

Masjid-e-Qurtuba-THE MOSQUE OF CORDOBA

My own age does not understand my meaning, I am the voice of the poet of tomorrow.

Background

The mosque was commissioned by Abd Rahman I around 785, more than 1100 years before Iqbal visited it in 1931-32. It then continued to be developed for many years since. It was a very different era with Europe in the dark ages, and the Muslim civilisation flourishing. According to the World Heritage Centre, the mosque “represents a unique artistic achievement due to its size and the sheer boldness of the height of its ceilings. It is an irreplaceable testimony of the Caliphate of Cordoba and it is the most emblematic monument of Islamic religious architecture.”

Iqbal was officially invited there to pray, as a pilgrimage to an outstanding symbol of faith by a faithful Believer and a warm-hearted poet. It was a pilgrimage of love and loyalty by a celebrated Muslim to pay homage to the spiritual legacy of Abdul Rahman el-Dakhil and his companions. The poem is illustrative of the period known as Al-Andalus, celebrated for its crosscultural spirit of co-existence under the sovereignty of the Umayyad dynasty. Iqbal was greatly moved by the magnificence and solemnity of the Mosque and the deep emotional responses its awe-inspiring sight evoked in him found expression in the immortal poem called Masjid-i-Qartaba (The Mosque of Cordoba).

Themes of the “THE MOSQUE OF CORDOBA” (In order of appearance)

1-Time-Life and Death

Iqbal makes it clear that the entities of spirit and matter are not opposed to each other. The ultimate reality according to Quran is spiritual and its life consists in temporal activity. The spirit finds opportunities in the natural, the material and secular. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of spirit. *The succession of day and night is the touchstone of the universe*; This notion of duality in cosmos and understanding it in terms of time is an idea that seems to be directly inspired by Quran like most of Iqbal’s poetry. As the following verses shows;

Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed Signs for men of understanding, - 3:190 (Al-Imran)

Iqbal muses on the temporary nature of this world and says that permanence can only be found in death. *Death is your ultimate destiny, Death is my ultimate destiny.* At another point he reasserts the same notion differently; *Annihilation is the end of all beginnings; Annihilation is the end of all ends.* But Iqbal ends the prologue on a very optimistic note when he says the only lasting stuff in this transitory world is anything that is godly and holds a lofty purpose than mere mundane existence.

...indelible is the stamp of permanence

On the deeds of the good and godly.

2-Love

Love, for Iqbal, is one of the ways to man’s real secret behind existence. The act of love for Creator transcends the bounds of time, space, mind and words. Love is a kind of perception of heart that gives meaning to life and makes the intellect a source of blessing for mankind.

Fast and free flows the tide of time,

But Love itself is a tide that stems all tides.

The heart which is the fountain head of love, is a kind of inner tuition and insight, which in the beautiful words of Rumi, feeds on the rays of the sun and brings us into contact with aspects of Reality other than those open to sense-perception.

For Iqbal, the natural evolution of man basically springs from the real Love which flourishes in the inner being of an individual. Love as described by Iqbal is the inward drive of all life to attain to its full maturity and development. It is a primal urge to live, to progress and bring out all the inner wealth and resources of being. As Iqbal writes

Love is the light of life, Love is the fire of life.

To Love, that is eternal; Never waning, never fading.

3-Art

Iqbal believes that art has a social obligation to fulfill. He believes that the spiritual well-being of a nation is dependent on a great extent on the nature of inspiration bestowed upon her poets and litterateurs. Inspiration for Iqbal, that cannot be acquired, is a god gifted trait that must be used for the benefit of people at large.

The miracle of art springs from the lifeblood of the artist!

Iqbal believes that philosophy, art and poetry, or any other form of literary or artistic activity, is shallow and insincere if it is not fed with the blood of the heart. Works of art cannot endure without the intensity of inner passion, depth of love and profundity of earnestness. When a drop of love's warm blood falls upon a piece of marble it turns it into a bearing heart and if even a man's heart is destitute of love it is a slab of stone.

4-Man is superior to Angles

Iqbal brilliantly discusses the nature of religion represented by Islam. He rightfully asserts that Islam is not just a private relationship between man and his Creator. It is the real substrata of the universe and a complete code of human life. It lights up morality and supplies the emotion and inspiration needful to carry out a sage life. The mind which the Quran aims to build is therefore views in one sweep the entire life of man and treat it as a single unity. And it is this emotional warmth and sensibility that makes Man superior to Angles. He writes,

Celestial beings, born of light, Do have the privilege of supplication,

But unknown to them are the verve and warmth of prostration.

5-Archetecture of the Mosque

Iqbal says that the material world is not everlasting. It is transitory, and, with it, all the wonders of art and architecture, historical buildings and ancient monuments, are heading towards ruin and destruction. But such constructions are an exception that are touched by the messianic hand of a man of God and a devoted Believer and shine with the radiance of his love. Iqbal finds a mystical affinity between mosque and the spirit of Islam.

Your beauty, your majesty, Personify the graces of the man of faith.

You are beautiful and majestic. He too is beautiful and majestic.

6-Momin

In Iqbal's view the Mosque of Cordova, in the totality of its appearance and effectiveness, is a material manifestation of the *Momin*. In its beauty and elegance, height and width, gracefulness and solidity, fineness and strength it is his exact replica. Its imposing pillars remind Iqbal of the oases of Arabia and in its balconies and latticed windows he sees the gleams of Heavenly effulgence. He regards its towering minarets to be the descending points of Divine mercy and the halting places of the angels. Overcome with the emotion, he cries out:

The might of the man of faith is the might of the Almighty:

Dominant, creative, resourceful, consummate.

Apparently, *Momin* is born of clay but in reality, he has the nature of Light. There is the reflection of Divine Attributes in his being. He is indifferent to the allurements of the world since, *His contented self has no demands on this world or the other*. His desires are few but his aims are high. He is the embodiment of grace and strength, love and sternness. He is gentle of speech but warmth in quest. In peace he is soft like silk but in war he is hard as steel. And he is *Ever chaste at heart, ever clean in conduct*. Iqbal poses him as a role-model when he says, *He is the journey's end for reason, He is the raison d 'etre of Love And An inspiration in the cosmic communion*.

7-Nostalgia of Lost Glory

Iqbal proceeds to pay a tribute of never-fading charm to the Mosque and looks in the distant past and centuries roll back in his imagination. He begins to live in the Muslim ascendancy in Spain. Combining romanticism with classicism. Iqbal feels that Spain still bears the floral imprint of Arab blood. Oriental charm, hospitality and sincerity can even now be seen among its people. Its air is filled with the scent of Najd and Yemen and the music of Iraq and Arabia reverberates in the atmosphere. Iqbal recalls the golden principles of the Muslim rulers that once inspired the West and he writes,

Their sagacity guided the East and the West.

In the midst of these sorrowful recollections Iqbal's imagination is fired with the desire for change. He says that through the land of Andalusia enjoys the high position of the heaven it has not heard the Azan for ages and in spite of the fact that winds of revolution are blowing in the world there is no evidence of a ripple in its stagnant waters.

8- Islamic Renaissance

Iqbal's poetry is lucid manifestation of his creative ideology, not only as a great philosopher or as a humanist but also the most gifted leader of Islamic renaissance. His theories forces the Muslim readers to rethink the entire metaphysics of their religion in a spirit if scientific objectivity. Alluding to the renaissance of Europe, Iqbal signals the cause behind it; *Reason, once more, unfurled its sails*

In *Javed Nama* expresses his vision and the current situation of the Muslim world when he writes," The most remarkable phenomenon of modern history is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West." He narrates the same sentiments in the poem at hand when he says;

The same storm is raging today In the soul of the Muslim.

Iqbal references the movements of the West here. Martin Luther's movement of Protestant Reformation in Germany not only led to the decline of Papal authority and the extinction of the hegemony of the Church but it also made its impact on language, literature and civilizations and paved the way for the cultural revival of Europe. The philosophy of Rousseau and Voltaire brought about the Revolution of France and set the stage for the emergence of the industrial era. Conservative Italy, too is showing signs of regeneration. Against his background Iqbal yearns for an Islamic revolution. He believes that the revolutionary spirit of Muslims is also uneasy but one does not know when it is going to assert itself. These references proves what an author wrote about the scope of Iqbal's knowledge; *Iqbal's mind has deeply drunk from the springs of Islamic culture and it was also nurtured by the philosophy and the modern science of the West.*

Iqbal believes that destination of nations is forged in strife and revolt and foreshadows the future of the Muslims as;

Tomorrow is still in the curtain of intention,

But its dawn is flashing before my mind's eye.

9-Significance of change

Islam is the religion of action but inertia has overwhelmed the Muslims. Iqbal becomes a reformer to when gives a call to them to awake and to strive. He writes, *Life without change is death*. His poetic genius is wholly dedicated to the task of stirring up emotion amongst the Muslims and spurring them to life. His soul-stirring words inspire the Muslims of all periods. He severely lashes the lethargy in one of his poems when he writes;

An infidel before his idol with a waking heart is better than the religious man asleep in his mosque.

He reminds the Muslims that life is a persistent onward struggle for existence and the as soon as one ceases to move on ceases to exist because without action one's entire physical existence loses its importance, meaning and significance. Motion is life and "death lays hidden in rest".

10- An ode to life and art

In the end, Iqbal once again emphasizes that a philosophy which is not written with the blood of the heart is no more than a mental exercise. The vital flame, the breath of life, is missing from it. Likewise, the greatest works of art fade into oblivion if the blood of the artist does not flow into them and music that does not spring from the depths of the soul is transient and superficial. This is Iqbal's concept of art as well as of life;

Incomplete are all creations without the lifeblood of the creator.

Soulless is the melody without the lifeblood of the maestro.

Style

“The Mosque of Cordoba” is one of Iqbal's finest poems. The poem is a masterpiece of poetic inspiration and artistic expression. For beauty of diction and richness of emotion it is unsurpassed. Iqbal visited Cordoba and saw the Mosque during his European trip of 1931-32; it had long since been converted into a cathedral. The poem consists of eight stanzas in the same meter, each of which is made up of a seven-verse ghazal, followed by an extra internally-rhymed verse with different rhyming elements that is calligraphed very emphatically, as a kind of *tīp* or 'punch-line' verse. The poem is full of resonant phrases, rhythmic repetitions, and internal rhyme.

Conclusion

Iqbal's body may have died but his spiritual influence as a poet, as a thinker and as a of mankind will ever defy the limitations of space and time inspiring the coming generations of Muslims and even non-Muslims alike with hope, courage and faith. The teaching of Iqbal if properly understood, appreciated and assimilated will go down in history of the world as a great character-building force. As Dr. Aftab Iqbal put it,

A great poet, especially of the type of Iqbal, is a gift of Providence to a nation and we must consider ourselves lucky that we have one.

