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Celebrating Iqbal: A Journey of Poetry and Philosophy Across Cultures



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Ambassador Aamer Leads Pakistan Embassy Initiative Celebrating Iqbal's Legacy

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By Haroon Rashid Qureshi

The Pakistan Embassy in Doha hosted a special program on Thursday, 27th November, to commemorate Iqbal Day with an exclusive talk on the philosophy and poetry of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Pakistan's national poet, entitled "Iqbal Through Arab Eyes." H.E. Dr. Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawari, State Minister and President of the National Library, graced the occasion as the chief guest, joined by diplomats, prominent Pakistani figures, and senior Pakistan Embassy staff. The program began with the national anthems of Pakistan and Qatar, symbolizing the deep cultural and diplomatic bonds between the two countries. Deputy Head of Mission Attiya Iqbal served as the master of ceremonies, guiding the audience through a program that included a moving recitation of the Holy Qur'an, creating a reflective and reverent atmosphere.

The keynote presentation was delivered by Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar Shankiti, Associate Professor of International Affairs at Qatar University, who offered a compelling insight into Iqbal's enduring influence in the Arab world. Dr. Shankiti, a Ph.D. graduate in History of Religion from Texas Tech University, is a prolific scholar with a deep passion for Iqbal's poetry and philosophy. A regular contributor to Al-Jazeera TV and website, he has authored twelve books on topics ranging from Islamic civilization and political philosophy to poetry, many of which have been translated into Turkish, English, French, Urdu, and Arabic. Following his visit to Lahore in 2023, he wrote an extensive story on Iqbal in Arabic for Al-Jazeera, later translated into Turkish

and published as a book.

Dr. Shankiti explained that his engagement with Iqbal is not merely academic but profoundly personal and transformative. He shared moments from his journey, from standing in the Mosque of Cordoba and reciting Iqbal's poetry at the very site that inspired it, to walking through Javid Manzil in Lahore, the poet's home, where he felt the intellectual energy that shaped Iqbal's thought. Visiting Mazar-e-Iqbal further moved him to compose a poem reflecting his admiration, demonstrating that connecting with Iqbal is both an emotional and spiritual experience as well as an intellectual pursuit.

He highlighted Iqbal's spiritual connection to the Hijaz, describing himself as a "Hijazi breeze" drifting over the Indian subcontinent. For Iqbal, Arabia was not merely a desert; it was the homeland of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), a source of spiritual nourishment, and the foundation of Islamic civilization. His poetry consistently reflected this bond, suggesting that the true inspiration flowed from the Hijaz, regardless of where the "jar was cast." Even in his final moments, Iqbal recited verses about the Hijaz, underlining the lasting connection between his imagination and the sacred heritage of Arabia.

Iqbal's engagement with the Arab world extended beyond poetry into active intellectual and political discourse. He attended the International Islamic Conference in Jerusalem in 1931, joining

representatives from across the Muslim world to support Palestine. He also spent time in Egypt, forming close ties with scholars such as Abd al-Wahhab Azzam, who became a leading translator of his works into Arabic. His correspondence with Shaykh Mustafa al-Maraghi of Al-Azhar in 1936 emphasized the importance of strengthening Islamic scholarship. A moving episode shared by Iqbal's manager described an Arab visitor reciting the Qur'an in Iqbal's home, bringing him to tears, illustrating his profound love for the Arabic language.

The presentation also acknowledged the crucial role of Arab translators in bringing Iqbal's works to the wider Arab world. Abd al-Wahhab Azzam translated major works including *Secrets and Mysteries*, *Message from the East*, and *The Rod of Moses*, and authored Iqbal's biography *Muhammad Iqbal: His Life, Philosophy and Poetry*. Other prominent translators included Al-Sawi Sha'alaan, whose rendition of *Hadith-e-Ruh* was famously performed by Umm Kulthum; Hussein Mujeeb al-Misri, who translated *The Gift of Hijaz* and *Javid Nama*; and Abd al-Mu'een al-Malloohi, who translated *Gabriel's Wing*, later adapted into Arabic poetry by Zuhair Zaza. Their efforts ensured Iqbal's philosophy and poetry reached and inspired generations across the Arab world.

Dr. Shankiti concluded by emphasizing that Iqbal represents a timeless intellectual and spiritual treasure for the Muslim world. He urged the renewal of Arabic literature on Iqbal through

contemporary translations, fresh biographies, and critical studies, while connecting Arab scholars with the Iqbal Academy's rich resources. His remarks underscored that Iqbal's message of spiritual revival, dignity, and unity continues to inspire both South Asian and Arab audiences. The program concluded with H.E. Muhammad Aamer, Ambassador of Pakistan in Qatar, expressing his heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for the successful event. The speaker and chief guest were presented with gifts as tokens of recognition, followed by refreshments. The evening not only celebrated Pakistan's intellectual and cultural heritage but also reinforced the enduring bonds of friendship and shared admiration for Allama Iqbal's philosophy between Pakistan and the Arab world.