



## Allama Iqbal - A View and a Critique

Syed Khalid Kamal

Any views expressed here are mine own and I am prepared to amend them should sufficient evidence be presented. I am no great scholar yet there are questions in respect of Iqbal's poetry and religious ideas and the impact he had on the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent that should be critically examined.

Pakistanis have raised Iqbal to heights he neither aspired nor deserves here are the examples. Some of the titles ascribed to him are gross and unnecessary exaggerations. Let us take them one by one.

**Hakeem-ul-Ummet:** Hakeem may refer to someone who has "*hikma*" or wisdom or it may refer to someone who heals people when they are sick. In an allegorical way it may be referring to Mr. Iqbal's ideas on his favored political and religious solutions for the Muslims of India. I am not sure if *Ummet* refers to fans and followers of Mr. Iqbal in the Indo-Pak subcontinent or the entire Muslim world. Surely even the entire population of the Indian sub-continents neither understands nor subscribes to Iqbal's views political or religious. That only leaves Muslims more particularly Muslims of Pakistan as the *Ummet* not the entire Muslim *Ummet*.

**Shair-e-Mushraq:** I won't bother explaining what is a *Shair*. *Mashraq* in Arabic, Persian and Urdu means East. All of the countries starting from International Date Line to the Suez Canal and east of Bosphorus and Russia (except Eurasia) are considered the East. I can't even count the number of languages and dialects spoken in such a vast region. Linguistic domain of Mr. Iqbal's creative endeavors was Persian and Urdu. Two languages spoken by a relatively small minority of Asia, consisting of 10 % of the population at most. Mr. Iqbal was certainly a great poet of Urdu language (since his Persian work was somewhat smaller). On the basis of these facts to call him the poet of the East is a poetic exaggeration.

**Philosophy of Iqbal's:** Mr. Iqbal obtained a degree in philosophy from Heidelberg University, Germany in 1905. The title of his paper was *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy*. As it is plain to see it was an exploration of the History of Muslim

Philosophy. Philosophy as a discipline is not Muslim, Christian or Hindu, it is just philosophy. Mr. Iqbal's work did not advance the body of knowledge we call philosophy in any significant way nor did he teach or conducted research in it beyond his doctoral thesis.

What is the classical definition of a philosopher? The best one I can find is the following:

- a. a person who studies ideas about knowledge, truth, the nature and meaning of life, etc.
- b. a person who studies philosophy.
- c. a person who seeks wisdom or enlightenment.
- d. Scholar, Thinker.
- e. a student of philosophy.
- f. a person whose philosophical perspective makes meeting trouble with equanimity easier.
- g. an expounder of a theory in a particular area of experience.
- h. one who philosophizes.

As you can see there is a host of meaning to the word philosopher. The primary one being "a". Religious ideas are exempt from evaluation as knowledge, truth or facts. They fall into the category of beliefs or doctrines usually revealed by a deity or handed down from tradition and accepted without proof by an individual or a group.

Mr. Iqbal's views do not fall into the category of knowledge or truth as accepted by logic or the scientific method. I can offer further reasons why his ideas or philosophy cannot be accepted as facts, truth or knowledge. In order to pass scientific muster, the ideas must be capable of being debated, evaluated, and examined in cold light of human logic and reasoning. Most scholars and philosophers not only conduct original research, but teach and advance their particular branch of knowledge in one way or another. Mr. Iqbal did research of a purely historical nature so we may accept him as a scholar, but we can't put him down as other philosophers of western thought.

Of course I shall be deluged with objections on the use of the word western thought. There is a long line of philosophers from all parts of the world including Greece, Italy, Germany, the British Isles, and many other countries. Some of their theories were later repudiated upon further examination and discovery of more solid evidence or reasoning. Unfortunately, we can't subject Mr. Iqbal's ideas to the same rigorous examination due to their nature.

So far I have tried to show that Mr. Iqbal was representative of a small linguistic and religious group in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, he cannot be considered representative of the views or ideas of the entire East, nor can his work be considered a philosophical work. These were musings of a dedicated Muslim,

and his poetry is beautiful and enjoyable. To take another example: Ghalib's poetry contains many beautiful, unique and universal ideas but no one calls him a philosopher. It is my sincere beliefs that we like many peoples of the world have a habit of making our heroes larger than they really are out of love or devotion to them.

I could end it here, but I need to show that Mr. Iqbal knew many of his ideas were false and he still promoted them out of religious conviction. Take for example: *Juda ho dee'n siyasat say to rah jati hay changeezi*. Iqbal knew full well about the constitutional British monarchy which had been in existence for well over 500 years and Icelandic democracy had existed for nearly 900 years at the time of his writing these lines. But he just wanted to promote his ideas facts didn't and couldn't get in his way. *Shikwa* and *Jawab-e-Shikwa* a dialogue between man and a mythical being called God. That wasn't stuff of facts either. *Du neem unki thoker say sahra-o-darya*, that too was a poetic expression nothing to do with reality.

Many of his ideas were indeed beautiful and universal in their appeal.

*Wo ada-e-dilbari ho kay nava-e-ashiqana,  
Jo dilo'n ko fatah kar le wohi fath-e-zamana*

*Afrad kay hathoon mein hay aqwaam ki taqdeer,  
Her fard hay millat kay muqudder ka sitara.*

I believe there is very little correlation between poetry of Iqbal and facts or reality as the world knows it and we ought to acknowledge it. He was a man for the times, Muslims needed to be uplifted and inspired and he obliged with ease. I love Iqbal and enjoy him the same way I enjoy other great poets of our language. But to seek guidance for personal or political lives in Iqbal's poetry can only end in disaster. I sincerely apologize if my ideas cause pain or hurt to anyone, but all is fair in the pursuit of truth. Thank you and have a wonderful day.

Reader's comments and critique is warmly welcomed and greatly appreciated. The author is a retired Pakistani Engineer, divides his time between Canada and Pakistan. A social observer of liberal values, and a secular humanist. E-mail: spib1971@gmail.com
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