

'Ayn al-Shams University Cairo: *Iqbal in Egypt*

## **IQBAL IN EGYPT**

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'Ayn Al-Shams University Cairo





“O sacred land of Arabia you were nothing but a stone which had been rejected by the architects of the world. But God knows what magic had been cast on you by an orphan child that the foundations of culture and civilization of the modern world were laid on you ----- O holy land -----  
----- your deserts had borne the footprints of thousands of sacred-beings and the shade of your date-palm trees had given protection to thousands of Saints and Solomans from the gruelling heat of the sun. I wish that the dust of my luckless body could mingle with the particles of sand and wonder aimlessly in your wildernesses and may be this very vagrancy .....  
Becomes a retribution of the dark days of my life. I wish I could be lost in your deserts and releasing myself from all material comforts – sizzling under your hot sunshine, and not caring about the blisters on my feet, should reach that part of the holy land in the streets of which the love – slicken voice of Bilal’s prayer call used to resound.”

It was in the course of this sea voyage that Iqbal, for the first time in his life, set his foot in the Egyptian not and came in contact with the Muslims of Egypt. His recorded impressions are as follows:

“When the ship anchored at Suez, a large number of Muslim vendors turned up and set up a bazar on board. -----  
----- From one of the young Egyptian vendors I wanted to purchase some cigarettes and while talking to him I informed him that I was a Muslim. But since my headgear was European, he hesitated to believe my and asked me in turn as to why I was wearing a hat? I said to him why should he think that by wearing a hat Islam could disappear? His reply was that if a Muslim was clean-shaven, then he must wear a headgear like Turkish cap or Tarboosh, otherwise what would be the indication of his being a Muslim. - - - - - Eventually, he was convinced of my being a Muslim and as he was a hafiz-e-Quran, when I recited a few Ayas from the Quran, he was extremely pleased and started kissing my hands. Thereafter, he called all the other vendors and introduced me to them. They surrounded me in a circle uttering ‘Masha Allah’ ‘Masha Allah’ and when I told them as to what was the object of my voyage, they started praying for me. In other words, for a few moments they elevated themselves from the

lowness of trade to the hights of Islamic fraternity. Shortly thereafter, a group of extremely handsome young Egyptian came on board. I looked at them and found their faces so familiar that for a second I thought that this was a delegation of students from Aligarh College. They stood in a corner and were chatting when I also joined them. We talked for a long time. One of the youngmen spoke such beautiful Arabic as if he was reading a passage from Hareeri. ----- When the ship arrived at Port Saeed, the Muslim tradesmen again appeared and started displaying their wares on board. I shared the boat with a fellow traveler and went to see the harbour -----  
- - - We visited a madrissa, numerous mosques as well as the house of the Muslim Governor and saw the statue of the architect of Suez canal. ----- Thereafter bedding farewell to our Muslim guide, who spoke so many language, I returned. To the ship.”

He briefly visited Egypt for the second time in 1931 while proceeding to England in order to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. He states:

“On 20<sup>th</sup> September at about 3.00 p.m we touched Port Saeed. I was most impressed by its development. In fact I was asleep in my cabin but was woken up by an Egyptian doctor called Sulaiman. While we were talking to each other some Egyptian youngmen, who happened to be members of Shaban-ul-Muslemin, came to see me. I was very pleased to meet them -----  
- Lutfi Bay, who is a fomous Barrister of Cairo, had sent a message of greetings throught Dr. Sulaiman and had extended invitation to me to visit Cairo on my way back. ----- You would be surprised to learn that, generally speaking, Muslims of Egypt think that the Indian Muslims were placing hindrances in the struggle for India’s freedom. This propagandfa had been made also in numerous other countries. At Port Saeed every Muslim young man whom I chanced to meet had put this question to me. But now it appears that gradually veil is being lifted from their eyes. I gave them a long lecture in order to explain as to how the political problem of India affects the indian Muslims. After hearing me I had the impression that a heavy load had been removed from their backs. They also took notes of some parts of my speech -----  
- - - - - The ship left Port Saeed at about 6-30 on the next morning and the Egyptian youngmen kept sitting in my cabin until

early hours of the morning. When they disembarked they sent two tins of Egyptian cigarettes as a present for me.”

During his stay for some hours at Port Saeed, he was also contacted by Hakeem Muhammad Siddique, a correspondent of Reuter, and in the presence of Egyptian youngmen Iqbal informed him:

“Hindus are worried that the Indian Muslims with the help of Afghan, Baluch and Pathan tribes would capture India. But could it be possible that Egyptian, after securing independence of Egypt, would hand-over their country to the Turks, because the Turks are Muslims?”

It may be known further that the Congress follows the policy of non-violence only when it confronts the British bayonets. Otherwise, as is evident from the riots in Mirzapur, Canpure, Sirinagar etc as against Muslims, the course of violence is adopted.”

He likewise gave a statement for the Egyptian Press in which he said:

“The Egyptians are under the impression that Indian Muslims are a thorn in the way for securing independence of india. There is no truth in it at all. If Egyptian friends have formed this view, then they have not taken the trouble of understanding Indian politics. I, therefore, suggest that the correspondents of Egyptian news-papers should visit India to study the situation themselves. I may also tell you that propaganda is likewise made in India against them to the effect that the Egyptian Muslims have forsaken the Quran, Allah and islam, although this is a deliberate mischief.”

Iqbal was temporarily impressed by the Turkish and Iranian revolutions. But he was eventually disappointed as is apparent from the following verse:

(The spirit of the East is still in search of a body as it has neither been able to manifest itself in the person of Mustafa nor other a Raza Shah.)

He visited Egypt for the third time on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1931 when his ship touched Alexandria at 9.00 a.m. At the harbour he was received by representatives of Prince Umar Tausoon, some members of the Jamiat-ul-Shaban-ul-Muslemin, Siddique Muhammad, Maulana Shaukat Ali and others. The members of Shabanul Muslemin were carrying flags. They raised slogans in his honour and the representatives of the Press took his and his companions photographs. He was taken to the Palace where he signed on the visitors book of King Faud. Thereafter, he returned to the residence of Prince Umar Tausoon where he was staying and after some rest went around to see Alexandria. He visited the office of Shabanul Muslemin, met some eminent literary figures there and gave an interview to the Press. Then, in the afternoon, he took the train for Cairo and arrived there at 6.00 p.m on the same day. At the Cairo railway station he was received by the members of Shabanul Muslemin, a few members of Parliament, editors of news-papers and journals, Indian-Muslim residents of Cairo and some Indian-Muslim students of Jamia al-Azhar. In Cairo Iqbal stayed in Metropolitan Hotel. But he went Lahore his dinner with Dr. Abdul Hameed Saeed Bay, member of Parliament, where he met Sheikhu Azhar, the Mufti of Al-Azhar, Muhammad Ali Pasha, ex-Minister of Auqaf, and other eminent men. The Press representatives asked him to give a message for the Egyptian youth. He replied, “I desire that the Egyptian youth should remain loyal to the Prophet of Islam.” He returned to his hotel at 11.00 p.m..

During his stay in Egypt he felt that there was a general impression prevailing there that the Muslims were placing hindrances in the struggle for freedom of India. He tried to remove this misunderstanding during his stay and informed the Egyptian journalists about the separate political entity of the Indian Muslims and their political standpoint. Otherwise, the eminent scholarly personalities of Egypt were anxiously waiting to meet and to exchange ideas with Iqbal. Among them was the famous Advocate and author of numerous books on philosophy, Lutfi Bay Jumma, who spent most of his time in Iqbal’s company during his stay in Cairo.

In the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1931 Iqbal was taken in a car to see the historical sites. He saw the Ahraams at a distance of 10 miles from Cairo –haram Akbar, haram Ausat and Haram Asghar. Then at some distance from there he saw Abulhaul,

walked around the beautiful gardens on the bank of the Nile. He noticed that many new buildings were being raised there. On his way back he visited Qasarul Aaini, the magnificent hospital named after Allama Badruddin Aaini. He also wandered in the bazars of this locality. The lunch was arranged in the house of a Syrian trader Mohayyuddin ul Haddi where he met the Syrian Mujahid, Dr. Abdur Rahman Shah Bandar, who had fought against French Imperialism in Syria for a number of years. Iqbal discussed the position of Indian Muslims with Dr. Shah Bandar and they also talked about the problems of the Arab world as well as future of the Arab nations. He returned to his hotel at about 3.30 p.m where many people were already waiting for him. While he talked to them one of the most respected Egyptian Soofi, Syed Muhammad maddi Abul azaaim came to meet him along with his two sons. Iqbal was extremely perturbed to see him like that in a hotel and said with utmost respect:

“Sir you should have not taken the trouble of coming here. I would have myself visited you to pay my respects.”

But he replied:

“The Holy Prophet has commanded that if you got to meet anyone who works for the cause of religion, it would give him pleasure. I have come to see you in compliance with that command so that my master is pleased with me.”

Iqbal was emotionally upset at this reply and was struck by a silence. Syed Abuyl Azaaim sat with him for a long time giving good advices and Iqbal silently listened to him. When he left Iqbal could not control himself. He broke down and with tears in his eyes said:

“Has such a time arrived that people should come to pay respects to a sinful person like myself thinking that I work for the cause of religion and in compliance with the command of the Holy Prophet so that he is pleased with them.”

Shortly thereafter Professor Ali Bay Abdur Razzaq came to see him. Professor Abdur Razzaq had written a book on the separation of Church and State on which the Ulema of Al-Azhar had issued a Fatwa as against him. Iqbal presented his own view point to the Professor on the issue and also explained to him as to what were the disadvantages of such a separation. In the meantime Mustafa nehas Pasha, the leader of Hizbul Wafad, phoned that he

was waiting to receive Iqbal. Consequently, Iqbal left the hotel for Bautul Umma where Mustafa Nehas Pasha received him and introduced him to some Ministers of his Cabinet as well as other members of the Wafad party. The talk centered around Egyptian and Indian Politics. Afterwards Iqbal went to the house of Ahmed Zaki Pasha, Sheikhul Urooba, which was on the bank of the Nile and had his dinner with him. They talked about the problem of Palestine and as to how the Motamir-ul-Islami Conference should be made successful.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1931 Iqbal had his lunch with an Iranian by the name of Mirza Mehdi Bay. Maulana shukat ali, Maulan Shafi Daoodi, sheikhul Azhar and other eminent people had also been invited by the host. At 4.00 p.m. he went to the house of Ahmed Zaki Pasha and participated in a tea-party. At 5.00 p.m he paid a visit to Abdur Razzaq, where he met Mahmood Pasha, leader of Hizbul Ahraar, Muhammad ali Pasha, Dr. Muhammad Hussain Haikal, Editor of *As-Siyasat*, and other literary men. While Iqbal was talking to them the sons of syed Abul Azaaim came in their car and informed him that their father wanted to meet him. On this Iqbal left for the house of Syed Abul azaaim. A large number of Mureeds of Syed Abul Azaaim were present there. Syed Abul Azaaim in his soft manner introduced Iqbal to his Mureeds and said that when the number of Muslims was only a few thousands, then the great powers of the world kissed their feet, but today they are hundreds of millions and yet the unbelievers and dominating them everywhere. The reason is that the Muslims have given up Islam and have forsaken its spirit. But then he turned towards Iqbal and pointing at his heart said:

“In this heart I see love for Islam and a special favour of the Holy Prophet.”

Then one of the Mureeds of Syed Abul Azaaim recited Sura Fatah in beautiful Egyptian accent and when Iqbal left, the Mureeds of Syed Abul Azaaim bade farewell to him raising slogans “Hazrat iqbal Zinda Bad”.

On 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1931 Iqbal paid a visit to the Museum of Cairo. He saw the relics of the period of Pharaohs. In those days, because of the objection of the Copts, the mummy of that Pharaoh, who had been drowned in the Red Sea in the times of Prophet Moses, was not being exhibited. Then he visited the Museum containing relics of the Arab period and he was most interested to

see relics like the pen and ink-pot of Imam Ghazali and the swords of ottoman sultan Muhammad, the conqueror, Sulaiman, the magnificent, and Sleem Yildirm. On his return from the Museum he joined a tea-party arranged by Jamiat-ul-Rabta-ul-Hindiya. On this occasion Siddique Muhammad and mahmood Ahmad Urfani presented welcome addresses to him and the meeting was addressed by Lutfi Bay Jumma and Munirul Haddi. Iqbal, in his speech, thanked the members of the jamiat and emphasized the need for the development of stronger relations between Egypt and Muslim india. At 7.00 p.m Iqbal went to the office of Shabanul Muslemin to address a meeting organized by its members. The hall was full of literary men. Iqbal delivered his address in English. He went to have dinner with Muhammad Ali Pasha and the talk ranged on numerous subjects like the problem of interest, Muslim conquests in the early centuries, causes of the decline of the Muslims in modern times and Indian politics.

On 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1931, Iqbal visited Fustaat and Jamia Amar Ibn Al-Aas. Thereafter he went to the mazar of imam Shafai and sitting near the grave recited the Quran for a long time. Then after visiting some historical mosques he arrived Jamia Al-Azhar where the Administrator, Muhammad Khalid Hasnain Bay, was waiting for him. Iqbal sat with the students for some time attending the classes of Tafseer, Hadees and Mantaq. Thereafter, he paid a visit to the new part of the jamia where the students were taught modern sciences like Physics and Chemistry. One of the teachers of the Jamia had written a Qaseeda for Iqbal which was recited and presented to him. Thereupon the students raised slogans of

Then Iqbal called on Sheikh Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mustafa Al-Muraghi, in his office. While giving his impressions about the Jamia iqbal said to him:

“The route is the same, although the caravan has changed. Consequently, if you do not take care of the needs of the present caravan in accordance with the dictates and needs of present time, then you will never be successful in achieving the objective.”

From Jamia Al-azhar he came to the house of Muhammad Ramzan and had his meals there. Then he went to the house of

Syed Abul Azaaim and again spent some time with him. Thereafter came to the hotel and sent his luggage to the railway station but himself went to the house of Dr. Shah bandar to participate in a tea-party. There he met numerous Syrian fighters for freedom of their country. Besides those Ahmad Zaki Pasha, Ali Bay Abdul Razzaq, Lutfi Bay Jumma, Dr. Mansoor Fehmi, Munirul Hadi, Ahmad Jamal Pasha Al-uzzi were present there. After attending the tea-party he went straight to the railway station where many Egyptian and Indian friends had come to bid farewell to him. At 6.00 p.m. the train left for - - - - - and along with it left Iqbal taking a deep impression in his heart with him of the love and affection of the Egyptians.