**Was Iqbal against scientific enlightenment**

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I love Professor Dr. Pervez [Hoodbhoy](https://dailytimes.com.pk/120641/pervez-hoodbhoy/), an eminent physicist of Pakistan, for being generally objective and rational, in his analysis of social issues. But unfortunately he suffers from a bias against anybody who for some reasons says something against science. This is against the norms of fair criticism.

A few days ago,I happened to watch on YouTube a lecture by Prof. Hoodbhoy on the subject of philosophy and Iqbal, in which the Professor mercilessly lambasted Iqbal for a stray remark made by him about science, without speaking a single word about his poetry which is his true forte. The overall impact of this talk was that Iqbal wanted to drive his nation to the caves of antiquity, was reactionary in his nature, and was allergic to reforms of any kind, and wanted to see his nation lying languid as Tennyson’s “lotus eaters”! This tempted me to write these lines.

The remark which irked him greatly was Imran Khan’s call to the Pakistanis to become Iqbals of Pakistan. Does this call imply Iqbal to be an evil, and yet to be followed under some vicious campaign of the Premier for which great alarm was severely needed to be raised from a public platform? Have the Pakistani scientists no other useful work to do except to raise false alarms?Now let us see why he took such a strong exception to this call.

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During his discourse, the Professor quoted some excerpts from Iqbal’s book “The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” to show that Iqbal had never studied science and was completely ignorant of it. He took strong exception to Iqbal’s view that whatever Einstein propounded had been discovered several centuries before by the Muslim scientists, which statement of Iqbal, according to the Professor, was without foundation. Though he could not say why this statement was untrue. He proclaimed his respect for Iqbal, yet he felt that for a genius of his stature, he should not have passed judgments against Einstein and science which had no basis. I began to think whether this lone remark offsets his entire thinking, his exhortations for rationalism and his entire radical approach for unbounded struggle against the hidden forces of this universe? Can a stray remark offset the main thrust of his thought and his entire struggle and thinking with one blow? And was there any need to take such an offence from a person who had no claim to be a scientist. The Professor hastily took a stand against Iqbal despite his confession that he has not read his works, particularly the entire gamut of his Persian works which formed the bedrock of his thought. Now passing a judgment against a poet without ever reading his works itself revolts against the principles of fair criticism.

If the conclusions of philosophy and religion based on logical reasoning (or fallacies) have given more consolation and happiness to the human soul than all scientific inventions put together, then should those be dismissed as mere hogwash only because they do not consider physical matter as the only reality of this universe? And has science the final answer to what happens after death? Or the knowledge as to what makes the immutable mass of an embryo within the womb to suddenly pulsate with life for no palpable physical reason?If scientific potential knows so miserably little about the totality of the universe, then there are very strong reasons why science should not be regarded as the ultimate source of knowledge.

We say a lot of things in our private gossip, and it does not much matter, but when something is said on a public platform, it does indeed matter much. There is no doubt about Prof. sahib’s mastery of his own subject, and the clarity of his reasoning in his public discourses, but dismissing a genius without knowing what he says in his works is not an enviable exercise.

Iqbal was a profound thinker of his time and yet he may not have qualified himself as a philosopher in the conventional use of this term. Nor he ever claimed to be a philosopher in that sense. He was essentially a poet from first to last, and those who label him as a philosopher do so in their naivety and lack of knowledge. By doing so, they unwittingly constrict his achievements in the narrow framework of a dry and drab philosopher. Iqbal was so many things packed into one: a poet of exra-ordinary intuitive perception, a reformer with the zeal to lift mankind to the ethereal heights of glory, a mystic capable of discovering the hidden truths of life , a seer who could see into the life of things not yet known to the man, and many manymore. His genius could not be encapsulated under one title as are the other mortals. Most of what he said can be understood as poetic truths which could be knownto those only who are fully conversant with the niceties of the poetic art where truth is conveyed most aesthetically through tools like metaphors, symbolism, allegory, similies, hyperbol etc. and not in drably prosaic manner of a traditional philosopher. A poet not only reveals reality as it is in itself, but also as it appeals to human sensibilities.

It is true that Iqbal’s views about science were not charitable, yet he was not averse to free exercise of all faculties of mind which is the goal of scientific enlightenment and explorations. In all his great works he championed the cause of rationalism and consistent struggle against ignorance and lack of knowledge, so much so that the reactionary Mullas turned deadly against his radical thoughts. If at places he shows contempt for science it was due to its evil effects on society. He was never against scientific attitudes and exhorted his nation to go for unbounded explorations of the universe.

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