

2nd International Conference on Iqbal 2021

Bahria University Islamabad Campus

Date: 10th & 11th November 2021

Keynote Presentation

Topic:

Developing the Muslim Mind to Face Modern Challenges: An Iqbalian Perspective

By:

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak¹

Alhamdulillah Rabbil ‘Alamin Wassalatu Wassalamu ‘Ala-Asyrafil Anbiya’e Wal
Mursalin Saidina Muhammadin Wa’ala Alihi Wasahbihi Ajma’in

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

(May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon All of you)

I am Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, from the International Islamic University Malaysia. Alhamdulillah, I feel honoured with the invitation to participate at the 2nd International Conference on Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

**Dear
Chairman,
Moderator,
Learned Scholars/Participants of the Conference,**

In the 1st conference, I chose to speak on the psycho-spiritual life of the ego according to Iqbal. And this time around, the topic I have chosen is “Developing the Muslim Mind to Face Modern Challenges: An Iqbalian Perspective”.

For a very long time since my young age, though I have been researching on Iqbal. Nevertheless, in all humility, I claim

¹ Asst. Prof. at the Department of Fundamental & Inter-Disciplinary Studies, KIRKHS, IIUM, maarji@iium.edu.my

myself to be a novice researcher compared to the many experts there in Pakistan. With that qualification, what I intend to share with all of you is my understanding of the kind of Muslim mindset called by Iqbal and other reformers in the Muslim World. The fall of the Muslim empires in many parts of the world gave way to the coming of the European colonial powers. Since then, there has been a shift in the way the Muslims think and strategize in facing the challenges of the modern world.

Dear Learned Scholars and Students,

Through research, I have found out that colonization that happened in many Muslim countries has somehow caused the masses there either go to an extreme level of spirituality or go all out in embracing a secular way of life at the expense of neglecting their spiritual needs. It is a known fact, that starting with the disappearance of the “Golden Age” of the Muslim up until now in the 21st century; the Muslim world has been facing an enormous amount of challenges in preserving its faith, identity and culture. Through the use of the International Media, the Western world continuously labels Muslims as “Terrorists”, “Extremists”, “Fundamentalists”, etc. The sort of message it intends to narrate to the world is one that depicts as though the whole world cries for peace, while the Muslim world wants war and chaos.

Dear Learned Scholars and Students,

In our effort to counter this sort of false acquisition that comes from the West, we need a new approach to convey the true message and beauty of Islam to the world at large. In order to do that, I humbly propose that there is a need for us to return to the qualities of the traditional mind that existed during the Golden Age of the Muslims, which in turn gave birth to a great civilization that incorporated spirituality, philosophy, natural and human sciences. Polymath scholars like al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Rush, will be a few to name here, who contributed immensely to the later development of science and philosophy in the West.

Dear Learned Scholars and Students,

Reading, the works of Iqbal, Malik Bennabi, Jamaluddin al-Afghani and a few other past Muslim thinkers has given me the understanding that there is a need for us to revive the traditional Muslim Mind of the past. Hence, the type of mind we intend to develop should have the quality to think spiritually, philosophically and scientifically. Having said that, now allow me to explain the three qualities of the mind we need to develop in the young generation of people in the Muslim world.

1. The Spiritual Mind

The Muslim mind has to be religious for the reason that all of us have come Allah and will return back to Him. As such, we should lead a God-centered life. It is said that the soul entity in

man is the “Divine Spark” from God. For this reason, Man who is the Khalifah of Allah has to live by the ethical principles mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah. The spiritual mind is one that demands man to stay connected with God in all our ups and downs in life. Moreover, the spiritual mind which is imbued in the quality of love not only binds a good relationship with God but also with fellow human beings (Muslims and non-Muslims) and nature (the flora and fauna). It is true that science is important for human survival on this planet. But only believing in science won’t be able to explain to man the comprehensiveness of life on this planet, particularly on our pre-existence, death and otherworldliness. Scientific knowledge can explain how humanity arrived on this planet but fails to explain the purpose of this life. Conversely, the spiritual mind of a Muslim explains the questions on why we are put here and what is expected of us in this life. At times, science can fail to answer such philosophical questions. In such a situation, we need greater wisdom and guidance from God who is the Creator of the Universe to explain to us as to why we have been placed on this planet.

2. The Philosophical Mind

The second quality of the mind which I propose is that it has to be philosophical. There are many verses of the Qur’an that calls humanity to contemplate and reason in what one sees in the grandeur in the creation of the heavens and earth, in the form of celestial and terrestrial beings. For this reason, Ibn Rushd’s

argument holds water when he criticized Al-Ghazali for opposing philosophy. More to say, the mind that is developed in the philosophical manner would be able to conduct syllogism, thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis in looking at any given problem. Furthermore, the philosophical mind is capable of looking at an issue from different perspectives, coming up with an in-depth analysis and perhaps able to debate on a given topic much more persuasively than of a simple mind. The last thing that can be said about the philosophical mind is that, it is a mind that is critical, creative, innovative and analytical. We believe that such qualities are very much needed in the present condition of the Muslim Ummah.

3. The Scientific Mind

The third and last aspect of the mind that I propose is that it should be scientific in nature. Compared to the early days of Medieval Christianity in Europe, the scenario in the Muslim world was diametrically opposite. Ever since the coming of the first revelation up until the Muslim era of civilization and to the present time, science was never seen as a rival to religion. In fact, science helps in many ways to elucidate theories found in the Qur'an more elaborately with the cutting-edge technology offered by modern science. In Islam, except for the atheistic and secular concepts advocated by modern science, all other aspects of science are well accepted and celebrated.

Any keen researcher of the Qur'an will be surprised to find information on fetal development in the mother's womb and other aspects of embryology, how the universe was created and other matters on cosmology, sea currents and oceanography, formation of the mountains, tectonic plates and other issues related to geology, that are described in the Qur'an.

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1839-1897), Malik Bennabi (1905-1973), Said Nursi (1877-1960) and many others called Muslims to embark on the bandwagon of science and to perform scientific investigations. According to these scholars, such an act will be a soul-enriching process when one discovers Allah's mighty hand behind the making of the universe and the secrets found in the natural world. At the personal level, Iqbal metaphorically praises the scientists for their observation of nature and the universe at large, as sort of mystic seekers trying to get closer to the Creator by probing the wonders of the natural world. He calls this act of the scientists a form of ibadah (worship) in Islam. Likewise, Iqbal also calls the Muslim Ummah to improve their lives by utilizing science and technology to extract the bounties of Allah in the natural world and use them for their spiritual development. A precise explanation of what Iqbal says is that Muslims should extract the natural resources from the belly of the earth and convert them into wealth and use it to improve the condition of the Ummah. Simply put, a mind that is interested in science and its

calculations and discoveries will most probably appreciate not only the spectacular beauty in the natural world but also the precision orbiting of the planets and the presence of God behind all created matters, including man.

Dear Learned Scholars and Students,

The human mind is an amazing, beautiful and powerful creation of God Almighty. For the mind, spiritual practices, reading and training provided in the areas of critical and creative thinking can help us to overcome many of the insurmountable obstacles we have to face as individuals as well as a nation. In the Qur'an, Muslims are encouraged to think, ponder, contemplate, etc. As such, the following will be some of the benefits we can get if we can restore the qualities of the traditional Muslim Mind:

1. It can help Muslim communities to rebut many of the negative perceptions of non-Muslims with regard to Islam, Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an and Islamic practices.
2. A well-developed Muslim Mind that uses logic, rhetoric, diplomacy and persuasion will be in a better position to counter Islamophobia, racism and prejudice that comes from the West.
3. By and large, a mind that is spiritual, philosophical and scientific can do great wonders in bringing in the much-needed development in the Muslim World.

Dear Learned Scholars and Students,

I believe education is the best way to cultivate, nurture and bring back the qualities of the traditional Muslim Mind. Students at all levels should be required to take some courses in Islamic Worldview, Islamic Aqidah, Islamic History and Civilization. At the tertiary of education, students who are doing their specialization of natural sciences should do some elective courses in Islamic Ethics, Islamic Worldview and Basic philosophy, while those doing religions sciences should do some elective courses in philosophy, creative thinking and science from an Islamic perspective.

Dear Learned Scholars and Students,

Before I end my presentation, allow me to thank Brother Dr. Abid Ali, the Conference Organizing Committee of Bahria University for the invitation to participate in the 2nd International Conference on Allama Muhammad Iqbal. May your best reward come from Allah the Almighty, ameen!

Thank you/Syukran Jazilan/Terima Kasih

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, Ph.D. (IIUM)
Depart. of Fundamental & Inter-Disciplinary Studies, KIRKHS,
International Islamic University Malaysia,
10th November, 2021