

Book Review

Iqbal za Sve

*Damir Kafrić**

Edited by Professor Shahab Yar Khan, PhD

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Iqbal's poetry for children is unique in both in terms of its form as well as its content. The collection of his poems, *Iqbal Za Sve (Iqbal for All)*, written primarily for children and the youth, is a unique example of a literary form yet largely unattended within the Balkans. In other words, there are not a large number of literary pieces for children and youth created in the territories of the former Yugoslavia. However, the number of such poetic works rarely written is not the only issue present in the Balkans; another problem is the fact that the number of works which convey similar messages are also rather scarce. That also contributes to the overall originality of the works created by Muhammad Iqbal. This kind of poetry does not primarily deal with didacticism for children, moral messages that different youth groups ought to read during the years when they most grow and develop. On the other side, his collection of poetry also targets the youth, whereas it is possible for young individuals to find adequate discipline for life in general, but they can also find numerous guidelines which can help them develop a decent manner of thinking in order to progress and develop.

The collection is translated by a group of volunteer students, under the guidance of professor Shahab Yar Khan, Ph.D. These students come from different ethnic backgrounds of a country which had been devastated by the deadliest European war since the days of WWII. These students are of Bosniak (Muslim population), Croatian (Roman Catholic population) and Serbian (Orthodox Christian population) ethnic backgrounds. For the sake

* Research Scholar, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina

of the readers' better understanding of the conflict in Bosnia during the final decade of the previous century, it is necessary to mention that the ceasefire, which resulted out of the Dayton Accord in 1995, has been maintained to the date but the uncertainty of a political resolve haunts over the country. The three warring sides, the Bosniaks, the Croats and the Serbs representatives all signed the Dayton Agreement, whereas the final bloodsheds were stopped.

In this atmosphere of stalemate, through this book, the three aforementioned sides pay their homage to the great poet of the East and of the eastern tradition, Allama Iqbal. It should be noted that this book is extremely important due to a larger number of topics which are both interesting and adequate for the children of different age groups, because such poetic pieces can contribute to the overall learning, upbringing of children, and understanding of the world from a solid spiritual perspective. This, in my opinion, is the most vital element communicated by this book to the youth of Bosnia.

Among many of his poems, Allama Iqbal's poem concerning the *Prayer of the Child* is of a particular interest for the readers, due to the fact that the poem itself contributes so much to the idea of the responsibility element that helps children to evolve a personality independently and helps assuming a role of constructive nature for their societies. This element is missing from all pedagogical studies of the world today and I wish if only our children could sing this poem every morning the way children once did in the Subcontinent, many of our civilizational crises would be resolved. In the light of professor Shahab Yar Khan's surveys, one can now claim with more confidence that William Shakespeare's style of conversation was the source of a particular kind of dialogue writing, which Iqbal merged into his oriental context to create an atmosphere of a monologue that actually serves the purpose of a discourse both within and without. That is to say, the Bard's own poetic and dramatic pieces were directly taken as the source materials which helped Iqbal in the entire procedure of producing his own authentic poetry for children, the youth and even when it comes to his great epical poems in Persian, this style dominates the structure. Therefore, it is not without reason that like Shakespeare, Iqbal's influence simply transcends any geographical or religious barriers.

Iqbal is commonly known as Pan-Islamist but the works presented in this volume do not limit him to any particular community or religion. I must say that the editor, doctor Khan's choice of translated pieces was very carefully carried out as he kept in his mind the delicate balance which we need to maintain in the ethnically divided Bosnia. These poems reflect versatility and respect for all who mean good and have helped humanity to reach various stages of spiritual evolution.

The poems, such as, *Lord Rama*, *Baba Guru*, *Nanak*, *Lenin*, etc. mark a heart which is genuine and free from all bias and prejudice. It also shows to the reader that by being a Muslim or by following any other creed one does not get confined into a narrow group of ideals but a true believer is like an ocean where all possible strains merge.

The collection also deals with Iqbal's Nature images. Poems like *the Himalaya*, *Council of Stars*, *Mountain and the Squirrel*, all deal with the idea of the grandeur that Nature offers us as confirmation of a cosmic soul that can help humanity to grow out of its narrow differences. These poems also celebrate every now and then Iqbal's recurring metaphors taken from the Qur'an. Iqbal's poems urge the readers to see the value of the Quranic messages closely connected to the exploration of the universe. The editor on purpose included a fair number of Iqbal's patriotic poems such as *Song of an Indian* to emphasise that the nationhood is possible as a concrete concept only once we evolve respect for the land that we live in. Iqbal's patriotic poems speak of the Subcontinent, as a land of glory, honour, hopes, but also as a land of good fortune for mankind.

This book is a project of Iqbal Chair which was established at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, at the University of Sarajevo, 2010. The former ambassador of Pakistan to Bosnia, his Excellency Jauhar Saleem, initiated the plan of the Chair, consulting professor Shahab Yar Khan, who was then appointed the cultural coordinator of the Chair, alongside professor Džemaludin Latić, Ph.D. (the director) and professor Enes Karić, Ph.D. as the member of the Advisory Board. With pride, we can say, that this was the most active chair in entire Europe, publishing eight books of high value, and organising four international conferences.

The idea of this book is the brainchild of professor Shahab Yar Khan, Ph.D. Professor Khan being always in close contact with the students

initiated voluntarily lectures on Urdu cultural studies and gathered around himself a considerably large group of students. The students were then motivated to contribute five to ten poems for the collection but with the passage of time, this activity became more than an academic exercise since the group was joined by several students of Serbo-Croatian background, as well. Professor Khan seized the opportunity of making Iqbal the meeting ground of various ethnic groups. For this purpose, all the three ethnicities were encouraged to maintain their specific linguistic variants and have a book which does not celebrate any particular ethnic variant but unites them all. In this way, Iqbal who was previously known as a poet of Muslim background for the Muslims of Bosnia became liberated from the image and emerged as a poet for the entire Bosnia. That is the reason that the collection was titled *Iqbal for All*.

Professor Khan's idea was in many ways unique and the novel value of it led the then director of the Iqbal Academy, Lahore, Mr. Muhammad Suheyl Omar. Mr. Suheyl Omar visited Bosnia and during his eventful stay he talked with various communities, scholars and students. He believed that the projects like Iqbal for All were going to help Bosnian youth to find its way out from this ethnic chaos. The methods used for the translations were also in many ways unique. Mr. Omar and doctor Khan agreed upon to not to go for word-by-word or theme-by-theme translation. It was agreed upon that the original Urdu poems would be read in front of the group and metaphor-by-metaphor descriptive lectures would be delivered. This method was demanding and challenging as it required more time, commitment and deep understanding of both the text and the context.

As a result, Dr. Khan's lectures extended to two full-length academic years. The resolve of the students and their interest throughout this time remain exemplary. The group leader Ms Ivana Antić played a significant role in keeping the group together, even after the graduation of certain students. The metaphors which were discussed during these meetings were then put into contrast with several Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian parallels and after days of discussions, the group would come up with a solution with consensus. After the completion of a poem, the text was sent to a renowned Bosnian writer and historian, Mr. Edin Kukavica for the final approval. One by one, all the fifty poems included in the collection went through the same process. The result was one of the most groundbreaking

translations of Muhammad Iqbal's works yet unattempted in Bosnia. The collection is not free from errors as several typing mistakes and typographical flaws can be noticed, but generally speaking, this is one of the finest attempts of translating Muhammad Iqbal's poetry in a Slavic language.

The book was published by Ibn Sina Institute Sarajevo in 2013. The publishing house did not charge any money and did it as a tribute to Iqbal and the great efforts put by Dr. Shahab Yar Khan and his students Ivana Antić, Raisa Bušatlić, Alma Mustafić, Dino Mustafić, Mili Šestić, Aida Begović, etc. Dr. Mohammad Ali Barzanooni, then the director of Ibn Sina wrote in his foreword that Iqbal's poetry is not just a speech for the speech's sake, nor a verse for verse's sake, but poetry with a purpose. Dr. Khan said in his editorial note that all languages are holy languages when spoken to a purpose and all are unwholesome when the purposefulness is blurred.

To end the survey, I would like to present to the reader a few passages in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language which are very close to my heart and I believe that this different phonetic effect will be of great interest to ordinary English and Urdu readers.

Iqbal's poem "William Shakespeare":

"Tvoje je postojanje ostalo sakriveno od oka običnog sveta
A tvoje je oko videlo svet potpuno razotkriven
Priroda čvrsto čuva svoje tajne
Da opet nekoga kao ti neće stvoriti"

Iqbal's poem "The Himalay":

O Himalaji! O kapijo Indijskog kraljevstva!
Klanjajući se, nebo ljubi vaše čelo."

Iqbal's poem "Child's Prayer":

"Želja dođe i osvježimo je usne kao dova
O Bože, Da moj život bude kao svijeća
Da sva tama svijeta nestane kroz život moj
Da svako mjesto zablješta iskrom mog postojanja"

Iqbal's poem "Love and Death":

“Upitao je Smrt: ‘Kositi?
Ne želim vidjeti lice tvoje.’
Čuvši ovo, anđeos mrti odgovori:
‘Moja uloga je jasna, anđeo smrti sam ja!’”

Iqbal's poem "The Moon":

“Iako sam ja na zemlji a ti miljama gore
Privlačiš mi srce k'o i uzburkano more?
Kuda ideš i odakle dolaziš?
Možda si poblijedio od puta kojim si prošao.
Ti si stvoren osvjetljen a ja sam potamnio
Obasjan sam svjetlom težnje za Božijom milošću?”