

## **Iqbal and His Asrar-i-Khudi**

By Liu Shuxiong

Esteemed Professors and Scholars,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to join the Center for South Asia Studies at UC Berkeley as a visiting scholar and pleased to have a talk on Iqbal. I am a teacher of Urdu in the School of Foreign Languages at Peking University and I would like to take this opportunity to briefly introduce Iqbal studies in China and exchange views on Iqbal, a Muslim poet-philosopher of South Asia. I define Iqbal as a Muslim poet-philosopher of South Asia rather than of India or Pakistan, because he may be considered as a poet of both countries.

My today's talk consists of three topics. They are: 1. Iqbal Studies in China, 2. Iqbal's Personality, 3. His philosophical Masnavi *Asrar-i-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self).

### **Iqbal Studies in China**

Among numerous Chinese scholars of Islamic literature and culture, there is a group of scholars, who are interested in Iqbal studies and have published a considerable number of papers and articles on various Chinese magazines and periodicals. They also published some translations and research books.

#### **a) About translation:**

*Selected Poems of Iqbal* is the first book of Iqbal's poems published in China in 1957. One year later, another book with the same title was published in another press. Both of them were translated into Chinese from English version, not from the original text.

Twenty years later, the People's Literature Press published *Selected Poems of Iqbal* on Iqbal's centennial anniversary in 1977, which was selected and translated from Iqbal's Urdu poems. There are 37 poems in the book.

I translated and published Iqbal's Persian Masnavi *Asrar-i-Khudi* in 1999. Dr. Javid Iqbal, Muhammad Iqbal's son and the Executive Vice President of Pakistan Iqbal Academy, wrote a preface entitled in a line of Iqbal *Himalayas Spring Is Boiling up*. He speaks highly of the translation work and expatiates on the significance of Iqbal's philosophical idea *Khudi*.

It was in the summer of 1991 when I visited Iran together with the teachers and students of Persian language of my university, I learnt a great deal from the trip and it deepened my understanding about the Islamic culture and the life of Muslims. After coming back, I began to learn Persian in order to read Iqbal's Persian poems directly, which had been a desire from the days when I began to study Iqbal's Urdu poems at the beginning of 1980s and got to know that most of Iqbal's poems were written in Persian. I finally finished the translation in 1998.

Going with the translation from the original texts of Iqbal's works, scholars also translated and introduced foreign research work in China. For example, the book *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* by an Indian scholar Basant Kumar was published in 1991. This book discusses seven important contemporary Indian philosophers and thinkers including Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan and Muhammad Iqbal. The translator considered these seven philosophers representing the most influencing philosophical systems of contemporary India. On the other side, a research fellow from the Chinese Academy

of Social Sciences (abbreviated as CASS) wrote an article *On Iqbal Studies Abroad* and made an introduction on publications on Iqbal's studies in South Asia, Europe, Middle East and South East Asian countries. As a result, the Chinese literary circle got to know the situation of Iqbal studies of the outside world.

**b) About monographs:**

Besides the translation and introduction of Iqbal's works, many monographs were published in China's various magazines and periodicals. I would like to mention a few titles of the published monographs.

*The Muslim Enlightening Movement and Iqbal's Patriotic Poems*

*Iqbal's Poem "Bandeginame" from Zabur-i-Ajam —On Iqbal's Aesthetics"*

*The Image of Iblis in Iqbal's Poems*

*Iqbal's Poetry and His Philosophical and Social Thought*

*Iqbal's Philosophy and Social Ideal*

I also published a number of monographs on Iqbal from 1980s.

*A Primary Analysis on the Poetry of Iqbal's Earlier Period*

*Iqbal and Urdu Literature*

*Iqbal's Philosophy and Its Islamic Background*

*The Formation of Khudi Philosophy in Iqbal's Poetry*

*Iqbal and the Western Thinkers*

*Aesthetic Standards and Characteristics in Iqbal's Poetry*

*Uplifting the Value of Life — After Reading Iqbal's Masnavi Asrar-i-Khudi* (This monograph was translated by a Korean scholar and published in *Journal of South Asian Studies*, (Vol.VII No.1), in Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in 2001.

It is worth mentioning that some scholars wrote books either on Iqbal or partly concerning Iqbal. For instance,

*The Islamic Philosophy of South Asia* is one chapter of the book *Eastern Philosophy of Modern Time*

The book *Contemporary and Modern Indian Philosophers* discusses on nearly twenty philosophers' thoughts and their social ideals including Iqbal.

*Islam in the History and the Present Age* is a collection of more than thirty papers on Islam by a research fellow from the Institute of Religions of CASS, ranging from Islamic traditions, trends of thought to Islamic renaissance, modernity and relationship with politics.

I also published a book *Iqbal ---- Muslim Poet-philosopher*, which consists of ten chapters. After a biographical examination of the poet and the dissemination of Islam in South Asia and the traditions of Persian and Urdu poetry in the area, it approaches two aspects of Iqbal as a poet and a thinker.

Generally speaking, Iqbal studies in China is done in two aspects. One is to introduce Iqbal's poems to the Chinese people, which includes translation of Iqbal's poems and release of some introductory articles about the poet-philosopher, and the other is to research in his main philosophical ideas, which is comprised of the papers issued in various periodicals and relevant chapters in the monographs and a few books.

**c) About institutions:**

There are two educational institutions of Urdu in China. One is in Peking University and the other is in Beijing Broadcasting College, the latter is now renamed as the Chinese University of Communication. In China, a foreign language is taught as a specialty or a major. Until now about two hundreds of students who majored in Urdu graduated from college.

Peking University is a comprehensive institution and one of the best universities

in China. Now other two universities are prepared to enroll Urdu students in the near future.

Institute of South Asian Studies of CASS was established in early years of 1980s. The institute later was incorporated into the Institute of Asian and Pacific Studies of CASS. Many scholars with an academic background of Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Sinhala and Nepali do research work on South Asian Studies.

In China, there is an academic organization, The Chinese Society of South Asian Studies in charge of coordinating South Asian Studies and holding conference annually at the national scale.

#### **d) Iqbal's value from the Chinese perspective:**

Let's look at two remarks on Iqbal. When Iqbal's poems were firstly published in China in 1950s, the translators pointed out in the postscript that Iqbal's religious poems were not based upon standing aloof from worldly affairs but grounded on the positive realistic spirit.

This is the publisher's remark in 1970s. "Iqbal's poems are full of enmity towards the colonial policy of imperialism and its exploitation, oppression and racialism, and overflowing with solicitous expectations for independence and emancipation and the happy life of the Eastern nations." The publisher further explained that Iqbal had lived in the era when the oppressed Eastern nations were awakening increasingly and roused to struggle against the imperialism and colonialism. Iqbal's earlier poems inclined to patriotism, appealing to the people of different nationalities to give up the religious disputes and be united to struggle for the national independence and freedom.

These remarks represent our common evaluation on Iqbal. People can see that in the past, Iqbal in the Chinese eye was considered as a poet fighting against exploitation and oppression, and struggling for national independence and freedom. The Chinese people attached more importance to Iqbal's patriotic sentiments. Iqbal's verses "*The deeply slept Chinese people are awakening, the spring of Himalayas is now boiling up*" (pic.10) were praised highly, which expressed friendly sensibilities of his people to the oppressed Chinese people. This couplet of Iqbal's poems enjoys a great popularity in China. It is the common experiences that the Chinese people and the people of South Asian sub-continent share in the past that produced the resonance of Iqbal's thought to the Chinese people. Obviously, research work and comments on Iqbal had been less done in his philosophical perspective.

In my humble book, I wrote that Iqbal towered a peak in the history of South Asian Persian and Urdu poetry. His theory of Khudi glistens the philosophical lights of knowing and mastering himself of human being. Iqbal did not only possess courage of a great thinker, but also owned an indomitable and persistent will. He is an outstanding thinker in the modern Islamic world. His poems are full of new ideas. His ideas are full of philosophy, creative spirits and humanities.

### **Iqbal's Personality**

#### **a) About his life:**

The famous poet, philosopher and social activist in the South Asia Muhammad Iqbal was born on Nov. 9th, 1877 in Sialkot, an Indian city at that time. His parents were devout Muslims, whose education and the religious family atmosphere stamped him in the childhood with the brand of Islam. The Islamic doctrine became the code of conduct all his life.

Iqbal studied at the Scottish Missionary College Sialkot and continued his education in Lahore. He got B. A. at Government College, Lahore in 1897 and M. A.

at Punjab University in 1899. Afterwards, he once worked at the Oriental College and taught the course of philosophy at Government College, Lahore as an assistant professor.

Iqbal went to Europe in 1905 and stayed there until 1908 to study philosophy and law in Trinity College at Cambridge. He was granted Ph. D. degree by Munich University on his dissertation entitled *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, which was published in 1908 in London. Meanwhile, he passed the qualifying examination for barrister. By then, Iqbal had become a learned scholar proficient in philosophy, law and literature.

Iqbal left Europe for India at the end of July, 1908. He joined the Lawyers' Association, Lahore to begin his practice and later on took in professorship at Government College, Lahore to teach philosophy and English literature. Not long after that, he gave up teaching and threw himself into philosophical studies and poem-writing besides political activities.

Iqbal actively took part in social and political activities. He assumed the General Secretary of the Society of Kashmir Muslim, Lahore in 1909 and took up the Chairmanship of the Association of Supporting Islam in 1924. He was a member of Punjab Assembly in 1926 and was selected the chairman of Allahabad Conference of All India Muslim League in Dec. 1930. At that occasion, he delivered an important historical speech to establish an independent state for Indian Muslims within British India, which laid a theoretical foundation for the establishment of Pakistan.

It is a long speech. He proclaimed. "I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India."

Iqbal participated in the British and Indian Round Table Conference in London twice in 1931 and 1932 as the representative of Muslim League. In 1935, Iqbal was elected the Chairman of Muslim League, Punjab. He passed away of decease on April 21st, 1938. A mausoleum was built in Lahore for the later generations to pay their respects to this great figure.

#### **b) About his literary contributions**

Iqbal left behind himself a rich spiritual heritage to mankind, particularly to the Islamic world. As a poet and philosopher, he wrote and published eleven poetic works, in order of publication namely: *Asrar-i-Khudi* (1915), *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* (1918), *Bayam-i-Mashriq* (1923), *Bang-i-Dara* (1924), *Zabur-i-Anjam* (1927), *Javidname* (1932), *Musafir* (1934), *Bal-i-Jibril* (1935), *Zarb-i-Kalim* (1936), *Pas Chay Bayed Kard aye Aqwam-i-Sharq* (1936) and *Armughan-i-Hijaz* (1938).(pic.15)

The Secrets of the Self

The Secrets of Selflessness

A Message from the East

Call of the Marching Bell

Persian Psalms

Javid Namah

Traveller

Jibril's Wing

Kalim's Blow

What should the Eastern Nations do

## The Present of Hijaz

These works are the crystallization of his hard-working and wisdom. He first wrote in Urdu and later in Persian in order to extend more influence on Muslim world.

Besides, he has other three prose works. *Ilm-ul-Iqtisad* was compiled in 1903, which is a book on political economy in Urdu and published in 1904. The second work is the above-mentioned *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1908) and the third book is *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*. In early 1929, he prepared six lecture drafts for the speeches in Madras, Bangalore and Mysore in South India. He also delivered the speeches in Aligarh in North India. These speeches were compiled up into the book of *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam* later in 1930. Iqbal, in this important philosophical work, showed clearly that religious thought in Islam had been practically stationary in the last five hundred years and Muslims should survey seriously their history by means of a rousing and enterprising spirit.

### **C) A Poet with Enthusiasm and Cultural Ideology**

We may say Iqbal is a poet, a philosopher, a thinker, a religious reformer, even a political leader. Firstly and eventually, Iqbal is a poet, a poet with extreme enthusiasm. For example, Let's take his two poems Shikawa and Jawab-i-Shikawa (*Complain and Answer to Complain*, pic.16). The poet poured out sufferings in his heart to the God. He imagined that the Muslims were threw away by the God and were immersed in downfall. The God answered to the poet about why the Muslims have declined and how they could rise up and be prosperous again.

Though these two long poems were written apart in three years, they expressed a common and integrated standpoint. In the poems, what the poet put forward and what the God answered to the complaint are Iqbal's new cerebrations to the new issues in the reality. Although Iqbal did not adopt new poetic form, he did fill new liquor into the old bottles. The new liquor is his enthusiasm, which originated from his loyalty to the religion. He is a poet firmly based himself upon his belief and the poetic traditions. He sought the poetry serving to a grand spiritual scenery, unlike the most modern Western poets who were seeking for the noumenal significance and value of pure poetry. When Iqbal was writing the poems, great changes have been taking place in the international Parnassus. In 1909, the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti(1876— 1944) published in France *The Futurist Manifesto* and initiated the Futurist Movement. In 1913, the American poet Ezra Pound,(1885— 1973) was driving the Imagist Movement. And at the same time, Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888— 1965) wrote his modernist poem *the Love Song of Prufrock*. In the East, it was on the eve of New Cultural Movement in China. In India, Rabindranath Tagore edited and published *Gitanjali* (Song of Offerings) and not long later, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Iqbal was writing the poems as if he ignored all this changes and the modern movements. Iqbal is a different poet from most of the poets in the East and West. Besides Shikawa and Jawab-i-Shikawa, his later poetic works were almost of the same style. So, we may say, Iqbal's poetry is beyond the influence of modernist poetry. There is a close relationship between his poetry and his aesthetic principles, cultural traditions and ideology. Without knowing this background, we cannot understand his poetry.

Iqbal's Islamic cultural ideology is embodied in his deep thought, which is characterized by the creativeness and initiative spirit. The ideas of *Khudi* and *Bekhudi* provided the Muslims of South Asia with a philosophical guide. Meanwhile, his ideas

about establishing the Islam's identity played an important role in the unification of the mass of Muslims under the banner of Islam. The pith and marrow of *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam* is to oppose religious stagnation, awaken the consciousness of Islamic *Ummah* and reveal the common cultural psychology of Muslims.

### **About Asrar-i-Khudi and Rumuz-i-Bekhudi**

The themes of Asrar and Rumuz:

Asrar-i-Khudi (the Secrets of the Self): the value of the self

Rumuz-i-Bekhudi (the Secrets of Selflessness): the relationship between the individual and society

*Asrar-i-Khudi* is not a very long Masnavi, only 871 couplets. It is a short one either in India or in Iran compared with many poets' works. After a long time to conceive and two years to write, (He started conceiving the masnavi in 1911 according to one of Iqbal's letters which reads that his father has asked him to write a Masnavi in Persian.) Iqbal was convinced of his foresight of the theme.

*I have no need of the ear of To-day,*

*I am the voice of the poet of To-morrow.*

He compared his lyrics with those of the conservative poets.

*Their sea is silent, like dew,*

*But my dew is storm-ridden, like the ocean.*

In the Masnavi, *Khudi* sometimes is abstract, and sometimes is concrete. The poet described vividly by means of fables, for instance, the fable of tiger and sheep, bird and diamond, tales, for instance, the Islamic legend, Brahman and Sufi saint, and metaphors, for instance, the conversation between the River Ganga and Himalayas, and dialogue between diamond and coal, etc. to reveal the philosophy of *Khudi*.

*Khudi* is a complex thought in Iqbal. Broadly speaking, it represents the principle of the inner self of human being. In order to cultivate *Khudi*, Iqbal criticized the negative factors existing in mysticism. He believed that the universe was an existence consisting of continuous lives. Human being was the highest form of life and *Khudi* the highest form of human being. The creative self-assertion was the basic moral for Muslims.

Iqbal placed emphasis on individuality and suggested that the individual rely on his own ability and explore his potentialities. According to Iqbal's idea, the individuality could be strengthened only if he took part in practice. Otherwise, it would weaken the *khudi* and be idle, attempt nothing or avoid struggles. So, in Iqbal's thought, the value of the Self is actually the value of life.

Iqbal's philosophical conception of *Khudi* refers to a brand-new signification. It is not only the source and essence of the universe and natural person but the motive of all the activities and behaviors of human being. He uplifted the value of *Khudi* and inspired Muslims to cultivate *Khudi* for rebuilding the society.

*Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* is Iqbal's another Masnavi, which is also in Persian and published in 1918. Rumuz has as its main theme the relationship between the individual and society.

That is to say, *khudi* of individual should be mixed together with *khudi* of group and the individual interest should submit to the collective one. Actually, only when the individual maintains close links of his destiny with the entire nation's destiny, can he exist and develop. Iqbal created these philosophical ideas in such a time

when his country faced great difficulties. His philosophy is an acting philosophy.

He held that it was by the collectivized *Khudi* formed up of the countless individuals' *Khudi* that the glorious Islamic traditions could be recovered and a unified *Ummah* could be established. Iqbal said in the winter of 1910. "Islam has a far deeper significance for us than merely religious, it has a peculiarly national meaning, so that our communal life is unthinkable without a firm grasp of the Islamic Principle. The idea of Islam is, so to speak, our eternal home or country wherein we live, move and have our being."<sup>1</sup> *Asrar-i-Khudi* and *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* extended and developed the idea of Iqbal's philosophical principles.

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<sup>1</sup> *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, compiled and edited by Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1995, p.124.