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## Three Poems of Iqbal: A Psychological Interpretation

Everywhere I go, I find that a poet has been there before me  
—SIGMUND FREUD

ONE OF IQBAL'S TRANSLATORS, the Scotsman Victor Kiernan, wrote, "Mohammad Iqbal, the 'Poet of the East,' lived a life outwardly of which there is little to be said, and inwardly of which little is known" (2004, xv). Works on Iqbal by scholars and academicians would fill a small library, particularly in Pakistan where he is revered as one of the country's founding fathers. He was one of the early proponents of the idea of a separate state for the Muslims of British India, a fantastically improbable idea at the time. His eventual wholehearted support for the idea of Pakistan was surprising considering that one of his early poems, "Tarāna-e Hindī" (Song of India), first published in 1904, is still sung and revered widely in India. Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Iqbal that he sang it hundreds of times during his many prison terms for sedition and political activity against the British Raj. Iqbal did not live to see his dream of a separate homeland for India's Muslims brought to fruition and would, surely, have "recoiled in horror," as Kiernan wrote, had he witnessed the communal bloodbath that accompanied the birth of his vision (*ibid.*, xxiv). There are still no accurate estimates of the number of people who perished on both sides of the newly created border, but one estimate puts it at half a million killed and twelve million made homeless. All this came much later. Before that was the poetry, page after page of lyrical, melodious poetry reflecting on themes as simple as mountains, animals and insects and as exalted as God, Heaven, the Angels and everything in between.

The three poems chosen here reflect three different styles of Iqbal. "Māñ kā Khvāb" (A Mother's Dream) is from his first published collection of Urdu poems, *Bāñg-e Darā* (The Caravan Bell) written before

1905 (he was born in 1877). This collection includes many poems written in a simple style specifically for children, including “Himalaya,” “A Child’s Prayer,” “The Cow and the Goat,” etc. While all of his children’s poems speak about simple themes, they also have subtexts rich with meaning. For example, one of Iqbal’s most enduring children’s poems, “A Child’s Prayer,” is still sung by children in schools today. It is the prayer of a child asking to “shine like a beacon and light up the darkness in the world” (2000, 52). At another point, the child sings “let me be the voice of the poor, a lover of the old and infirm and those in pain” (*ibid.*).

“Māñ kā Khvāb,” on the surface a simple description of the dream of a mother fearing for her child’s safety, is a profound explanation of a core concept in child development: “Separation-Individuation,” the process by which a child grows psychologically and develops the capacity to tolerate prolonged periods of separation from its mother (or other parental figure) on its way to becoming an adult.

“Khizr-e Rāh” (Khizr the Guide) is from a different era and showcases Iqbal’s full poetic talent. It was written in the aftermath of the First World War with the once magnificent Muslim Ottoman Empire, that had spanned large parts of southeastern Europe, western Asia and North Africa for more than six hundred years, in terminal decline and about to be abolished by Turkish Nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. On 13 April 1919 came the trauma of the infamous Jallianwala Bagh.<sup>1</sup> It was a time of near universal despondency among the Muslims of India. The poem describes Iqbal’s dialogue with the mythical “Khizr,” revered as a spiritual guide in many belief systems, including Islam. One could think of all manner of things to ask such a figure but Iqbal concentrates on matters that weigh heavily on his heart. This includes the meaning of life, governance or kingship, the struggle between “labor and capital,” and the reason for Khizr’s wandering ways. Since this poem was composed sometime after 1919, at least one of the questions was surely

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<sup>1</sup>The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, alternatively known as the Amritsar Massacre, is named after the Jallianwala Bagh (Garden) in the northern Indian city of Amritsar. On 13 April 1919, British Indian Army soldiers under the command of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer opened fire on a peaceful, unarmed gathering of men, women and children celebrating the Punjabi New Year. The firing lasted about ten minutes and official British Raj sources placed the fatalities at 379. According to private sources there were over one thousand deaths, with more than two thousand wounded. The British Civil Surgeon indicated that there were 1,526 casualties (See introductory paragraph on Jallianwala Bagh Massacre at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jallianwala\\_Bagh\\_massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jallianwala_Bagh_massacre)).

inspired by the recent establishment of the first worker's government in history—the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917 abolished the monarchy in Russia and gave birth to a socialist government led by Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik Party. Iqbāl devotes more of his energy to this subject in later works, including a poem entitled “Khudā kē Ḥuḏūr Mēñ” (Lenin in the Presence of God). Due to its length and the breadth of the subject matter of “Khizr-e Rāh,” this essay will focus on Khizr's explanation of the meaning of life. The third poem illustrates Iqbāl's love of Persian, a language more ancient than Iqbāl's native Urdu and thus richer in poetic similes and metaphors. In fact, of Iqbāl's twelve thousand verses, seven thousand are in Persian, including his masterpiece “Jāvēd Nāma” (Book of Eternity) inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The poem “Muḥāvāra Mā-bain Khuda-o-Insān” (Dialogue Between God and Man) also demonstrates one of Iqbāl's favorite themes, conversations between celestial and earthly figures, in this case between God and Man (representing all of humanity). This style is also present in one of Iqbāl's famous Urdu poems, “Shikvah” (Reproach), in which Man addresses God with a long list of complaints specifically about God's treatment of Muslims. That poem created quite a stir when first presented in public and would still be considered politically incorrect, if not outright blasphemous, in many Islamic societies today. In fact, some time later, Iqbāl felt compelled to write “Javāb-e Shikva” (Reply to Reproach) whereby God rebukes Muslims for daring to complain about their condition in light of their own less than stellar conduct in the past.

### Man ka Khvab (A Mother's Dream)<sup>2</sup>

On the surface this poem is simply a description of a mother's dream about her young son who is lost. Some commentators have described it as the lament of a mother whose child has died. However, there is a more life-affirming explanation that makes more sense psychologically.

The poem starts out simply enough. It is in the first person with a mother describing her dream:

As I slept one night I dreamt  
A dream that heightened my discontent  
I saw myself going somewhere  
Unable to find my way in the gloom  
Trembling, drowning in my terror

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<sup>2</sup>See (Iqbāl 2000, 54). All translations included here are by the author.

It should be noted that simply being conversant in a language does not mean that one is able to appreciate its poetry. Iqbāl's poetry, with its dense metaphysical and philosophical themes, is even more of a challenge for the casual reader. This poem, however, is written in a simpler style.

The poet continues:

As I continued on I saw  
Boys walking in line  
Wearing emerald-hued coats, carrying lamps,  
Silently they walked  
God knows where to

The use of the color "emerald" or green is interesting. Why green? This might be one key to unlocking the life-affirming message of the poem. In many cultures, green symbolizes hope and growth. The most common associations, however, are found in its ties to nature. For example, Islam venerates this color as it expects paradise to be full of lush greenery. In many folklores and literatures, green has traditionally been used to symbolize nature and its embodied attributes, namely those of life, fertility, and rebirth. Green was symbolic of resurrection and immortality in Ancient Egypt; the god Osiris was depicted as green-skinned. It is often used to describe foliage and the sea, and has become a symbol of environmentalism. In short, the use of emerald seems to represent life and vibrancy.

Further on:

As I stood lost in thought  
There I saw, my son  
Walking forlornly in the back  
Carrying an extinguished lamp

Here is a glimpse of the central theme of the poem, a lamp, used to light one's way, dark and useless, unable to show its bearer the way forward.

Recognizing him, I cried, "my love"  
Why have you forsaken me?  
I pine for you; and every day weave a necklace of tears  
Not once did you think of me  
Alone and abandoned

Even though the translation does not do justice to the power of Iqbāl's words, it is hard not to be moved by the setting of the poem; darkness, a dreamworld, figures with emerald coats and a mother, lost and tearful.

The child seeing my agony derisively replied

“Your tears do me no favors”;  
 Silent then for a moment  
 He showed me the lamp  
 “Do you wonder what happened to it?  
 Your tears put it out”

Here we come to the central message of the poem, a mother’s grief and agony at letting go of her child as it grows, matures and becomes more independent, inevitably, in the process, moving away from her. Iqbāl arrives at a profound psychological insight, perhaps from his own experience with his mother, perhaps through his observations as a sensitive artist. As a child grows, the mother, who has learned to cater to its every need and whim, must now learn to allow the child to stumble out of her grasp, perhaps to fall, make mistakes and get hurt. She must accept that those hurts are an inevitable part of growing and changing into an adult. Interestingly, the poet makes no mention of a father anywhere in the dream, a figure that can help moderate the intensity of the emotions involved.

Also, this pattern of a mother’s intense attachment to the child and the child’s resultant feeling of perhaps being smothered would be quite typical in the feudal, non-industrial culture of British India where Iqbāl was born, raised and lived most of his life.

In the end, Iqbāl is pleading both sides of the case. The mother describes her suffering to the child (and to us) and it is proof of her love. The child does not reject it but points out to her the consequence of excessive attachment, his difficulty finding his way, in the dream (and presumably in life) because of the effect of his mother’s tears and grief.

### Khizr-e Rah (Khizr the Guide)<sup>3</sup>

Al-Khizr (Arabic: “the Green One”) is an enigmatic figure in Islam. He is best known for his appearance in the Qur’anic “Chapter of the Cave” (Sura al-Kahf). Although not mentioned by name, he is assumed to be the figure that Moses accompanies and whose seemingly violent and destructive actions so disturb Moses that he violates his oath not to ask questions.

Islamic tradition sometimes describes Khizr as *Mu‘allim al-Añbiyā’* (Tutor of the Prophets) because of the spiritual guidance he has provided every prophet who has appeared throughout history. In Sufi tra-

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<sup>3</sup>See (*ibid.*, 362–66).

dition, Khizr has come to be known as one of those who receive illumination directly from God without human mediation. He is the hidden initiator of those who walk the mystical path and also figures in the *Alexander Romance* as a servant of Alexander the Great. Al-Khizr and Alexander cross the Land of Darkness to find the Water of Life. Alexander gets lost looking for the spring, but Khizr finds it and gains eternal life.

The poem, first read at a session of the Anjuman Hımāyat-e-Islām (Association for the Service of Islam) in 1921 was written against the backdrop of widespread pessimism and gloom in British Indian society. The aftermath of the destruction of World War I, the abolition and dismantling of the last Muslim Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire, the massacre of hundreds of innocents at the hands of British Indian soldiers at the infamous Jallianwala Bagh and other repressive acts by the ruling British had created a somber mood across the land. This, combined with the ongoing economic depression, had created almost universal despondency, particularly among Indian Muslims. Interestingly, the poem also alludes to the dawn of a new age where workers would no longer fall for the “tricks of the money-men,” inspired, no doubt, by the 1917 October Revolution in Russia and the establishment of the first worker’s government in history:

Rise, for a new age dawns  
Your era begins in East and West

Iqbāl begins the poem by first setting the scene in some detail. Like most poets and artists, he had a keen eye for nature’s beauty and wrote numerous poems extolling them. As with many of his best poems, this one, too, is in the form of a dialogue. The poet goes first, describing the peaceful scene around him:

Sunk down though I was, one night on the riverbank  
My anguish buried deep in my heart  
Still was the night, quiet, calm the river  
Amazed was I at this picture of serenity

Warming up a little, after painting a picture of nature in all its tranquility, the poet then plumbs a little deeper into his imagination.

Songbirds caged by night’s magic  
Dimly lit stars imprisoned by the moon’s sorcery

As the poet paints the scene, he comes face to face with the object of his search, the elusive Khizr.

Who do I see but that wanderer Khizr

Young like the early morn

Khizr then addresses our poet and issues a challenge:

Said he, "O seeker of the secrets of eternity  
The Universe's fate is clear only to the 'seeing eye'"

In his poetry Iqbāl often explores metaphysical ideas relating to life, death, birth, heaven and hell. In fact, his doctoral dissertation submitted in 1908 at the University of Munich was titled "The Development of Metaphysics in Persia" and this remained an abiding interest throughout his life.

What does Khizr mean by "the seeing eye"? Ancient esoteric and mystical doctrines held that there exists some special force inside humans which can perceive the essence of reality independent of intellect or reason. This was named "intuition," which is usually taken to mean the ability to sense or know immediately without reasoning. It has been variously called "Gnosis" in ancient Greek philosophy and "*irfān*" in the Sufi tradition. What the poet is implying is simply that the "secrets of eternity" cannot be discerned by the average person. They cannot be found by seeing, hearing, touching or through any of the senses humans ordinarily use to understand the world around them. One needs something more, a willingness and desire to look beneath the surface of things to try to perceive their essence—something that requires effort, dedication, desire and a love of knowledge and learning.

That other great mystic Mirzā Ghālib expressed it thus:

This intoxication is not meaningless, Ghālib  
Something remains hidden from view  
(2010, 277)

In fact, this is a constant subject in mystical literature and poetry and countless volumes have been written on it through the ages.

Moving on, Iqbāl comes to the questions he wants to ask Khizr. He starts with an easy one:

Forsaking dwellings you wander deserts  
Without today or tomorrow, past or future is your life

Why is Khizr forever "wandering the deserts" living a life "without yesterday or tomorrow"? Iqbāl then comes to the questions that form the subject of the rest of the poem:

What is the secret of life, what is governance?  
Why this antagonism between labor and wealth?

In the first section of his response, titled "Şehrā Navardī" (Desert Wan-

dering), Khizr answers the first question with another question:

Why this surprise at my wandering ways?  
This eternal struggle is the very proof of life

Thus Iqbāl illustrates a profound concept of life, its never still, always changing, dynamic nature. Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941), a French philosopher very popular and widely known during Iqbāl's lifetime, concluded that time eluded mathematics and science. To Bergson, the ordinary, rational mode of understanding divides time into static intervals of seconds, minutes, days, weeks, etc., which prevents a person from accessing the “ultimate reality” of things.

And, in fact, humans, by virtue of our limited understanding of the universe, can only measure time this way. To us, there is always a time that has passed, a time that is to come, and very briefly, the time that is now. It is a cruel irony that also by virtue of our human nature, most of us dwell either in sorrow over our past or in fear of a future that is inherently uncertain.

Khizr, on the other hand, is presenting the opposite message. The change that time brings and the struggle that it implies, whether we like it or not, is proof of life and is what endows life with meaning. The struggle is life in the most profound sense of the term. Cessation of movement, of change, of struggle means death, and though that is peaceful, it is no longer life. Khizr underlines this point in the last verse of this section:

Robust is life's wine cup because of this eternal movement  
This, O unknowing one, is the secret of eternal life

The next section of the poem titled “Zindagi” (Life) is where Khizr explains the meaning of life to the poet. He begins:

Life transcends profit and loss  
It is living your life and giving it up (for something)

Khizr illustrates to our protagonist that everything is recognized by its opposite. This is a simple enough concept. What is day? The absence of night. What is night? The absence of the day. Is it possible to have day without night? Is it possible to have life without death? One thing defines and, in fact, creates the other. Without the one, the other would no longer exist. Just so, Khizr tells the poet that posing the question in such a narrow way is meaningless; the meaning of life and its meaninglessness are one and the same. If one person asks the meaning of their life, the answer could very well be “nothing” (or whatever that person chooses it to be) but the question changes if one asks the meaning of



Life with a capital “L,” i.e., Life itself, all life. Khizr goes on to say:

Measure it not by this day or that  
Eternal, dynamic, ever young is Life

Here again, Khizr gently chides our poet for his narrow point of view. While any one person is always a prisoner of “today and tomorrow,” Life itself has no such constraints. It emerges, blooms, flowers, withers, dies and then starts anew. Khizr then goes on to teach the real lessons to the poet:

Create your own world if you count yourself among the living  
The Secret of Adam, the essence of (divine) creation is life

Here Iqbāl demonstrates one of the central contradictions of his poetry and his life philosophy, the struggle to resolve its material and metaphysical aspects. While Iqbāl grew up in a deeply religious household he traveled and read widely. He was quite familiar with the ideas of both the idealist and materialist Western philosophers, i.e., those espousing Idealism—the proposition that ideas exist independently of matter (in its more extreme forms it may involve the denial of the existence of the external world), and those advocating Materialism—the philosophical theory that regards matter and its motion as constituting the universe and all phenomena, including those of the mind, as due to material agencies. While Iqbāl’s poetry has some wonderful exhortations to action, it is also deeply imbued with Idealistic themes, and in many instances the calls to action flounder on the shores of appealing to the heavens for help. This is the case in his “Khudā kē Ḥuẓūr Mēñ” from his collection *Bāl-e-Jibrīl* (The Wing of Gabriel):

The leader of the Russian Revolution rails against the  
rulers of the East,  
the White gods and the rulers of the West, gold and  
silver

Iqbāl goes on to say that “the rule of machines kills the soul; tools and machines destroy fraternity and brotherhood.” In the end, however, Iqbāl cannot rise above his metaphysical solution, calling upon God to change things rather than placing his faith in Man.

In the next verse Khizr clarifies his explanation:

Ask the mountain cutter the meaning of life  
It is the stream of milk, the stone cutting tool and the  
heavy boulder

This refers to a story in the fabled *Shahnama* of the Persian poet,

Firdausī, in which the Sassanian King, Khosrow II, sets his rival the impossible task of carving a stream of milk through a stone mountain if he wants to win the hand of Shīrīn. The story (and particularly the carving of the stream as a metaphor for accomplishing something close to impossible) is a favorite motif of many Persian and Urdu poets, among them Iqbāl's spiritual mentor Ghālib.

Khizr continues:

In bondage, Life is but an exhausted stream  
Free, it is a fiery, interminable ocean

Iqbāl is, no doubt, exhorting his countrymen, enslaved economically and politically by the British for over a hundred years with no end in sight.

Again, we see the interesting contradiction of Iqbāl's style. In the poem he refers to Man as a "lump of clay," a completely Materialist point of view. Humans arise from the world they live in, they subsist on the world they inhabit, they die and rejoin their "Mother Earth" who receives all back into her embrace. If we arise from this Earth and then rejoin her after we die, where does the world of angels, heavens, purgatory and the like fit in? Khizr (and Iqbāl) chooses to remain silent.

Risen are you like a bubble on the ocean of life  
Life is your test in this world of everlasting loss

Here Iqbāl points out another profound truth. Everything fades and disappears. Things rise and fall and rise again and the cycle continues. Clutching at this or that, trying to preserve it, prolong it, fearing its loss, mourning its passing is meaningless. If change is constant and nothing is eternal, then there is no point in trying to hold on to things. Then, another call for action:

Imperfect are you, if still a lump of clay  
And if hardened, a mortal sword  
The heart that desires martyrdom for the Truth  
Let him first strengthen his earthly form  
Let him destroy this borrowed Earth and Heaven  
And from the ashes, fashion a new world

It is easy to see, even from this imperfect translation, the electrifying effect this kind of poetry could have on a crowd, particularly among people suffering from centuries of bondage and humiliation. Of course, Iqbāl does not elaborate on what "Truth" he is referring to, leaving it up to each reader to discover it for him or herself. There is, of course, a danger in this. Quoting Kiernan again, Iqbāl had

talked of the importance of a peaceful understanding between Muslims and Hindus; he had also, in his time, indulged in unguarded rhetoric about holy wars and the sword of Islam and extolled *action* as if it were an end in itself. Doubtless many other on both sides said the same things, but few with his authority and none with his eloquence. The holy war he would have seen if he had lived another decade, and most certainly would have recoiled from in horror, was the gigantic massacre of 1947, one of the most frightful catastrophes of even the twentieth century, in which the Muslims and Hindus of the Punjab perished by hundreds of thousands. Years before, thinking of the Great War [the First World War], he had written: "That is not the rosy dawn of a new age on the horizon of the West, but a torrent of blood." The same might have been written now of his own horizon of the East.

(2004, xxiv)

Khizr ends this section by issuing a challenge to the poet (and the poet to us):

This is the day of reckoning and here you are  
If you have something to present, this is the time

Iqbāl closes this section with a profound tribute to the idea of the "present moment." There is no yesterday, it is only a memory of time gone by, it never will be again. There is no tomorrow, we may never see it. All of us, at any time, only have the present moment in which we live. We plan for and worry about the future, we remember and mourn the past, and in between we so often choose to neglect the only time we ever have, the here and now. This is what Khizr is telling Iqbāl (and us). If you have something to do, something to show, something to accomplish, begin it now, do not wait, do not put it off, you will never have this moment again and you may never see tomorrow.

### **Muhavara Ma-bain Khuda-o-Insan<sup>4</sup>** **(Dialogue Between God and Man)**

This poem features one of Iqbāl's favorite styles, a dialogue or interplay between earthly and celestial figures. It also employs one of Iqbāl's favored poetical styles, the Socratic Method (or Socratic Debate), a form of inquiry and debate between individuals with opposing viewpoints based on asking and answering questions to stimulate rational thinking and to illuminate ideas. It is a dialectical method, often involving an

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<sup>4</sup>See (2004, 271).

oppositional discussion in which the defense of one point of view is pitted against the defense of another. One of the most famous examples of this genre is Iqbāl's lengthy poem "Shikva" in which Man (representing the Muslim faith) complains to God about the shabby treatment meted out to Muslims by God in spite of the sacrifices that Muslims have made on God's behalf. The poem, which caused quite a stir when first read by Iqbāl in public, is a bold criticism of God's indifference to a people who feel they deserve better: "O God, listen to this remonstrance from your faithful / Listen to the lament of those who forever praise you" (2000, 232). Many people were scandalized in those conservative days of the British Raj when Iqbāl dared to address God in so brazen a manner and, eventually, Iqbāl ended up writing a "Javāb-e Shikva" in which God takes Man (Muslims) to task for daring to complain while failing miserably in all manner of things practical.

The "Dialogue" is just such a poem. It is brief, a mere six verses, three each allowed to God and Man with, tellingly, the last word by Man. It is in Persian, Iqbāl's favored language and flows in his typical style. God goes first, remarking to man:

I created this world from the same water and earth  
 You created Iran, Tartaria and Nubia  
  
 I forged from dust, iron's pristine ore  
 You fashioned the sword, arrow and gun  
  
 To fell the garden tree, you made the axe  
 You fashioned the cage to imprison the singing bird

Man replies:

You created night, I the lamp  
 You created clay, and I the cup  
 You—desert, mountain peak and valley  
 I—flowerbed, park and orchard  
 It is I who grind a mirror out of stone  
 And brew elixir from poison

The striking thing about this exchange, other than its lyrical flow (lost somewhat in translation) is the insolent nature of Man's response. It is all the more surprising considering that Iqbāl is revered throughout Pakistan as a champion and staunch defender of the Muslims, till his last days a defender of the somewhat problematic concept of "Pan-Islamism"—the notion that Muslims the world over are one "Umma" or brotherhood. This has been a rallying cry for poets, writers, reformers and leaders through the ages, although there has never been an effec-

tive political event that came close to realizing the dream. This would seem to demonstrate the idea's inherent weakness, i.e., the difficulty any new faith always has in taking strong root in a new land without adapting and incorporating local traditions, customs and beliefs. In spite of exhortations to the contrary, the banner of faith has never been able to unite disparate nationalities, ethnicities and languages simply because loyalties to family, community, ethnicity and nation (in the broadest sense of the word) predate religion by thousands of years.

Man's response in the poem is also a good example of one of Iqbāl's central poetical themes, that of "*kbudī*" or "selfhood," the "sense," according to Kiernan,

of evolution and history, of advance through effort and struggle. [...] of the dynamic individual personality developed through practical activity in the world, as against the lingering Sufi ideal of passive contemplation and mystic absorption.

(2004, xviii)

The poem's chief strength appears to be Man's declaration of supreme confidence in his abilities to face any challenge, rise to overcome any obstacle, even one thrown up by the Almighty. It also points to another important psychological turning point, particularly in a man's life: the struggle, beginning, according to Freud, at a young age, and continuing throughout life to overcome and surpass the legacy of a dominant father. Freud termed this the "Oedipus complex" after the mythical Greek king, Oedipus, who, unknowingly, kills his father and marries his mother, an act which is expressly forbidden in all major religions on pain of eternal damnation. In this poem, Man, the defiant son, challenges his heavenly Father and proudly defends his accomplishments while God benevolently (and perhaps ironically) looks on and chooses to allow Man to have the last word.

This belief in struggle and the resulting development of selfhood is a favorite theme in Iqbāl's work. Kiernan pointed out that Iqbāl could never reconcile the Materialist and Metaphysical aspects of his personality and this is evident in his poetry. However, there is no evidence that Iqbāl ever wanted to reconcile the two, his poetry seems to lean now one way, now the other, and, as with all great poets, everyone can find in it what they are looking for. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, whose progressive, anti-imperialist poetry remains widely popular on both sides of the Indo-Pak divide, deeply admired Iqbāl's poetry (while remaining skeptical of his Pan-Islamism). It is often thought that Faiz, being a socialist and humanist, did not care much for Iqbāl's poetry. Nothing could be

further from the truth. Iqbāl presented Faiz with one of his first awards for winning a poetry competition when the latter was still a teenager. Iqbāl also wrote a letter of recommendation for Faiz's admission to Government College, Lahore. Upon Iqbāl's death, a sorrowful Faiz wrote a moving elegy named after the poet.

Of Iqbāl's place in Pakistan, Kiernan writes:

In the new State that now had to find its place in the world, Iqbal was canonized as a founding father and hoisted on to an official pedestal. That dead poets should moulder in government shrines while living poets moulder in government jails is a not unfamiliar irony of history. [...] A poet's influence is Protean. Among those numerous Hindus and Muslims who in the nightmare days of 1947 saved the lives of members of the other community at the risk to their own, [...] there must have been many, who had breathed Iqbal's verses with their native air. It was, after all, his lifelong teaching that the spirit is more than the letter, that religion must always be on its guard against [...] the dogmatist and the charlatan, and that a people must go forward or die.

(*ibid.*, xxiv)

At its best, Iqbāl's poetry is a magnificent call to action against all forms of injustice, tyranny and oppression, a call that is as relevant today as it was a hundred years ago. □

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