

Conference

International Conference on Iqbal and His Universal Vision

A one day conference on *Iqbal and his Universal Vision* was organized by the International Islamic University Malaysia and Pakistan High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

The conference, which was held on 22 Rabiul Akhir 1423/3rd July 3, 2002, included a seminar on Iqbal, exhibition of Iqbal's books and memorabilia, multimedia presentation, recitation of Iqbal's poetry, and presentation of poetry in honour of Iqbal by various poets.

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of this international seminar was performed by Yang Berhormat Datuk Seri Panglima Syed Hamid bin Syed Jaafar Albar, the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who congratulated the University for organizing such an important seminar. The Minister emphasized that Iqbal was one of the greatest poet and a philosopher who had an open mind and always willing to accept the inflow of new ideas as knowledge advances. Iqbal challenged the conventional and reactionary thinking of Muslim scholars and presented a new approach for political, social, cultural and spiritual rejuvenation of Islam. Iqbal emphasized acquisition of knowledge, good governance, social justice and tolerance. Iqbal's message for Muslims was to forge unity and to acquire scientific knowledge to contribute for the betterment of the world. Iqbal's message is as relevant and applicable in the contemporary period as it was during his time. Speaking on the occasion, the Pakistani High Commissioner General (R) Nasim Rana said that Iqbal was a revolutionary poet who inspired the slave nations to rise up and steer their ships towards the shores of liberty and freedom. Earlier Prof. Dr. Kamal Hassan, Rector International Islamic University Malaysia, welcomed the honourable guests.

Seminar

The conference started in the morning with an academic session of papers presented by distinguished scholars from various countries. The

first paper was by Tan Sri Dato' Seri Sanusi bin Junid, President of International Islamic University Malaysia, who spoke on "Iqbal and Muslim Unity." Tan Sri mentioned that according to the Qur'an, Muslims form one brotherhood because they are fused together by their beliefs. This is one of the major themes emphasized by Iqbal who started as a nationalist but later on, turned into an Internationalist. His internationalism is based on the fusion of politics with higher moral values derived from religion. He started writing on problems beyond that of Indian Muslims. His vision was to have a unified *millat* composed of individuals who have reached the stage of development of *khudi* and have gone over the state of *be-khudi*.

According to the speaker, Iqbal, known as the poet-philosopher of Pakistan, was not a narrow nationalist, and his vision was not limited to Pakistan. Iqbal's vision was ummatic and hence he should be referred to as "the poet-philosopher of Muslim unity." Iqbal had a distinct conception of Muslim unity and suggested clear-cut guidelines to attain that cherished goal. These ideas were as much as relevant to his times as they are to the contemporary Muslim world which is characterized by disunity.

The second paper was by Dr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, Director of Iqbal Academy, Lahore. His paper entitled "So that I May See and Tell": Significance of Iqbal's Wisdom Poetry. According to Dr. Umar Iqbal was unique among the Muslim poets in the sense that, while almost all of his contemporaries were singing praises of the high ups or indulging in indolent love poetry, Iqbal was concerned with issues that were of vital importance to the Muslim Ummah, both on the theoretical as well as the practical level. It is the "conscious concern" which provides the key to understanding the psycho-dynamics of Iqbal's mind, and leads us to appreciate the reasons for which Iqbal's poetry has become significantly important and meaningful to us.

The third paper was on "Iqbal and the Challenge of Reform within the Muslim World" by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar. According to Dr. Muzaffar, fundamental to Iqbal's reconstruction of religious thought was his challenge to Muslims to understand *tawhīd* and to re-think their entire concept of, and approach to, Islam. He pleaded for the return of the spirit of *ijtihād* in the interpretation of the law. He was impressed by Western civilization's passion for self-consciousness, social justice and egalitarianism though he distanced himself from its atheistic strain and from the ideas that were a hindrance to the spiritual and moral advancement of the human being. Iqbal abhorred imperialism, democracy and race-based nationalism. He equally attacked the

fossilized religious dogmatism that had sapped the spirit of Islam. Iqbal sketched a blue print of a polity to give life and meaning to *tawhidic* values.

Dr. Altaf Husain Ahangar, Professor in the Faculty of Laws, presented a paper on "Iqbal's Approach to Legislation in Islam." He said that while *ijmā'* is an established principle in Islamic legislation, Muslim jurists are divided on the format of *ijmā'*. According to Ahangar, Iqbal contends that at present *ijmā'* is possible only through legislative assembly.

Ustaz Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady, a Very Distinguished Fellow of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, presented an interesting paper on the relevance of Iqbal to the Malay World. He said that Iqbal attracted the attention of the Malay World as well as the Muslims in Southeast Asia through his prose works and his poetic compositions that were translated into Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia. Most Indonesian and Malay front ranking leaders were influenced by his ideal of serving the cause of the Ummah. They used Iqbal's arguments to mobilize the Muslims for reforms of their respective societies particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Basit B. Koshul, a scholar from the University of Virginia, USA, presented a paper on "Iqbal on Faith in the Modern World." According to him, Iqbal was acutely aware not only of the fact that modern society was facing a crisis of faith, but he was aware of the root cause of this crisis as well. Iqbal saw an intimate relationship between the modern crisis of faith and modernist epistemology. Hence, he tried to articulate an epistemology that meets the critical rigour of modern philosophical and scientific thinking and also attempts to account for the reality and verity of religious experience as the most subtle and reliable source of knowledge. Iqbal's proposed epistemology is rooted in the Qur'ānic narrative and the interpretation of this narrative by the "more genuine schools of Sufism." Iqbal combines the insights garnered from a study of these "religious" sources with his first-hand understanding of modern philosophic and scientific thought to recover and re-present an understanding of "knowledge" that is a companion to "faith" rather than its adversary.

Dr. Azizan Baharuddin, Professor in the Department of Science and Technology and the Director of the Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya, presented the paper on Iqbal's ideas regarding his perceptions of space and time. According to Dr. Azizan Baharuddin, the subject of science and belief has always been part of the *élan vital* of Islam. From hundreds of Qur'ānic verses, Muslim scholars and thinkers

have embarked on the exercise to understand scripture in the light of His creation (the study of nature or science). When talking about space and time in the empirical and spiritual sense, it is indeed these “signs” that Iqbal was interested in. This paper presents some of the ideas Iqbal had elaborated upon regarding religion and science especially on the subject of the meaning and spiritual implications of the concepts of space and time.

Dramatisation, Poetry Recitation and Exhibition

The seminar was followed by a program of dramatisation and poetry recital in the evening. A multimedia presentation was made to introduce Iqbal and his contributions. This was followed by poetry recitation and *nashid*. A number of guests, students and faculty members recited poems of Iqbal and on Iqbal. The distinguished participants included Prof. Dr. Kamal Hassan, who recited his poem “Complaining to Iqbal: A Dialogue with the Dead,” and the renowned Malay poet Dato’ A. Samad Said, who recited a special poem on Iqbal composed for the occasion in the Malay language. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azmi Omar, Dean Faculty of Economics and Management and Chief Organizer of the conference gave the closing remarks and congratulated the organizing committee members for a job well done.

During the day, the IIUM library held an exhibition of its inventory of books on Iqbal. Another exhibition was held simultaneously in the Central Administrative Building showing the memorabilia of Iqbal, including his books in various languages, his manuscripts, letters, photographs and personal belongings. This exhibition was organized by the Iqbal Academy, Lahore.

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