

## Editorial

### Remembering Iqbal

Sir Dr. Muhammad Iqbal was born in November 1877 in Sialkot, Punjab (now Pakistan). He was one of the greatest of Urdu and Persian poets of the 20th century and one of its brightest philosophers. Iqbal set before him an ideal of combining poetry with doctrine. He took it upon himself to inspire the Muslims to consolidate themselves in order to imbibe the true spirit of Islam. He taught in London and in Lahore. He was an *‘Allāmah* (the greatest *‘ālim*) and a Doctor in philosophy. He was a lawyer and a leader. He struggled against British colonialism and yet he received a knighthood from the British government. Sir Muhammad Iqbal is the spiritual founder of Pakistan which gained independence in 1947, nine years after he passed away in April 1938. As a poet, Iqbal was unrivalled. People bestowed on him the title of “Shair-e-Mashriq” (Poet of the East) and *Malik al-Shu‘rā’* (the king of poets). He was also a jurist, a politician, a social reformer, and a great Islamic scholar. There is much more that can be said in praise of Muhammad Iqbal which has been said by many. The important thing is that Iqbal lived in the twentieth century, tried to solve the problems he encountered, and thought about the challenges Muslims would face in the twenty-first century. He addressed such burning issues as the relationship of the Ummah to the West; of pluralism and toleration and of living in a multi-ethnic society, and of the nature and feature of an Islamic state that Muslims are currently debating.

Iqbal had a multi-dimensional personality. He was a mystic, a rationalist, a philosopher, and a rebel. Conversant with all the traditions of Islam, Iqbal believed that all contributed to an understanding of the relation between God and Man, but none did so exclusively. Thus he extolled mysticism for demonstrating to the self the inner experience of God. He faults it, however, for not understanding the concreteness of nature. Iqbal praised the philosophical school of Islam for demonstrating to the self, the rational structure of the universe, but faults it for neglecting the inner experience of the divine. He believed that law is a means for the self to find its fulfillment, but faults it for hardening into unyielding rigidity. He was a great mystic, with a pure spirit, delivered from materialism and, at the same time, a man who respected and

honoured science, technological progress, and the advancement of human reason.

Iqbal was a person with a world view based upon the Qur'ān. He developed philosophical-spiritual interpretations based upon it which he offered to the world and its people. The Qur'ān, to him, was not only a book of religion but also a source of foundational principles upon which the infrastructure of an organization must be built as a coherent system of life. That system of life when implemented as a living force is what Iqbal called Islam. Based on permanent (absolute) values as stipulated in the Qur'ān, this system provides perfect harmony, balance, and stability in the society. It also provides freedom of choice and equal opportunity for the development of personality for everyone within the framework of the Qur'ān. For Iqbal, religion was not simply a matter of faith but a way of life, which has to be tested in accordance with the strictest moral and scientific standards.

Iqbal was not a thinker who debases science, reason, and scientific advancement. Neither was he a proponent of “dry” factual science like the science of Francis Bacon or Claude Bernard, which is limited to the discovery of the relationships between phenomena or material manifestations and the employment of natural forces for material life. Likewise, he was not a thinker who links philosophy, illumination, science, religion, reason, and revelation together in an incongruous way. Rather, in his outlook and attitude towards this world, he regarded reason and science as complementary and supplementary to each other. One of his unique contributions to the contemporary Islamic thought is his linking of modern science with “God-consciousness” which he considered more precious than mere belief in God. He equated the scientist's observation of nature with seeking a kind of intimacy with God, a kind of mystic search in the act of pray. He believed that scientific observation of nature would help maintain “a close contact with the behaviour of reality, and thus sharpens our inner perception for a deeper vision of it.” If Muslims had heeded Iqbal's advice and considered scientific advancement as an act of prayer, the road map of world power today would have been very different.

Iqbal was despaired with the Muslim religio-philosophic tradition of his time, which he called a “worn-out and practically dead metaphysics” with its peculiar thought-forms and set phraseology producing manifestly “a deadening effect on the modern mind.” According to him, God had created the universe so that man could play a creative role with passionate zeal for the higher ideals of truth, justice, and social good. Iqbal emphasised that the conventional view of Islam, so sedulously

propagated, needs re-examination to bring it in accord with the advanced scientific and philosophical knowledge. He stressed the interrelatedness of some of the fundamental Islamic concepts such as prophethood, revelation, knowledge, faith and its efficacy which serve as potential means for the apprehension of reality. For Iqbal, the illumined mind awakened by meditation over the essentials of Islam, self-realisation and self-affirmation are the pointers for the perfectibility of man which is the aim, goal and master-passion of human existence. The only alternative for Muslims, then, is to tear off from Islam the hard crust which has immobilized an essentially dynamic outlook on life, and to rediscover the original verities of freedom, equality, and political ideals with a view to rebuild their moral, social, and political ideals out of their original simplicity and universality. Iqbal called upon Muslims to transcend their history. He believed that a participatory system is the natural form of government for Islam and that Islam's message has been corrupted by centuries of autocratic empires. He, therefore, called for a new jurisprudence, a new *ijtihād*, which he defined as movement.

Iqbal's contribution to the Muslim world as one of the greatest thinkers of Islam remains unparalleled. In his writings, he addressed and exhorted people, particularly the youth, to stand up and boldly face life's challenges. Humanity, as a whole, has never faced the challenge posed by the enormity and the complexity of human problems, such as it is facing in the twenty-first century. The problems have now assumed a global dimension transcending the barriers of race, colour, language, geography, and social, political and religious ideologies. Most of the problems of mankind are universal in nature and, therefore, require a universal approach to the solution. Iqbal's universal message of love, self-development, perseverance, dignity and freedom is an attempt to address this challenge faced by humanity. To introduce this universal vision to the youth, the International Islamic University Malaysia organized an international conference on Iqbal. Some of the papers read in this conference are presented in this special issue on Iqbal and his Universal vision.

Abdul Rashid Moten