

## IQBAL DAY CELEBRATIONS AT LONDON, 1948-56

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In addition to Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) is appropriately assumed as the founding father of Pakistan. Throughout his life span and even after his demise, his obliged community had shown unmatched warmth and appreciation to him. The trend reached its climax after the creation of Pakistan when he was considered the personality who first visualized the proposal of a separate homeland for the Muslims and motivated others to attain that target. Therefore, soon after the establishment of Pakistan, Iqbal Day celebrations became an event of national rejoice and regeneration, which were used to be celebrated with, unbound enthusiasm and eclat. Besides Pakistan, these festivities were also observed in all the major capitals of the world under the auspices of various socio-cultural associations with collaboration of the Pakistan's diplomatic missions. In fact, the towering personality of Allama Iqbal provided an opportunity to introduce the newly established nation-state of Pakistan into the international academic, political, and diplomatic circles. The views expressed by world dignitaries about Iqbal's contributions and the extent of indebtedness shown to him by the national leadership are worth mentioning. In the following pages, an attempt has been made to trace all such events held at the British capital, London, during 1948-56 as reported in the English dailies of Pakistan. It is hoped that this endeavor would reveal to some extent the international perception of the life and works of the great seer, devotee to the teachings of the Quran and statesman.

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In 1948, the first mention about Iqbal Day celebrations in London appeared in the national English dailies. *Dawn*, Karachi reported that a grand Iqbal Day function was arranged by the Muslims based at London at the Islamic Culture Centre, London, on April 21, 1948. Speaking on the occasion on behalf of Arab Community, Emir Abdul Mejid Haider, Jordanian Minister, linked Iqbal with Shakespeare and reminded that his country was deeply loved by Iqbal and one of his most beautiful poems was in praise of it.<sup>(1)</sup> Speaking on the occasion, Habib Ibrahim Rahimtoola (1912-1991),<sup>(2)</sup> the High Commissioner for Pakistan, said that Iqbal stood for certain values in human conduct and outlook, which transcended all racial distinctions. His mind ranged extensively over a realm of ideas, which did not recognize any territorial or racial frontiers.<sup>(3)</sup>

On May 4, 1948, *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, published a delayed report sent by Victor Gordon from London regarding inaugural meeting of the Majlis-i-Iqbal on Iqbal Day. The correspondent reported that it took the form of an 'at home' at the Islamic Culture Centre in London on April 21, when Habib Ibrahim Rahimtoola, the society's patron, presided over a distinguished gathering of nearly three hundred persons, which included representatives of all the Muslim countries as well as many British scholars, writers and critics.<sup>(4)</sup> In his inaugural speech, Rahimtoola said that Iqbal's works bore ample signs of his vast mental horizon he developed in the light of the Quran as his mind ranged extensively over a realm of ideas, which did not recognize any territorial frontiers. He also referred to the English translations of the poet's works and observed that Iqbal's students and admirers felt deeply grateful to their translators for enabling others to share the joy, stimulation and the inspiration.

which they had found in Iqbal's works.<sup>(5)</sup>

It was followed by recitations from Iqbal's works and short speeches paying tributes to the poet and his works, which were made by several scholars and diplomats. The evening concluded with a speech of thanks by Abdullah Yousaf Ali, president of Majlis-i-Iqbal, for the honour that had been accorded to the Society by such distinguished support at its inaugural meeting.<sup>(6)</sup> Another report, which appeared in *The Pakistan Times* on May 11, 1948, supplemented that the BBC recorded the proceedings of the meeting and extracts from them were put out in their eastern service in a half-hour magazine programme that was broadcasted on the next day.<sup>(7)</sup>

The next indication regarding Iqbal Day observation in Britain appeared in 1950. The correspondent of *The Pakistan Times* informed on April 13, 1950 that Habib I. Rahimtoola, Pakistan's High Commissioner to Britain, would preside over a meeting in London on April 21 to commemorate the 12th death anniversary of Iqbal. The news further notified that the meeting would be held at the Islamic Culture Centre, London and would be addressed, among others, by Mohsin Rais, the Persian Ambassador to Britain.<sup>(8)</sup> Later, *The Pakistan Times*, *Dawn*, *The Khyber Mail*, Peshawar, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Karachi, *The Morning News*, Karachi and *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore reported that Iqbal Day was celebrated in London at the Islamic Culture Centre where a reception was held jointly by Majlis-i-Iqbal and the Royal India and Pakistan Society under the presidentship of Habib Rahimatoola, Pakistan High Commissioner to Britain and was attended by a large number of Pakistani, Persian, Arab and British audience. Alan Wheatley, a well-known British stage actor, recited two English

translations of Iqbal's works while Masood Farzaad, a Persian poet, dedicated *ghazal* sequence in Persian to the memory of Iqbal.(9)

Speaking on the occasion, Ibrahim Rahimatoola said that Iqbal stirred the nation into activity and gave them the restlessness they needed. He rebelled against contentment, and taught us to look much beyond what ordinarily might be seen by the naked eyes. He gave a message of the glorious past and of the still glorious future that lay ahead. Mohsin Rais, Persian Ambassador to Britain observed that Iqbal was held in great esteem in Persia and hoped that Iqbal's thoughts would influence in developing a synthesis of European and Muslim countries. A. J. Arberry spoke on Iqbal's doctrine of the individual and community and concluded that Islam to Iqbal was the absolute answers to all questions.(10)

*The Civil and Military Gazette*, Karachi, *The Khyber Mail* and *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore communicated that two days later, Allama Iqbal was again mentioned at a high level meeting when Habib I. Rahimtoola quoted a verse of Iqbal in praise of Shakespeare while attending Shakespeare's birthday celebrations held at Stratford-on-Avon. Speaking on the occasion. He said that as a proof of the high esteem and regard in which Shakespeare was held in his country, he could do no better than to quote the greatest national poet, Iqbal. He then quoted a verse from Iqbal's poem on Shakespeare.(11)

On May 7, 1950, *Dawn*, Karachi, published text of the speech of A. J. Arberry under the caption "Iqbal's doctrine of the individual and the community", delivered at Iqbal Day function held in London on April 21, 1950. Focusing on Iqbal's poem *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, Arberry

observed in his address that the images used by the poet in those verses were almost as ancient as Persian literature itself and his allusions were drawn from the orthodox doctrine of Islam. He pointed out that it was symptomatic of Iqbal's genius that he was able to give those images and allusions entirely new meanings, closely related to the very modern problems with which he was engaged. Iqbal's answer to the questions he had posed was similarly couched in traditional language, but the language was brilliantly reinterpreted to state a modern philosophy of the human self.<sup>(12)</sup>

Arberry believed that the theme of the *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* was the bond between the 'individual and the community'. The individual could not realize fully his own personality and potentialities, except as an active member of the community; while the community itself cannot continue vital and created unless it is made up of vital and creative individuals.<sup>(13)</sup> Concluding, Arberry argued that Iqbal was right in urging us to build from the foundations and urged that let each individual seek to realize himself within the best traditions and according to the highest ideals of the community to which he belonged; and let each community strive earnestly to justify and achieve the purpose of its existence.<sup>(14)</sup>

In 1951, Iqbal Day was also planned to be observed at London under the presidentship of Ali Soheily, Iranian Ambassador in London, under the auspices of Iqbal Society in Britain. *Dawn*, Karachi, reported that the principal speakers at the meeting included Javid Iqbal, then studying at Cambridge. A number of British film and radio artists had agreed to recite English adaptations of some of Allama Iqbal's poems. The recitations in Persian were expected to be done by a member of the Iranian Embassy in London.<sup>(15)</sup> BBC also

planned to broadcast a series of special programmes for the occasion in Urdu and Bengali as well as in English. As per reports appearing in *The Pakistan Times* and *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Karachi, highlights of the Iqbal programme in English were a recording by Javid Iqbal, and a talk on Iqbal especially contributed for the occasion by a young Pakistani writer, Jalaluddin Ahmed. The Urdu programme included a contribution from Javid Iqbal. In the weekly Bengali programme for (the then) East Pakistan; Abdul Hai of Dhaka University gave a talk on Iqbal and read Bengali translation of one of his poems.(16)

In 1953, Iqbal Day was observed in Britain with immense fervor. *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore reported that Iqbal Day was observed at London by the Iqbal Society in Britain at the Islamic Culture Centre with M. A. H. Isfahani (1902-1981),(17) Pakistan High Commissioner to Britain in chair. Isfahani, in his presidential address said that Allama Iqbal's outlook on life was based on the intensely humanistic system of thought given to the world by our Holy Prophet (SAW), now enshrined in the Quran. He added that Iqbal stressed that Islam was a living faith, which placed the utmost importance on the individual. As the first man in the East to attempt a reorientation of Muslim thought in the light of modern philosophical concepts, Iqbal's work marked the renaissance of the Muslims. The High Commissioner added that in our generation, Iqbal had restored to us pride in our past and inspired us with faith in our future, for it was through his verses that the vision of Pakistan was first glimpsed. His conception of the new state was the establishment of Islamic society deeply devoted to the service of humanity under the teachings of the Quran and in the promotion of peace and a state providing equal opportunities to all irrespective of colour, caste, or creed, he concluded.(18)

In 1954, tributes to the memory of Allama Iqbal were paid at Iqbal Day meeting held at London under the auspices of Iqbal Society in Britain, which was covered by *Dawn*, Karachi, *The Times of Karachi*, Karachi, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore and *The Khyber Mail*. The function was presided over by M. A. H. Isfahani, Pakistan's High Commissioner in chair and attended by a large and distinguished gathering including diplomats from the Muslim countries. Addressing the gathering, Isfahani said that throughout his poetry and prose, Iqbal emphasized on action and attaching the attitude of resignation and dedication played a magnificent role in working of a new awakening in the Muslim masses. Summing up his genius as a poet, philosopher, political leader, and educationist, he observed that Iqbal's works, great though they were, have assumed immense fertility and significance since the emergence of Pakistan, which he was the first to conceive, and concluded that they were not the heritage of Pakistan alone but of the whole world.(19)

Speaking next, Ali Soheily, the Iranian Ambassador, dwelt on the poet's contribution to the Persian literature and maintained that Iqbal was undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in Persian literature since the eighteenth century. Continuing, the Iranian Ambassador said that like all great thinkers and poets, Iqbal belonged to the entire world and his vision covers the vast vista of the whole human race and the universe. Besides, Professor Arberry rendered the Iqbal's poems in English and William Barton made a speech paying tributes to Iqbal. Zaidi and Lohani also recited Iqbal's poems in Urdu and Bengali.(20)

In 1955, detailed reports of Iqbal Day function held in Britain appeared in the national newspapers. *The*

*Morning News*, Karachi, *The Pakistan Times*, *The Times of Karachi*, *The Pakistan Standard*, Karachi, *The Khyber Mail*, and *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore reported that leaders of religious, cultural, and political thought paid tributes to Allama Iqbal at a meeting held at the Islamic Cultural Centre in London to commemorate Iqbal's seventeenth death anniversary. The Iqbal Society, the Royal India Society, Pakistan and Ceylon Society and the Pakistan Students Federation whose members attended emphasized to organize the programme jointly. Also present were the Ambassadors of Saudi Arabia and Libya, the *charge d affaires* of Libya and Burma, British members of parliament, William Barton, Frank Brown, A. J. Arberry and many other friends of the Islamic world, including representations of the Indian and Ceylon's communities in London.(21)

Welcoming the guests, Pakistan's High Commissioner said that he could think of no period in his life when he did not know of Iqbal. Raz Moradabadi, a writer, poet and member of the Pakistan Section of the BBC gave a recitation from Iqbal's poetry in Urdu. He was followed by Takivi of the BBC Persian Section, who quoted from Iqbal's verses and spoke of the vastness of his mental horizon. Javid Iqbal, son of Allama Iqbal, who had been awarded his doctorate at his father's old university, Cambridge and was then doing post-doctorate research in philosophy was present at the meeting attended by several hundred admirers of the great Muslim writer.(22)

A new translation into English of *Shikwah* and *Jawab-i-Shikwah* was read by Arberry that he had prepared especially for the occasion and that was warmly applauded. Paying tributes, Arberry said that Iqbal's genius had many aspects. Nevertheless, one that embraced all others was that Iqbal had been a voice

rousing his fellow men from their lethargy and reviving their faith in Islam enshrined in the Holy Quran. He concluded by describing Iqbal's life as an existence devoted to the cause of Islam as a system of life and the triumphal advance of humanity.(23)

About Iqbal Day observance in 1956, *The Morning News*, Karachi and *The Morning News*, Dacca communicated that at London, The Iqbal Society jointly with the Royal India, Pakistan, Ceylon Society, and the Pakistan Students Federation in the UK commemorated the death anniversary of Allama Iqbal at the Islamic Culture Centre, London with Pakistan's High Commissioner in the UK, M. Ikramullah in chair.(24) The guest speakers of the evening included M. Samy Abdoul Fatouh, the Egyptian Ambassador who spoke on Iqbal's life and works, A. D. Azhar, Financial Adviser to the Pakistan Mission, London, and Ashiq Hussain Batalvi. Those present included the Ambassadors of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Burma, Philippines and a large number of English, Pakistani and Indian guests. After the meeting, a *mushaira* under the chairmanship of A. D. Azhar was held in which well-known Urdu poets in London participated.(25)

Even a cursory glance on the above paras would reveal that Allama Iqbal being the originator of the idea of newly formed state enjoyed a special status among the Pakistani intelligentsia. A survey of English dailies of Pakistan, which existed during 1948-56, reveals that he was highly respected for his multi-dimensional services not only by Pakistanis but also by British intellectuals and his views were persistently quoted as guidelines to be pursued for curing the ailing humanity. In fact, his ideas were presented as a panacea for all the ills and rallying point for the development of a sense of unity and oneness. In reality, the character of Allama Iqbal

provided an opening to introduce the recently established nation-state of Pakistan into the intercontinental circles. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a leading role in that context and its services are highly appreciable.

#### END NOTES

1. "Homage paid to Dr. Iqbal at London meeting", *Dawn*, April 22, 1948. Also see, "Iqbal linked with Shakespeare: Trans Jordan Minister's homage", *The Daily Gazette*, April 23, 1948.
2. Habib Ibrahim Rahimtoola (1912-1991); politician, industrialist, trader, diplomat, leader of Pakistan movement and a close associate of the Quaid-i-Azam; member, food delegation, Government of India to UK and USA, 1946; Indian delegation, International Trade and Employment Conference, Geneva, 1947; Vice President, Federation of Muslim Chamber of Commerce and Industry; President Young Men's Muslim Association; Bombay Muslim Students' Union 1946-47; Chairman, Bombay Provincial Muslim League Parliamentary Board for Local Bodies; Pakistan's High Commissioner in UK; Governor of Sindh, 1953-54; Governor Punjab, June-November 1954; Central Minister for Industries, 1955; Chairman Karachi Development Authority; Chairman Pakistan Red Cross Society, 1969-72.
3. "Iqbal did not recognize any racial frontiers, Rahimtoola", *Dawn*, April 23, 1948. Also see "London tributes to Iqbal", *The Daily Gazette*, April 23, 1948.
4. "Iqbal Day in London: Many tributes to Pakistan's poet", *The Pakistan Times*, May 4, 1948.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. "Iqbal Day celebrations in London", *The Pakistan Times*, May 11, 1948.
8. "Iqbal Day in London", *The Pakistan Times*, April 13, 1950.
9. "Iqbal Day in London", *The Pakistan Times*, April 19, 1950;

"Programme for London 'Iqbal Day' celebrations", *Dawn*, April 19, 1950; 'Iqbal Anniversary in London', *The Khyber Mail*, April 20, 1950; "Iqbal Day to be celebrated in London: Majlis-i-Iqbal and India and Pakistan Society meeting", *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore, April 20, 1950; 'Iqbal's mission has not ended with Pakistan's creation, Rahimtoola', *Dawn*, April 23, 1950; "London celebrates 'Iqbal Day'", *The Pakistan Times*, April 23, 1950; "Iqbal Day celebrations in London", *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Karachi, April 23, 1950; "Iqbal Day celebrated in London", *The Pakistan Times*, April 24, 1950; "London commemoration: Islam to Iqbal, answer to all questions, Prof. Arberry", *The Morning News*, April 24, 1950.

10. *Ibid.*

11. "Rahimtoola quotes Iqbal's poem on Shakespeare: Stratford-on-Avon banquet", *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Karachi, April 24, 1950; "Iqbal's praise of Shakespeare: Birthday celebrations at Stratford-on-Avon", *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore, April 24, 1950; "Iqbal's verse about Shakespeare", *The Khyber Mail*, April 25, 1950.

12. A. J. Arberry, "Iqbal Commemoration, 1950", *Dawn*, May 7, 1950.

13. Tabassum Kashmiri believes that according to Iqbal an individual has no separate identity. Real life is national life made up of individuals. If the national life is strong, the individual is also strong and if collective national life is weak, its individual members are also weak. Iqbal believes in collective force, which comes into being with unity and cooperation of individuals, and this force in turn forms the national identity. Quoted in Tabassum Kashmiri, *Iqbal aur Nai Qaumi Saqafat*, Lahore, Maktabah-i-Aalyia, 1977, pp. 29-30.

14. *Ibid.*

15. "Iqbal Day in London", *Dawn*, April 20, 1951.

16. "Iqbal's death anniversary: BBC programme", *The Pakistan Times*, April 14, 1951; "BBC programme for Iqbal Day", *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Karachi, April 21, 1951.

17. Mirza Abul Hasan Isfahani (1902-1981); a leading industrialist who was extremely close to the Quaid-i-Azam and helped him in wiring over the Muslim industrial and business classes; member, 1933-35, 1940; and Deputy Mayor, 1941-42; Calcutta Corporation; member, Bengal Legislative Assembly, 1937-47; President Muslim Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta; member, Pakistan Constituent Assembly, 1947; Deputy Leader, Pakistan delegation to UN, 1947; Pakistan envoy to US, 1947-52; UK, 1952-54; and Afghanistan, 1973-74; Central Minister for Industries and Commerce, 1954-55; Pubs.: *The Case of Muslim India; Jinnah as I Knew Him*; Z.H. Zaidi, ed., *M.A. Jinnah-Isfahani Correspondence 1936-48*.
18. "Pakistan wide homage to Allama Iqbal", *The Civil and Military Gazette*, April 23, 1953.
19. "In London", *Dawn*, April 22, 1954; "Iqbal, heritage of the whole world . . . London", *The Times of Karachi*, April 24, 1954; "Iqbal Day observed throughout the world, London"; *The Civil and Military Gazette*, April 23, 1954; "London celebration", *The Khyber Mail*, April 23, 1954.
20. *Ibid.*
21. "Iqbal Day in London", *The Morning News*, Karachi, April 22, 1955; "Iqbal Day observed in London: Arberry presents new translation of *Shikwah*", *The Pakistan Times*, April 26, 1955; "Iqbal Day abroad: Prof. Arberry's new translations of *Shikwah*", *The Times of Karachi*, April 26, 1955; "Voice that awakened Muslims: London homage to Iqbal", *The Morning News*, Karachi, April 26, 1955; "Tributes paid to Iqbal in London: New translation of '*Shikwah*' and '*Jawab-i-Shikwah*'", *The Pakistan Standard*, April 26, 1955; "London tributes to memory of Iqbal", *The Khyber Mail*, April 26, 1955; "Glowing tributes paid to Iqbal in London: New English translation of *Shikwah*", *The Civil and Military Gazette*, April 27, 1955; "Iqbal's message of 'inspiration to man': Extracts from Arberry's translation of *Shikwah*", *The Pakistan Times*, April 28, 1955.
22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. "Iqbal Day in London", *The Morning News*, Karachi, April 23, 1956; "Iqbal Day in London", *The Morning News*, Dacca, April 25, 1956.

25. *Ibid.*