IQBAL, MUHAMMAD

IQBAL, MUHAMMAD (1877-1938; FIGURE 1), the spiritual father of Pakistan and leading Persian and Urdu poet of India in the first half of the 20th century. Born in Sialkot on 9 November 1877, Iqbal first learned Arabic and Persian, finished the Scotch Mission College in his hometown, and then joined the University of the Punjab in Lahore. After teaching for some time in the Oriental College, Iqbal, already known as a fine poet in Urdu, traveled to Cambridge (1905) on the advice of Sir Thomas Arnold (q.v.) to study Neo-Hegelian philosophy and law. In the summer of 1907 he went to Heidelberg to learn German, and submitted a thesis on “The Development of Metaphysics in Persia” at the University of Munich in November 1907. One year later he returned to Lahore, where he taught philosophy for some time; but he spent most of his life as a lawyer.

The period of his spiritual change can be witnessed in his notebook *Stray Reflections* (1910). In 1911 he found his way to a new style of powerful poetry; the long Urdu poem “Šikwā” (Complaint), in the spirit and form of Alṭāf Ḥosayn Ḥāli’s (q.v.) *Musaddas*, is the first expression of this activity. The Muslims’ complaint in this poem that God has forsaken them is answered, a year later, in “Jawāb-e Šikwā,” in which God blames the indolent Muslims and tells them that they bring misfortune upon themselves. In 1915 Iqbal’s first major Persian work appeared: *Asrār-e ḵᵛodi* “The Secrets of the self.” In this *maṯnavi*, written in the meter of Rumi’s *Maṯnavi*, he preaches, not the dissolution of man’s being in the ocean of God as the highest goal, but rather the strengthening of personality, activity, and courage. His readers, used to the

sweet melodies of Persian lyrics, were shocked, especially by Iqbal's attack on Ḥāfeẓ (q.v.), which was excluded from the second edition. Two years later another *maṯnavi* in the same style, *Romuz-e biḵᵛodi* "Mysteries of selflessness," followed. It explained the individual's duties in the ideal community of Muslims and the role of this community in the world: as the "seal of communities" they should act, following the Prophet's example, as "mercy for the worlds" (Qurʾān 21:107).

In 1922 Iqbal was knighted by the British Crown. One year later, his Persian answer to Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan*, the *Payām-e mašreq* "Message of the East," was published. This fascinating work contains not only quatrains and *ḡazal*s in the classical style, but many interesting remarks about European philosophers and politicians. One year later, a collection of Iqbal's Urdu poetry appeared, called *Bāng-e darā* "Sound of the caravan bell," as the poet felt like the bell that leads the striving and confused pilgrims on the right path towards the Kaʿba in Mecca. In 1927 Iqbal published his *Zabūr-e ʿajam* "Persian Psalms," a collection of beautiful Persian poetry. Its third part, "Golšan-e rāz-e jadid," is his answer to Maḥmud Šabestari's *Golšan-e rāz* (717/1317-18) and deals with the problems of God, man, and the worlds.

In 1928 Iqbal, who participated in the activities of the Muslim League of his native province, toured various universities in India to deliver a series of six lectures, later published under the title *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, a work which is indispensable for the interpretation of his poetry. In 1930 he was called to preside over the annual session of the Muslim League in Allahabad, and it was there that he first voiced the idea of a separate Muslim nation in the northwestern part of then British India, the nucleus of what was to become Pakistan. In 1931 and 1932 Iqbal participated in the Round Table Conferences in London. He made his way home, first via Jerusalem, and the second time through France (where he met Henry Bergson and Louis Massignon), Spain (to meet Miguel Asin Palacios and to visit the Mosque of Cordova, which inspired one of his greatest Urdu poems), and, finally, Italy.

In 1932 Iqbal's most important Persian poetic work was published: the *Jāvid-nāma* (q.v.), dedicated to his young son Jāvid. Something like an encyclopedia of Iqbal's thought, it poetically describes the poet's journey through the spheres in the company of Mawlānā Rumi, who introduces him to the various representatives of poetry, philosophy, and politics, until he reaches the realm of Divine Beauty. A year later, Iqbal was invited to Afghanistan to discuss the

plan for a university in Kabul; this journey, and especially his visit to Ḡazna, resulted in the small Persian collection *Mosāfer* “The Traveler.” Another booklet of Persian poetry from this period bears the signifi;cant title *Pas če bāyad kard* “What should now be done [O peoples of the East]?” In 1936 and 1937 two major Urdu collections of poetry appeared: *Bāl-e Jibrīl* “Gabriel’s wing,” containing Iqbal’s finest Urdu poems, and *Żarb-e kalīm* “Moses’ rod,” which is more concerned with criticism of political and social issues.

Iqbal died on 21 April 1938, in Lahore, and was mourned by the whole of India; he is buried in a mausoleum beside the Badshahi Mosque. After his death a collection of his Urdu and Persian verse was issued as *Armaḡān-e Ḥejāz* “Gift of the Hejaz,” to point to his unflinching loyalty to the homeland of Islam, which he, however, never visited. Iqbal’s ideas were instrumental in the formation of Pakistan, which came into existence nine years after his death. He noted in the *Stray Reflections* as early as 1910: “nations are born in the hearts of poets, they prosper and die in the hands of politicians.”

Iqbal once admitted that he used poetry as a medium for spreading his ideas, which, he hoped, would awaken Muslims from their centuries-long slumber. He deeply disliked the idea of *l’art pour l’art*, and believed that poetry should serve the education of the human race. As he says in the *Jāvid-nāma*: “If the formation of men is the goal of poetry, then poetry is the heir to prophethood.” But poetry that lulls people into sweet dreams and leads them into a world of unreal beauty and hence irresponsibility, inciting them to lose their individuality in the nebulous realms of mysticism, is dangerous—more dangerous than the hordes of Čengiz Ḵān. That is why Iqbal’s poetry never strives at attaining that pure verbal beauty in which classical Persian and Urdu poetry excels. Yet he uses the vocabulary of traditional poetry very skillfully: roses and nightingales, the cupbearer and the tavern, are found as much in his lyrics as in those of earlier mystical poets. However, Iqbal tried to change the content of this inherited vocabulary: the nightingale *must* remain separated from the rose in order to become active in its singing, i.e., to become creative; for creativity, the highest proof of personality, dies in union. Iqbal’s favorite flower is the tulip, long connected with the bloodstained shroud of martyrs, with the flame, and with the goblet. The tulip, growing in the wild and not in well-trimmed gardens like the rose, is the symbol of man, who, without external help, tries to unfold all his possibilities until he radiates like a burning bush in the desert. The nightingale is often replaced by the falcon, *šāhin*, which becomes the symbol of man: soaring high, never mixing with

lovely but lowly birds such as partridges, and resting only on the wind above the highest mountain peaks.

Iqbal uses the traditional forms of *ḡazal*, *maṯnavi*, and *robāʿi*, although he usually prefers the simpler form of *do-bayti* to the classical *robāʿi*. In the traditional forms he likes meters which can be easily split into two halves, so that the audience can memorize them without diffi;culty. He is also fond of contrasting pairs of concepts, which he repeats time and again in his lyrics, both Persian and Urdu. This, again, contributes to the memorability of his verse. Among his Persian works, the *Payām-e mašreq* contains the greatest variety of modern forms, and in the *Jāvid-nāma* he freely inserts *ḡazal*s or single verses into the text to make the *maṯnavi* more lively. His skill in *ḡazal* is influenced by the poets of the Indian Style; he has acknowledged his indebtedness to Bidel and to Ḡāleb (qq.v.), who taught him "to remain Oriental in spirit." Despite his aversion to some earlier Persian poets, he skillfully inserts lines from their poetry into his own poems, or writes *naẓira*s (responses) to famous *ḡazal*s, and sometimes quotes, in his epics, whole *ḡazal*s verbatim.

His greatest master is Rumi, whom he had regarded in his thesis as a representative of pantheism and praised, in Hegel's words, as "the excellent Rumi." Later, perhaps after reading Šebli Noʿmāni's booklet on Rumi (S*awāneḥ-e Mawlānā Rumi*), he recognized him as an advocate of constant development and movement. Rumi becomes his *Ḵeżr-e rāh*, his spiritual guide, whom he follows in his search for the true man in this world, which is inhabited by "people like animals, nay more astray" (Qurʾan 7:179). The meter of Iqbal's *maṯnavi*s was chosen to enable him to insert quotations from Rumi's *Maṯnavi* without diffi;culty. Eqbal tried to follow Rumi's teachings on dynamic love, as seen in a poem in which he depicts a confrontation between Rumi and Goethe, his Eastern and Western masters, in Paradise: each has "a book, though they are not prophets," and each sees that "cunning intellect is from Satan, love from Adam" (*Maṯnavi* IV 1402). Iqbal also understood the importance of the key term *kebriyā* "divine grandeur," in Rumi's work, and often alludes to it, for it seemed to point to the very core of his own conception of God: the eternally powerful Ego, about which, in the *Reconstruction*, he quotes Goethe's verse: "All the straining, all the striving/Is eternal peace in God."

The influences of both Eastern and Western thought and art and their synthesis make Iqbal's work fascinating for the reader. He was well versed in

the various fields of European philosophy and thought, although he gave up his erstwhile interest in Hegel and turned to the Vitalists, notably Bergson and Nietzsche. Yet Nietzsche’s role in his work is ambiguous. It is not true that Iqbal’s ideal man is a copy of Nietzsche’s Superman; for the Superman searches with the lantern for God and appears only after “God is dead,” while Iqbal’s *mard-e moʾmen* (“believing man”) is the most perfect servant of God, following the example of the prophet, who, in the most exalted state of his ascension, was called *ʿabduhu* “His servant” (Qurʾan 17:1). However, Iqbal recognized the strength of Nietzsche’s personality and rightly classifi;ed him as one “whose heart is faithful while his brains are infi;del,” or as a “Ḥallāj without gallows,” since he would have needed a master to guide him from the negative state of *lā* to the positive acknowledgment of “but God.” Iqbal’s *Reconstruction* (whose title alludes to Ḡazzāli’s *Eḥyāʾ ʿolum al-din*) shows the depth of his understanding of Western thought, and it is interesting to see how he incorporated into his system those ideas which were fi;tting for him. His poetry, on the other hand, and particularly the *Jāvid-nāma*, proves his intuitive insight into major issues of contemporary thought.

Iqbal was equally well read in the Eastern tradition, and special mention should be made of his analysis of Persian thought in his thesis of 1907. Beginning with Zoroaster, he sketched an outline of the major theological-philosophical movements in Iran, and for the first time introduced the names of Yaḥyā b. Ḥabaš Sohravardi-ye Maqtul (executed 587/1191) and the philosophers Mollā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) and Hādi Sabzavāri (d. 1295 or 1298/1878 or 1881) to a Western audience, thus paving the way for the development of modern research in these fi;elds. He was also interested in the Bābi/Bahāʾi movements (qq.v.), as is clear from his positive evaluation in the thesis and his introduction of the Bahāʾi poet Qorrat-al-ʿAyn Ṭāhera in a crucial scene of the *Jāvid-nāma*. Zoroaster, too, appears once more in the *Jāvid-nāma*, where he becomes the prototype of the prophetic spirit, who, tempted by Ahriman, refuses to turn away from his preaching. Ahriman appears here as the power who wants man to sit in seclusion, devoting himself exclusively to heavenly affairs, like the pseudo-mystics whom Iqbal attacked so relentlessly. Zoroaster, however, knows that a prophet’s duty is to go out into the world and “paint Ahriman’s picture in blood,” i.e., to struggle constantly with him. Only thus can man develop, and only by man’s unceasing strife with Satan can the forward movement of creation be maintained. Since in his thesis Iqbal had dealt particularly with the problem of good and evil, it is not surprising that Satan, Eblis, should play a major role in his philosophical poetry; he

appears—much like Goethe's Mephistopheles and, in a certain sense, Milton's Lucifer—as the necessary complement of man, an anti-hero who will be overcome by the perfected faithful and will finally perform the prostration before the *mard-e moʾmen* which he refused to do before the inexperienced, innocent Adam at the beginning of time.

It is interesting to watch the shift of gravity in Iqbal's work. Thinkers whom he had liked in his thesis, such as Ebn ʿArabī (q.v.), are later rejected; others, condemned in the period of the *Asrār*, are discovered years later in their true greatness. That holds true for quite a few Persian poets (e.g., ʿErāqi, Sanāʾi), and especially for Ḥallāj (q.v.), who becomes, in the course of time, something like Iqbal's own forerunner, who tried to bring resurrection to the dead. Besides being an excellent philosophical poet, Iqbal was also a nature poet of merit, and some of his poems which praise his ancestral country Kashmir are of great beauty; but even here the colorful description of nature is not a goal in itself, but serves to illustrate the poet's religious or socio-political ideals.

Iqbal's work has been discussed in Pakistan and India, later in Iran and Turkey, and more recently in the Arab world, in an almost uncountable number of books and articles. He has been appropriated by almost every faction inside Indo-Pakistan for its own purposes: he has been regarded as the unsurpassable master of every virtue and art; he has been made a forerunner of socialism or an advocate of Marxism; he was anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist; he was the poet of the élite and of the masses, the true interpreter of orthodox Islam and the advocate of a dynamic and free interpretation of Islam, the enemy of Sufi;sm and a Sufi; himself; he was indebted to Western thought and criticized everything Western mercilessly. One can call him a political poet, because his aim was to awaken the self-consciousness of Muslims, primarily in the subcontinent but also in general, and his poetry was indeed instrumental in bringing forth decisive changes in the history of the subcontinent. One can also style him a religious poet, because the fi;rm belief in the unending possibilities of the Qurʾān and the deep and sincere love of the prophet (in both his quality as nation-builder and as eternal model for man) are the bases of his poetry and philosophy. Perhaps one can summarize his role by saying that he wanted to remind Muslims of the fact that man was created as *ḵalifat Allāh*, God's vicegerent on earth, and was called to work and to ameliorate the world as a co-worker with God, without assuming that this earth was his own property.

As much as Iqbal advocated social justice and a modern outlook, he was just as

much opposed to materialistic interpretations of history and of life in general. Faithful to the strict monotheism of Islam, he fought against everything that looked like idolatry, be it nationalism, capitalism, communism, and all the other isms of our age, including feminism and women's liberation. His ideal man, who is the constituent of the ideal Muslim nation, cannot be imagined without a close relation to God, the all-embracing Greatest Ego. Man is called upon not to rely exclusively on the dangerous faculty of dissecting intellect, but rather to experience the creative dialogue with God and to implement on the earthly plane what he has learned in the loving solitude of prayer. With this basic teaching, Iqbal appeals not only to Muslims but to non-Muslims as well, as the great echo of his works in the West proves.

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