians, Hindus and Sikhs, and in his poetry he sang the praises of several famous ancient and modern non-Muslims.

When Iqbal lost his wife in 1935, and, as an ailing man, was left behind with a young son aged eleven years and a little daughter aged five years, he had no qualms about appointing a German woman of Christian faith as his children’s governess. Ironically, when that governess, upon a visit to the missionary school in Lahore where Iqbal’s daughter was attending, came to know that Muslim children were being taught the Bible in one of the classes, protested against it and pressed upon Iqbal to withdraw his daughter from that school, Iqbal overruled the governess, saying that his daughter should understand the basic principles of other religions, and directing that a Muslim teacher could be employed to teach the Quran to his daughter at home.

Iqbal had an affective disposition; it grew out of his sensitive relation to both faith and aesthetics. He wept as he recited the Quran; sometimes, his copy of the

Quran, wet with tears had to be put out in the sun to dry. He was possessed with and admired courage of conviction, creativity, and a dervish mindset embodied by self-sufficiency and indifference to the trappings of power, fame and material things. Powerful verse moved him similarly. On one occasion, he was so overcome with by emotion on reading a set of verses that he almost fainted. One of the high points of his emotional life was his visit to the Cordova Mosque in Spain. The visit took him, in his own words, “to heights I had never experienced before.” His poem ‘Cordova Mosque’ is reckoned by many as his masterpiece.

He was very attentive to detail and was in the habit of meticulously revising his work, which often resulted in delayed publication, and he often destroyed the poems that, in his view, did not meet a certain standard of excellence. But he was always quick to accept and appreciate well-founded criticism.

He became a legend within his lifetime, and his stature has only grown since. In Pakistan, at least, to cite a verse of Iqbal in support of one’s view is practically to clinch the argument in one’s favour. But that was not always the case.

He has had his critics - he was attacked for accepting a Knighthood, for writing poems to commemorate or celebrate certain occasions (like the coronation of King George V or the death of Queen Victoria), for refusing to support the civil-disobedience movement against British rulers, and for addressing God in a seemingly audacious manner in his poetry.

But Iqbal has also had his defenders, including some of the best-known scholars and literary writers, and they have put up a fierce defence of Iqbal against the charges brought against him.

Iqbal lived a simple, dignified, and principled life. His biographers have pointed out that, during most of his life – specially in his last few years, when he was at the height of his fame – he lived in straitened circumstances, and that the British would have been only too happy to patronise him and give him financial support had he asked for it. He was aptly called ‘the poorest knight’.

HIS PUBLICATIONS

Iqbal produced works in three languages: he wrote prose in English, poetry in Persian, and both poetry and prose in Urdu. He has a total of fifteen publications to his credit, comprised of seven collections of Persian poetry, four collections of Urdu poetry, three prose publications in English, and one prose publication in Urdu. His seven Persian collections of poetry are called:

Asrar-i-Khudi (Secrets of the Self)

Rumuz-i-Bikhudi (Secrets of Selflessness)

Payam-i-Mashriq (The Message of the East)

Zubur-i-Ajam (Psalms of Persia)

Javid Nama (Pilgrimage to Eternity)

Pas Chih Bayad Kard Ay Aqwam-i-Sharq (What Must Now be Done O Nations of the East)?

Armughan-i-Hijaz Farsi (The Gift of the Hijaz – Persian)

His four Urdu collections of poetry are called:

Bang-i-Dara (The Clarion Call)

Bal-i-Jibril (Gabriel's Wing)

Zarb-i-Kalim (The Rod of Moses)

Armughan-i-Hijaz Urdu (The Gift of the Hijaz – Urdu)

His three English publications are called:

The Development of Metaphysics in Persia

Stray Reflections

The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam

His solitary Urdu prose publication – his first in 1903 – is called *Ilm-ul Iqtisad* (Political Economy).

HIS POETIC ART, PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT, AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

His Poetry

Iqbal's poetry has an extraordinary variety of themes. A randomly drawn list would include nature, the human situation, *khudi* or selfhood, life as a quest, and Islam as a living faith.

Although Iqbal's poetry has variously dealt with nature, what stands out the most is how nature serves in it as a foil for drawing out man's potential. Nature is described as God's unfinished business – like a rough-hewn rock awaiting a sculptor's hand to chisel a masterpiece from it. Human beings fulfil their proper role in the world in perfecting what is imperfect in nature, thereby also discharging their role as God's co-workers. In a short Persian poem in *Payam-i-Mashriq* "A Dialogue Between God and Man", God accuses man of putting to evil use the benign natural objects:

From the earth I produced pure iron
But you made from that iron sword, arrow and gun.

In his response, man alludes to the enhancement of an otherwise crude and undeveloped nature:

You made deserts, mountains, and valleys;
I made gardens, meadows, and parks;
I am one who makes a mirror out of stone,
And turns poison into sweet delicious drink.

In taking up the human situation, Iqbal places his trust in the human being, a trust vindicated by the contribution that human beings have made in turning the world into a beautiful place. Yet again in *Payam-i-Mashriq*, Iqbal states:

God created the world, but Adam made it better –
Adam perhaps is God's co-worker.

Iqbal also extensively and fascinatingly dwells on the idea that humans, though made of earth, are yet possessed of a certain element that impels them to break free of their earthly limitations and engage in a ceaseless search for loftier goals. In considering these loftier goals, it is pertinent to briefly examine Iqbal as the philosopher of *khudi* or selfhood. Philosophically, Iqbal describes *khudi* as a primordial force, the Ultimate Reality, or the Absolute Ego, whose personal name is God. This force, which we may call Divine *khudi*, through self assertion or self manifestation, gives rise to a phenomenal world.

Iqbal adds that *khudi* is a point of light, and equates to life itself – to quote from his first publication *Asrar-i-Khudi*, *khudi* ‘is the spark of life in our dusty being’. But the source of *khudi*’s light is divine – as stated in his last publication *Armughan-i-Hijaz*, ‘*Khudi* is lit up from the light of the Majestic One’, and its very existence depends on Divine existence. Compared with the rest of creation, the human being possesses *khudi* in a relatively complete form and, for this reason, tops the chain of created things.

Iqbal gives details of how *khudi* might be nurtured. He mentions factors that strengthen *khudi* (for example, love of God and the Prophet Muhammad, devotion to a noble cause, self-discipline, and struggle against odds) and factors that weaken it (for example, dependence on others, and life-negating philosophy and literature).

At the start of the twentieth century, the majority of the world’s Muslims were politically weak, economically backward, and socially disintegrated. To Iqbal, this general decadence of the Muslims was due to the fact that they had forgotten who they were, were ashamed to take pride in their glorious tradition, suffered from a crisis of self-confidence, lacked self-esteem, and had despaired of building a bright future for themselves – in a word, had allowed their *khudi* to waste away.

The concept of *khudi* thus furnishes Iqbal with a reason for judgment: whatever nurtures *khudi* is good, and whatever kills or dampens *khudi* is bad. The theme of *khudi* is closely linked in Iqbal’s works with that of life as quest and discovery. He asserts that the mandate of humans is to bring out their potential to the fullest and to change and mould the world after their hearts’ desire. Thus, conquest of nature is an important way in which human beings affirm their *khudi*. To

show that challenge strengthens *khudi*, Iqbal tells the story of the young man who visited the great saint Ali Hujwairi and complained to him that he was unable to fend off the many enemies that surrounded him. The saint, instead of commiserating with the young man, remarked that a powerful enemy is a blessing from God since such an enemy presents a man with challenges that push him to the limit, thereby bringing out the best in him (*Asrar-i-Khudi*).

Since the human potential is limitless and the task of conquering nature never-ending, life becomes a series of quests. We must progress from one stage to another, never resting on our laurels, always regarding our destination as another milestone along the way (*Payam-i-Mashriq*). Success in life requires strength, and one becomes strong not by passively confirming to the given scheme of things, but by putting the stamp of one's own personality on the resistant environment; the same substance becomes coal through passive conformity to the environment, but it becomes a shining diamond when it seeks to assert itself by challenging the environment (*Asrar-i-Khudi*).

While Iqbal admires the quality of power, he leaves plenty of room for the play of the finer human feelings. His ideal is a man who has a body of steel that houses a tender, compassionate heart, as stated in *Payam-i-Mashriq*:

Build, with your handful of dust,
A body stronger than a rock fortress,
And inside this body let there be a heart that feels sorrow –
Like a stream flowing by a mountain.

Iqbal was a keen and appreciative student of early Islamic history. He firmly believed in the validity of the Islamic Project initiated by the Prophet Muhammad in seventh-century Arabia. Guided by Divine revelation, the Prophet aimed at establishing a model community that would at one be religious and humane, spiritual and egalitarian. But, in Iqbal's view, while the Islamic Project under Prophet Muhammad and his immediate successors did produce the desired results, it later went off course, with disastrous results – even though, from time to time, and here and there, the project was revived in part, leading Muslims to make remarkable achievements in diverse areas. As the political system degenerated from Caliphate

to kingship, justice-based *Sharia* was replaced with a system of treachery and palace intrigues. The resultant decadence and barrenness of the *Ummah* thus became Iqbal's main pre-occupation.

Iqbal asserts in *Payam-i-Mashriq* that commitment to Islam will not by itself work miracles. Muslims must realize that life is a struggle and not a set of rights to be claimed unconditionally. They should understand that the particular community to which they belong requires them to sink their tribal, ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic differences so that they might create a body politic that is founded on Islam's universal and inclusive principles; a Muslim's first identity is as a Muslim, and not as an Afghan, Turk, or Tartar. They must also learn the lesson of self-reliance: they should be like the self-respecting Turkish sailor who sang as he rowed his boat, saying that if he ran into trouble on the high seas, he would call upon none other than the storm itself for help.

In short, Iqbal has used poetry to state and argue a for a carefully formed and passionately held world view. He writes in what may be called High Urdu and High Persian, his poetry acquiring early on its distinctive quality, which is best described by the Arabic word *jalaal* or the Persian word *shikoh*, both signifying 'majesty, stateliness, and grandeur'.

Iqbal's vocabulary is, ultimately, instrumental in character; he uses it to convey his understanding of life and reality. He holds, particularly, that existence is marked by perpetual change and movement. To begin with, the cosmos is in motion – the stars, the moon, and the sun are all travelling through space. But Iqbal does not simply note the fact of change and movement; he sees meaning in the fact: the heavenly bodies are in motion because they are earnestly pursuing a goal or seeking a destination.

Noting a similar change and movement in human history, in human society, and in the individual human being, Iqbal seeks correspondence between the condition of human beings and the condition of the heavenly bodies. He goes one step further. Not content to situate the human being within the cosmos, he seeks to incorporate the cosmos within the human being. The human being is the primary fact – Adam created by God and meant to rule over the universe – all other

existence enjoying only secondary status; it is the human being who manages and exploits the world and assigns value to it. In principle, then, the human being towers above the universe, the story of the human being thus becoming the story of a being with a stature and importance next only to God's – a being whom Iqbal calls God's colleague or co-worker in *Payam-i-Mashriq*.

His Philosophical Thought

Coupled with Iqbal's poetic art is his philosophical thought, most famously embodied in his *magnum opus* 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam', which represents his most complex and least understood work. The seven lectures of the book bear the mark of a brilliant intellect that is seriously engaged with the diverse Western and Islamic philosophical traditions, offering a spirited analysis of issues and presenting an original synthesis of ideas.

In this book, Iqbal discusses, cites, or refers to the works and ideas of over one hundred and fifty thinkers and writers from both the Islamic and Western philosophical and literary traditions. Iqbal's aim in these lectures is to address the demand for a scientific form of religious knowledge by attempting to reconstruct Muslim religious philosophy with due regard to the philosophical tradition of Islam on the one hand and the more recent developments in the various domains of human knowledge, particularly science.

In so doing, Iqbal underscores the necessity of reconstructing Muslim political philosophy to make it compatible with the modern mind's inclination towards concrete thought driven by science. Such reconstruction comes under the concept of *tajdid*, the Islamic technical term for a significant 'renewal' or 'rejuvenation' of Islamic religion. Although Iqbal hopes that religion and science, now estranged from each other, will one day find common ground, it is evident that he regards the modern mind's incapability of reliving religious experience as an impoverishment, or even as a disability.

One of Iqbal's Indian Muslim predecessors, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, sought to bridge the gap between religion and science by putting science on a high pedestal

and requiring religion to adjust to scientific dictates. By contrast, Iqbal's view is that the scientific mind would do well to relive religious experience.

In the fifth of the seven Reconstruction lectures, titled 'The Spirit of Muslim Culture', Iqbal emphasizes that the Quranic view of nature as something concrete, and its view of the universe as dynamic, eventually led Muslim thinkers to revolt against the speculative Greek thought, which at first they had embraced. The revolt, joined by prominent theologians, philosophers, and scientists over a course of centuries, manifested itself in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and logic. The experimental method, born of the anti-classical spirit of Islam, is the product of Islamic culture, from which it was borrowed by Europe.

In the sixth of the seven lectures, also widely believed to be Iqbal's finest, titled 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam', Iqbal underscores the need to reconstruct Islamic law. He argues that in Islam, the Ultimate Reality – God – is the eternal spiritual ground of all life, which expresses itself in variety and change. An Islamic society must, therefore, reconcile eternal principles with the possibilities of change, and it must have a principle of movement to mediate between the two categories. *Ijtihad* – technically, the endeavour to form an independent legal judgment – is such a principle in Islam. Iqbal emphasizes that that shutting the door on *ijtihad* as has been done by conservative thought has immobilized the legal system of a religion whose scripture takes a dynamic view of life.

The 'independent reasoning' embodied by *ijtihad* signifies responsible intellectual effort exerted to arrive at a legal ruling on a matter that is not clearly pronounced upon in the fundamental principles of Islamic law, namely, the Quran and the Sunnah (Prophetic Conduct). It is in the context of his general philosophical conception of the dynamic nature of the universe and of human life that Iqbal states his views on Islamic law. Society, like everything else, undergoes constant change – and, consequently, has to reckon with the demands of change. But unbridled change is no less a destructive force than blind rigidity. *Ijtihad*, accordingly, is the Islamic instrument for accommodating and negotiating change in society. It goes without saying that *ijtihad* must be carried out within the limits proper to it. By way of example, the caliphate may be vested in a group of persons or in an elected body.

His Political Discourse

In his political philosophy, Iqbal argues that the essence of *Tawhid* (Islamic monotheism), as a working idea is equality, solidarity, and freedom. The state, from an Islamic standpoint, is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into a realization of definite human organization. In a short Urdu poem in *Bang-i-Dara*, Iqbal refers to a nation as a body and the individuals comprising it to its limbs: those in industry are the nation's hands and feet, those who help to administer the government are its beautiful face, and those who cultivate arts – Iqbal mentions poets as representing this class – are its eyes.

It follows that the failure of society's leaders or representatives can have disastrous consequences for the entire society. This understanding lies behind Iqbal's scathing critique of the leaders of historical Muslim societies. Iqbal holds the following three factors especially responsible for the general decadence of the Muslim world in recent centuries:

(1) *Mullaism*. This is the name Iqbal gives to the hidebound attitude of the *mullas*, the conventional ulema, or religious scholars. Always a source of strength to Islam', the ulema, 'during the course of centuries, especially since the destruction of Baghdad in 1258... became extremely conservative and would not allow any freedom or *ijtihad*, i.e. the forming of independent judgment in matters of law.

(2) *Mysticism*. In the history of Muslim societies, mysticism used to be, in the words of Iqbal, 'a force of spiritual education'. In the later centuries it disintegrated, cutting off Muslims from the actualities of life. Mystical practices increasingly became a mere means of exploiting the ignorance and gullibility of people. He adds that this created in Muslims the tendency to ignore the Law – the only force holding together Muslim society, and replaced Muslim Democracy with Spiritual Aristocracy.

(3) *Kingship*. Protection of their 'dynastic interests' being their first priority, Muslim kings did not hesitate to sell their countries to the highest bidder.

Iqbal's criticism of mullaism, mysticism, and kingship as the main factors responsible for the decadence of Muslim societies is not a blanket criticism of Muslim legists, mystics, and rulers. Iqbal held that, in early Islamic history, the three institutions of law, mysticism, and politics embodied, for varying lengths of time, the dynamic Islamic spirit. In later periods, however the legists became prisoners of formalism, the mystics were seduced by a false dichotomy of spirit and matter, and the rulers sacrificed collective interest at the altar of personal gain. The fact that the same institutions can be, at one time, forces of progress, and at another time, forces of decadence, suggests that they need to and can be reformed.

Therefore, instead of calling for a wholesale rejection of tradition, Iqbal aims at reinvigorating it – by subjecting it to a critical scrutiny, with a view to retaining its kernel and discarding its husk. Iqbal emphasized that the existence of competent leaders is crucial to a society's viability and progress, but so is the well-being – especially the economic well-being – of the masses. "It is the masses who are the backbone of the nation; they ought to be better fed, better housed, and properly educated" he wrote in a letter, adding that "Muslim social organizations should realize that their main obligation is to elevate the masses, not to exalt an individual".

As an elected member of the Punjab Legislative Council between 1926 and 1930, Iqbal often spoke on land revenue and taxation, demanding greater justice in land assessment and even land revenue deductions in hardship cases. In a speech made on the floor of the house in March 1927, he pleaded the case for compulsory primary education, and in a speech a couple of months later, he advocated for better sanitation conditions in villages as well as for medical aid to India's women. He additionally emphasized the importance of technical education as a means of achieving general economic prosperity. He was also, admittedly, a social democrat as stated in a letter to Mohammad Ali Jinnah dated 28th May 1937:

For Islam the acceptance of social democracy in some suitable form and consistent with the legal principles of Islam is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam. The modern problems therefore are far more easy to solve for the Muslims than for the Hindus. But as I have said above in order to make it possible for Muslim India to solve the problems it is necessary to redistribute the country and to

provide one or more Muslim states with absolute majorities. Don't you think that the time for such a demand has already arrived? Perhaps this is the best reply you can give to the atheistic socialism of Jawahar Lal Nehru.

Iqbal is often called a pan-Islamist, but this can be misleading. Iqbal wished to unify the Muslims of the world, but their unification, in his view, would have a spiritual rather than a geographical basis. He nowhere proposes that the existing Muslim countries should abolish their borders and create a universal Muslim state ruled by a single caliph. He grants the possibility of the simultaneous existence of many Muslim states and many Muslim rulers.

It is well known that, for a period of time, Iqbal was a proponent of Indian nationalism, but political developments in the country led him to remark that "India's most difficult problem is the communal problem", namely, the problem of the conflict-ridden relationship between Hindus and Muslims. Eventually, he was convinced that "the essential disparity between the two cultural units of India would not permit the hoped-for coexistence." This is what led him to deliver the historical Allahabad address of 1930 in which he proposed the creation of a state for the Muslims of India.

Besides that, Iqbal also took practical steps to unite Indian Muslims under one political banner. In the first place, he strove to make the All-India Muslim League the representative political party of the country's Muslims. Secondly, he was instrumental in persuading Mohammad Ali Jinnah to again become active in practical politics and provide much-needed leadership to India's Muslims. In emphasizing the preservation of Muslim cultural identity as the first priority of India's Muslims, he also advised that the All-India Muslim League, in order to be successful, ought to rely on Muslim masses rather than on elite Muslim groups.

HIS CONTEMPORARY VALUE

In assessing Muhammad Iqbal's contemporary value, let us begin with a quote from Mustansir Mir:

It is generally granted that Iqbal is both one of the most significant and one of the most influential Muslim writers and thinkers of modern times... Iqbal's greatness consists in interpreting the spirit of Islamic culture in a way that shows Islam to be a dynamic, forward-looking, and all-encompassing movement that not only has profound meaning for those who believe in the religion, but also promises to serve as a force for good in the world at large. In the history of modern thought – when that history deigns to recognise the merit of the works of non-Western thinkers – Iqbal will be remembered as one who mounted a spirited defence of the possibility of religion in a so-called scientific age.

The foremost aspect of Iqbal's work that thus earns him contemporary value is the elevation of the human being – the transformation and well-being of man – at the individual and collective levels through self, selfhood, and self-identity as embodied in his concept of *khudi*. He furnishes the formulae on how to strengthen, intensify, and raise one's self, and highlights what dissipates, destroys, and disintegrates the same. Driven by the Quranic force that God has infused his own spirit in man, Iqbal's teachings are emphatic about man bearing witness that God is indeed present in him for therein lies the essence of moral and spiritual life. Iqbal thus condemns every economic, moral, or socio-political structure, may it be internal or international, that depresses the dignity and sanctity of man and is keen to reconstruct it in a manner that may restore the vicegerency of man in this world.

Another key aspect of Iqbal's work in this regard is his explanation that the essence of the Islamic concept of *Tauhid* as a working idea, is human unity, human equality and human freedom. This opinion, that humanity unites in divinity, that humanity attains equality in divinity, that humanity attains freedom in divinity, that if this divinity were denied and disrespected, mankind would be divided and

disintegrate, serves as a beacon light towards interfaith harmony and the dialogue of civilizations in this day and age.

Finally, the value of Iqbal's attempts to reconcile religion with science is also of paramount contemporary importance, particularly in the field of education. Iqbal categorizes knowledge into observational/scientific knowledge for which God has endowed man with sense perception and has directed him to employ these senses for understanding and utilizing what surrounds him for his own good and that of all mankind, and revelational knowledge, which relies on intuition, and shows the light towards the ends and ideals of life and the very purpose of human existence. Iqbal thus makes the Quranic recommendation that power gained through science and technology should be exercised as directed by revelation, as that power, exercised alone, could destroy mankind. Accordingly, if education is bereft of moral content, it would fail to serve its purpose here and in the hereafter. Iqbal's hope therefore that religion and science, now estranged from each other, will one day find common ground, thus awaits fruition.

It would be in the fitness of things to close this presentation with yet another quote from Mustansif Mir:

But perhaps Iqbal's most enduring legacy consists of his zestful affirmation of life. A study of Iqbal's life reveals that he was interested in practically everything that life had to offer. He read much, he dreamed much, and he hoped much, he corresponded with many people, as he had made close friendships with many people from many different communities and nationalities, and, above all, he was open to new ideas. His readers find his works to be inspiring. No less inspiring to them is his decidedly positive attitude to life.