

Iqbāl-Nāmāh

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The Muslim World Between Decadence and Reform

[The following selection is taken from an article that was published in the periodical *Islam of Lahore* in January 1936. "Islam and Ahmadism" was written by Muhammad Iqbal in response to Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru's criticism of Iqbal's views on the relationship between the Ahmadis, the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), who claimed to be a prophet, and mainstream Muslims, who, in accordance with the established Islamic doctrine of the finality of Muhammad's prophethood, rejected Ahmadism as a heresy. In the opening line of the passage quoted here, the reference in "these great Muslims" is to three modern reformers mentioned in the immediately preceding passage: Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), and Sa'd Zaghlūl Pāshā (d. 1927). The two figures mentioned in the following selection are Mustafa Kemal (d. 1938), founder of modern Turkey, and Reza Shah, king of Iran (r. 1926–1941).]

It may, however, be asked what exactly was the objective of these great Muslims. The answer is that they found the world of Islam ruled by three main forces and they concentrated their whole energy on creating a revolt against these forces.

(i) *Mullaism*. The ulema have always been a source of great strength to Islam. But during the course of centuries, especially since the destruction of Baghdad, they became extremely conservative and would not allow any freedom of *Ijtihad*, i.e., the forming of independent judgment in matters of law. The Wahhabi movement which was a source of inspiration to the nineteenth-century Muslim reformers was really a revolt against this rigidity of the ulema. Thus the first objective of the nineteenth-century Muslim reformers was a fresh orientation of the faith and a freedom to reinterpret the law in the light of advancing experience.

(ii) *Mysticism*. The masses of Islam were swayed by the kind of mysticism which blinked actualities, enervated the people and kept them steeped in all kinds of superstition. From its high state as a force of spiritual education mysticism had fallen down to a mere means of exploiting the ignorance and the credulity of the people. It gradually and invisibly unnerved the will of Islam and softened it to the extent of seeking relief from the rigorous discipline of the law of Islam. The nineteenth-century reformers rose in revolt against this mysticism and called Muslims to the broad daylight of the modern world. Not that they were materialists. Their mission was to open the eyes of the Muslims to the spirit of Islam which aimed at the conquest of matter and not flight from it.

(iii) *Muslim Kings*. The gaze of Muslim Kings was solely fixed on their own dynastic interests and, so long as these were protected, did not hesitate to sell their countries to the

highest bidder. To prepare the masses of Muslims for a revolt against such a state of things in the world of Islam was the special mission of Jamal-ud-Din Afghani.

It is not possible here to give a detailed account of the transformation which these reformers brought about in the world of Muslim thought and feeling. One thing, however, is clear. They prepared to a great extent the ground for another set of men, i.e., Zaghul Pasha, Mustafa Kamal and Raza Shah. The reformers interpreted, argued and explained but the set of men who came after them, although inferior in academic learning, were men who, relying on their healthy instincts, had the courage to rush into sun-lit space and do, even by force, what the new conditions of life demanded. Such men are liable to make mistakes; but the history of nations shows that even their mistakes have sometimes borne fruit. In them it is not logic but life that struggles restless to solve its own problems. It may be pointed out here that Syed Ahmad Khan, Syed Jamal-ud-Din Afghani and hundreds of the latter's disciples in Muslim countries were not westernised Muslims. They were men who had sat on their knees before the *mullas* of the old school and had breathed the very intellectual and spiritual atmosphere which they later sought to reconstruct. Pressure of modern ideas may be admitted; but the history thus briefly indicated above clearly shows that the upheaval which has come to Turkey and which is likely, sooner or later, to come to other Muslim countries, is almost wholly determined by the forces within. It is only the superficial observer of the modern world of Islam who thinks that the present crisis in the world of Islam is wholly due to the working of alien forces.

Muhammad Iqbal, "Islam and Ahmadism,"
in Latif Ahmed Sherwani, ed., *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal,*
revised and enlarged edition (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1977), 231–232

My Wine-Pitcher Reveals Both Worlds

In the following poem, which occurs at the beginning of Part II of Zabūr-i 'Ajam, Iqbal invites the reader to study his thought carefully since it contains insights into "the two worlds" (see n. 1) and can serve as a guide through the perplexities of life. The poem predicts that Iqbal's thought will take root and give rise to revolutionary changes in the world of thought and action. At the same time, it warns that it takes courage and determination to follow that message, and that the faint of heart or weak of resolve will not be able to follow it.

دو عالم را تو ان دین بیسانی که من آ
کجا چشمی که بیند آن تاشانی که من آرام
دگر دیوانه بی آید که در شکر کف کند بونی
دو صد هسکامه خیر ز سودانی که من آرام
مخور نادان غم ز تار کی شبا که سیا
که چون نغم در خند داغ سیمانی که من آرام
ندرمی تاب آن ثوب و غوغای که من آرام
ندیم خویش میازی مرا لیکن از آن برسم

Translation

Both worlds may be seen in the wine-pitcher I have!¹
Where is the eye to view the sights I see?²

There will come another man, possessed, who will shout *hū!* in the city;
Two hundred commotions will arise from the obsession I have.³

Do not worry, ignorant one, at the approaching darkness of nights—
For, the scar of my forehead sparkles like stars.⁴

You take me as your companion, but I am afraid
That you are not up to the tumult and uproar I have raised.⁵

Notes

¹*Both worlds . . . I have.* The basic meaning of the verse is that Iqbal's thought contains special insights. We need to study the verse a little more closely in order to appreciate how Iqbal conveys that meaning.

Jamshed, the legendary king of ancient Persia, is said to have possessed a drinking-cup in which he could see the events occurring anywhere in the world; the cup was known as *jām-i jahāñ-numā*, the "world-revealing cup." Iqbal builds on that image, putting his own construction upon it. Note the following points: (1) Jamshed only had a *jām* (cup), whereas Iqbal has a whole *mīnā* (pitcher), which, of course, can reveal much more than a *jām* can. (2) The difference between a *jām* and a *mīnā*, Iqbal seems to be suggesting, is not only one of size or holding capacity, but one of status or rank as well: One who possesses a *jām* receives wine from others and is, thus, beholden to them; one who has a *mīnā* has command of the resources of wine and is in a position to confer favors on, or withhold favors from, would-be drinkers. (3) Jamshed, in all likelihood, jealously guarded his cup, for the view afforded by it constituted a privilege and gave him power over others; in other words, his cup was for his private or exclusive use. Iqbal, on the other hand, is not only willing, but also eager, to share with others the view he can see in his pitcher; in other words, he would like to share with others the privilege or power that comes with the possession of the pitcher. (4) Jamshed could see the happenings of only one world, whereas Iqbal's pitcher reveals both worlds (see below). In a similar vein, Iqbal says in *Asrār-i Khudī* (*Kulliyāt-i Iqbal—Fārsī*, 6):

Khāk-i man rawshan-tar az jām-i Jam ast
Mahram az nā-zād-hā-i 'ālam ast

[The dust of my being is brighter than Jamshed's cup;
It is privy to the world's yet unborn events.]

But what is meant by "both worlds" (Persian text: *du 'ālam*, "two worlds") in the verse? In light of the Islamic religious and literary tradition, the phrase can be interpreted in three ways:

(1) They are *'ālam ash-shahādah* and *'ālam al-ghayb*, "the perceptible world" and "the imperceptible world," respectively. In a number of places in the Qur'ān (for example, 6:73; 13:9; 35:38; 59:22), God is described as *'ālim al-ghayb wa-sh-shahādah*—one who is knowledgeable about the realms of *ghayb* (that which is imperceptible) and *shahādah* (that which is perceptible). A Persian poet (whose name escapes me) says:

Zi ritl-i durd-kashāñ kashf kard sālīk-i rāh
Rumūz-i ghayb ki dar 'ālam-i shahādāt raft

[It was through the dregs-drinkers' bowl that the path-treader discovered
The secrets of the imperceptible world that passed into the perceptible world.]

On this meaning of *du 'ālam*, Iqbal would be saying: Jamshed's cup revealed only the perceptible world (that is, the world that can be apprehended by means of the senses), but my wine-pitcher reveals, in addition, the imperceptible world (which is not amenable to sensory perception).

(2) They are *al-‘alam al-asfal* or *‘alam-i zīrīn* and *al-‘alam al-‘alā* or *‘alam-i bālā*, “the lower or terrestrial world” and “the upper or celestial world,” respectively. Iqbal’s Urdu poem *Mahabbat* (Love) in *Bāng-Darā* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbal—Urdū* [Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1990], 137–138) tells the story of an alchemist of the *‘alam-i bālā* who makes away with the well-guarded recipe of love inscribed on one of the posts of the Divine Throne. Following the recipe, the alchemist prepares a water-based solution, which he sprinkles on the newly created universe, infusing a cold, static world with the warm, dynamic force of love. Toward the end of the poem, reference is also made to *‘alam-i zīrīn*, which is the one signified by the word *‘alam* (world) in the phrase *kār-i ‘alam* (affairs of the world).

On this meaning of *du ‘alam*, Iqbal would be saying: My wine-pitcher not only reveals the goings-on in the terrestrial world, but also the happenings in the celestial realm—what Qur’ān 37:8 and 38:69 call *al-malā’ al-‘alā*.

This second meaning of “both worlds” overlaps the first, but not completely, since *al-‘alam al-asfal* would, by definition, seem to imply a sort of spatial distinction from *al-‘alam al-‘alā*, whereas *‘alam al-ghayb* may or may not imply such distinction from *‘alam ash-shahādah*, the former possibly being, in some cases, more like an aspect or dimension of the latter rather than being spatially extraneous to it.

(3) They are *al-ḥayāh ad-dunyā* (this-worldly life) and *al-ḥayāh al-ukhrā* (next-worldly life); in this interpretation, a temporal rather than a spatial distinction (see preceding paragraph) is implied. We may note Iqbal’s use of the phrase *du ‘alam* in this sense in a verse in *Zarb-i Kalīm* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbal—Urdū*, 636):

Dunyā hai riwāyātī ‘uqbā hai munājātī
Dar bāz du ‘alam rā īn ast shahanshāhī

[The world is custom-ridden, the afterlife is prayer-filled;
Give up on both—this is true kingship!]

On this interpretation—which is more comprehensive than the other two and probably the most relevant in the present context—Iqbal would be saying: My wine-pitcher reveals the secrets of both worlds, the present one and the one to come and, as such, offers the insight and guidance necessary to success in both. The following verse from *Asrār-i Khudī* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbal—Farsī*, 8) would seem to make a similar point:

Sirr-i ‘aysh-i jāwidān khwāhī biyā
Ham zamīn ham āsmān khwāhī biyā

[If you desire the secret of eternal life, come!
If you desire both the earth and the sky, come!]

²*Where is . . . I see?* The line simultaneously has an expectant and a regretful tone. The poet may be saying: I have so much to offer to the world, so let those who would benefit from me come forth. Or he may be saying: I have so much to offer to the world, but, regrettably, few are willing to benefit from me.

³*There will . . . I have.* The verse promises that the work started by Iqbal will not die with him but will continue after him—will, in fact, blossom into a large, powerful, and multifaceted movement. That work involves the reforming of society along Islamic lines. The verse has to be understood in light of the contrast that Iqbal, taking his cue from the sociological theories of the great Tunisian thinker Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), frequently draws between the city and the desert. In the verse, the *dīwānah* (“possessed man”; the dictionary meaning is “madman, insane man, crazy man”; the Arabic counterpart is *majnūn*) arrives in the city, which signifies that he is not of the city—or that he comes from the desert. In Islamic poetry, the *dīwānah* (the Persian—also Urdu—for “one who is possessed”) typically dwells in the desert. The several possible reasons for his disdain for the city and his preference for the desert cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to say that, in Iqbal’s verse, the *dīwānah*, on the one hand, represents rejection of and rebellion against the highly artificial, mechanical, and corrupt life of the city and, on the other hand, stands for rejuvenation of life through adoption of values associated with the desert, such as simplicity, vigor, and spontaneity. Iqbal’s *dīwānah* is not only subversive of the established order, but is also creative of a new order. This is borne out by the datum of *hū!* (He!) in the verse. The interjectory word, which is actually the Arabic personal pronoun *huwa* (he), is shorthand for “He alone is God!” or “He alone truly exists!” and is a favorite Ṣūfī formula of remembrance (*dhikr*) and concentration. To say, then, that another possessed man will come in from the desert and will shout *hū!* in the city is to say that such a man will challenge the established order in the name of God and will change society in accordance with His dictates. Iqbal’s *dīwānah* is, therefore, to be distinguished from a person like the maverick Nietzsche, who only seeks to subvert the established order.

Interestingly, in *Payām-i Mashriq* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbāl—Fārsī*, 328) Iqbal speaks of Friedrich Nietzsche as a *dīwānah* entering a glassmaker's shop (cf. the English idiom, "a bull in a china shop"). Furthermore, in the verse under study, the *dīwānah* is described as "another *dīwānah*," the implication being that Iqbal considers himself a *dīwānah* as well. To sum up, the movement of revolt and reform initiated by Iqbal will gain momentum with time, there arising, after Iqbal's departure, another *dīwānah* or rebel-reformer whose speech and action will destroy the corrupt existing order, replacing it with a just and wholesome order that is based on Divine dictates.

⁴*Do not . . . like stars.* Iqbal offers hope to those—he has members of the Muslim community in mind—who are apprehensive about a seemingly bleak future. He says to them: Have no worry, for I will guide you through the approaching difficulties. The second line, "For, the scar of my forehead sparkles like stars" (Persian: *Ki chuñ anjum darakhshad dāgh-i simā'e ki man dāram*) possibly alludes to a certain Qur'ānic verse. The line contains the word *simā*, which, in Persian, means "face" or "forehead." But *simā* (with several variants) is also an Arabic word, meaning "mark," "sign," "trait," or "characteristic." Iqbal, it seems, consciously exploits the word's homonymic potential. The *dāgh-i simā* in the Persian text means "scar or mark of the forehead," but the scar, or mark, meant is the one that regular acts of prostration (*sajdah*) in prayer (*ṣalāh*) leaves on one's forehead. From Qur'ān 48:29—or, rather, from one of the glosses on the word *simā* in the verse—Iqbal seems to borrow the notion of brightness of face, transfers this brightness to the *dāgh-i simā*, thus transforming the—normally darkish—scar of the forehead into a scar that shines like stars. The Qur'ānic verse says that Muḥammad's followers, who worship God in prayer, are easily recognizable from the marks of piety on their faces: *Simāhum fī wujūbihim min athari s-sujūd*, "Their [distinguishing] mark is in their faces, caused by prostration." According to one gloss on the verse, prayer beautifies or adorns one's face (*Aṣ-ṣalātu tuḥassinu wujūbahum*); according to another, a good act (the context, again, is that of prayer) brightens up the face (*ḍiyā' fī l-wajhi*) (see Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 7 vols., 4th printing [Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1983], 6:364). There is little doubt that Iqbal was aware of the homonymic nature of the Persian *simā*, and it is fairly certain that Iqbal, who read widely, had known of such glosses on the word *simā*. Testimony to this effect is provided in a verse in *Żarb-i Kalīm* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbāl—Urdū*, 545):

*Mithāl-i māh chamaktā thā jis kā dāgh-i sujūd
Kharīd lī hai Farangī ne woh musalmānī*

[The Europeans have bought off that Muslimhood,
Whose scar, from prostration, shone like the moon.]

Iqbal's use, in this verse, of the word *sujūd* (prostration), which occurs in the aforementioned Qur'ānic verse, and his ascription of brightness to the *dāgh-i sujūd* (mark of prostration) cannot be accidental. For another, similar use of the phrase *dāgh-i sujūd* in Iqbal, see *Payām-i Mashriq* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbāl—Fārsī*, 207), quatrain 1.

Having seen how Iqbal conflates two images (his poetry contains several other examples of such conflation), we may restate the meaning of the verse under study thus: Do not let the bleak prospects of the future dismay you, for I will guide you through the difficult times that lie ahead; the scar of my forehead is bright—it sparkles like stars—and it will light up the path for you. The verse is addressed either to people in general or, more likely, to those people whom Iqbal would like to follow a certain noble course of action but who are reluctant to do so because of the difficulties or hazards associated with such a course of action.

⁵*You take . . . have raised.* That is: You seem eager to embrace the message that I represent, but I am afraid that you will not be able to withstand the hardships that you will have to encounter in adhering to the content of the message. In the second line of the Persian verse, the phrase *āshob-o ghawghā'* calls for a comment. *Āshob* literally means "affliction, upheaval, misfortune"; *āshob-i rūzgār* is the vicissitudes of a historical period, *āshob-i mahshar* is the great disturbance or upheaval that will mark the Day of Resurrection, and *shahr āshob*, a literary term, is a poem that describes a formerly glorious city that has been ravaged or reduced to ruins. The literal meaning of *ghawghā'* is "noise, tumult, clamor." The combination of the two words in the phrase seems to have a certain significance. The word *ghawghā'* is originally from the Arabic *ghawghā'*, which is often used in classical Arabic to describe the noise, clamor, or tumult associated with a war—and which then comes to signify, both in Arabic and Persian, war as such. Iqbal uses the word in the sense of "war" in the phrase *mard-i ghawghā'* (a true warrior, one who stands his ground in battle) in a poem in *Payām-i Mashriq* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbāl—Fārsī*, 303); the phrase, in fact, is a borrowing from one of the best known verses of the Persian poet Nazīrī (d. 1670), and the second hemistich of that verse is quoted by Iqbal in the same poem in *Payām-i Mashriq* (302), the whole poem having been repeated in *Jāvid-Nāmah* (*Kullīyyāt-i Iqbāl—Fārsī*, 591–592). If these meanings of the words *āshob* and *ghawghā'* are kept in

mind, then, in the present context, *āshob* would represent Iqbal's lament at the misfortunes that have befallen the historic Muslim community, whereas *ghawghā* would represent Iqbal's "call to arms"—namely, Iqbal's summons to Muslims to undertake the arduous task of rebuilding the community on a war footing (if the pun be allowed). Iqbal, thus, not only mourns the Muslim past, but also invites Muslims to work for a better future. He is, however, apprehensive that his addressees will neither put up with the lament he is making over the past nor have the perseverance to follow the course of action he is prescribing for the future.

Mustansir Mir

Iqbal's College Years

[The following selection from Dr. Javid Iqbal's biography of Muhammad Iqbal, *Zindah-Rūd (The Living Stream)* deals with an interesting stage of Iqbal's intellectual development. It highlights the fact that, even as a college student, Iqbal pondered on serious issues of life, and that, while he had not yet reached the stage of settled convictions, he was already in search of what one may call intellectual certitude.]

Another characteristic feature of this period is that, during it, Iqbal, instead of being drawn to his surroundings, is largely focused on himself. His interest in the study of philosophy, while at times it graced the conventional subject matter of his *ghazal* with gems of wisdom, occasioned some intellectual quandaries as well. Iqbal himself wrote in 1910:

I confess I owe a great deal to Hegel, Goethe, Mirza Ghalib, Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil and Wordsworth. The first two led me into the "inside" of things; the third and fourth taught me how to remain oriental in spirit and expression after having assimilated foreign ideals of poetry, and the last save me from atheism in my student days.

It is obvious from this writing that Iqbal's inquisitive mind kept him searching about for truth. This was an entirely private and inward kind of struggle, for, during this period, Iqbal would not accept the truth or validity of anything on the authority of others. The temporary state of atheism was caused probably by the study of Hegel. In *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 'Alī Hujwīrī calls atheism a veil. According to him, this veil is of two types. The first type is that which cannot be lifted; an atheist's heart is sealed off, as it were. This is the permanent, entrenched type of atheism that is, like a chronic illness, incurable. The second type is the veil of truth. It represents an atheism that starts out as skepticism but ends up in faith. The inner self of an atheist of this category is ceaselessly active in the search to find out the truth and comprehend the distinction between good and evil. Atheism of this type represents a temporary phase in the evolutionary course of any inquisitive mind.

The question arises: If, from the outset, Iqbal was educated and trained along traditional Islamic lines, then how could Wordsworth influence him so? Iqbal's inquisitiveness is proof that he was averse to the narrow and limited range of his own tradition. European philosophy created in him the intellectual confusion from which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European philosophy itself was suffering. Little wonder, then, that his inquisitive mind and poetic disposition discovered, through a study of Wordsworth, an intelligible response to the hollowness of rationalism. It rather goes to prove the wholesomeness of his intellect that, despite coming under the influence of the materialistic doctrines of his age, he was not misled by them.

Every student of philosophy and mysticism knows how closely Wordsworth's ideas

resemble Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings on ontological monism. From this, one can deduce that it was the concept of ontological monism that delivered Iqbal from the skepticism of the aforementioned phase of his intellectual evolution. The evolution of Iqbal’s poetic art during this brief period occurs at a very fast pace. In some *ghazals*, artistic maturity is accompanied by a striking profundity of thought. Although the *ghazals* have an element of earthly or human love, yet, in respect of content or subject matter, mystic or philosophic poetry is at every point relegating conventional poetry to the background, and a distinctive style is on the rise. Under the impact of the philosophy of ontological monism, some verses represent the conventional idea of self-annihilation. In Iqbal’s view, in other words, the self’s individuality is an illusion that dissipates automatically after the emergence of truth, the same old reality—God—still being the only one to survive and subsist. It is in this phase that Iqbal laid, in light of the philosophy of existential monism, the foundations of his political thought and, later, wrote poems in support of territorial nationalism.

It was during his student days that Iqbal started composing poetry in a new style. Abandoning the conventional *ghazal*, he turned his attention to *nāẓm*. This was the result of the influence of Western ideas on him. The new civilization that had accompanied the British to India promoted a new set of values in Urdu literature. During the days of the Aligarh Movement, at least in respect of choice of subject matter, a new, Western-style poetry had begun to come into existence. Though not versed in English, Ḥālī, Shiblī, and Āzād had abandoned the conventional style and accepted the modern influences. During Iqbal’s student days, modern influences were at work in Government College as well. He had, before his eyes, the best models of English poetry as well as of Urdu and Persian poetry. Urdu and Persian lacked poetry about scenes of nature or about love of homeland and nation, but such sentiments were present in English poetry. At the very outset, then, Western influences changed the direction of Iqbal’s poetry. He made a free Urdu rendering of a few English poems. Some of his poems, though not translations, were Western in point of thought and style.

Under modern influences, Ḥālī had laid the foundations of patriotic or Muslim nationalist poetry. But such was that period in the life of the Muslim religious community that nationalist poetry consisted mostly of mourning over the Muslim nation. And so, when he was persuaded by his friends to compose poetry about the Muslim community, Iqbal, too, began by writing mournful poetry.

In any case, during his student days, some of Iqbal’s poems were published in such periodicals as *Zabān-i Dihlī* and *Shor-i Maḥshar*. He was well-known only among those people who participated in *mushā’arāhs* or poetry symposiums. The fact is that Iqbal was not a poet of the *mushā’arah*, and so, by the end of his student days, he ceased to participate in *mushā’arāhs*. A study of the poetry that Iqbal wrote during his student days makes it plain that he was a bundle of contradictions in that period. Life was still an enigma for him. He had not formed any firm convictions. Rather, his mind was an experimental laboratory for assessing the perdurability or the lack thereof of diverse thoughts, ideas, and feelings. This state lasted for quite some time.

The Lazy Mind

There is something of the plant in the lazy mind; it cannot dance.

Muhammad Iqbal, *Stray Reflections, revised edition*,
ed. Javid Iqbal (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1992), 104

Call for Contributions to *Iqbāl-Nāmāh*

Scholars and students of Iqbal are invited to write for *Iqbāl-Nāmāh*. Essays and studies on Iqbal, as well as translations of his Persian and Urdu writings into English and commentaries on any aspect of his work are welcome. Please send contributions to the Center for Islamic Studies at Youngstown State University.

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