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OF
IQBAL'S BIRTH

By

SYED ABDUL VAHID

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IQBAL ACADEMY, PAKISTAN
43-6/D, BLOCK No. 6; P.E.C.H. SOCIETY;
KARACHI-29.



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The daily "*Inqilab*" of Lahore published the following note in its issue of 7th May, 1938 :—

"In the brief account of Allama Iqbal, which was published in a previous issue of the '*Inqilab*', the date of Allama's birth was given as December, 1876, according to a statement of Shaikh Ata Muhammad, Allama's elder brother. But it has been ascertained now that the date of Allama's birth was 22nd February, 1873, which corresponds to 23rd—24th Zilhij, 1289, according to the Hijri Calendar".

But in spite of this announcement there were still people who had grave doubts about the authenticity of the date of birth as announced by the *Inqilab*. Then in 1955 appeared Abdul Majid Salik's "*Zikr-i-Iqbal*" in which it was stated that the birth of Iqbal on 22nd February 1873 was confirmed by the Deputy Commissioner, Sialkot, after referring to the records of the Municipal Committee of that town.¹ Now the Municipal records of births and deaths on the sub-continent are generally authentic, and it is not possible to question their accuracy unless there is some clear evidence to the contrary. Prima facie there are two improbabilities against the date of Iqbal's birth as given by the *Inqilab* and Salik, and these are detailed below :—

1. In the first instance if we accept the date of Iqbal's birth as given by the '*Inqilab*' and Salik, his age when he passed Matriculation examination would be 21. The average age of a student passing Matriculation on the sub-continent is generally 16, and clever students have been known to pass this examination at a much earlier age.

1. Abdul Majid Salik : *Zikr-i-Iqbal*, p. 10, Bazmi Iqbal, Lahore.

2. In January 1938, when Iqbal Day was celebrated in Lahore by the Muslim Students' Brotherhood in the poet's life-time, his age was announced as 60. This rules out 1873 as the year of Iqbal's birth.

These improbabilities are enough to shake our faith in the authenticity of 22nd Feb. 1873 as the date of birth and to justify our investigating the subject further. To do this, we have to start with the records of the Municipal Committee, Sialkot.

The statement relating to the birth of Iqbal as given in the register of births maintained by the Municipal Committee is produced *vide* Exhibit A. When we examine it carefully the following facts emerge:—

1. The birth certificate mentions that it relates to a male child of Shaikh Nathoo (which is the pet-name of Shaikh Noor Muhammad, father of Iqbal). But the certificate does not mention the name of the child. There is nothing strange in this, as in many cases a child is named several days after the birth, which is generally reported to the Municipal Committee the same day or the day after.
2. The date of birth is given as 22nd February 1873.
3. The Municipal records do not mention the birth of any other son to Shaikh Noor Muhammad after 1873.

On the other hand, we have the following evidence against accepting the above entry in the register as the date of Iqbal's birth.

1. There is the evidence of Iqbal's sister that a son was born to Shaikh Noor Muhammad few years before Iqbal's birth.² Thus the entry in the Municipal register probably relates to this son who died in infancy.
2. We have the evidence of another sister of Iqbal that he was born early in the morning on a Friday. As 22nd February 1873 was not a Friday there is strong evidence against our accepting that date as the date of Iqbal's birth.³

2. Syed Wahiduddin: *Rozgar-i Faqir*, p. 231.

3. *Ibid* p. 231.

After the date, as given in the Municipal records, several dates and years were suggested by various writers and journals, but as these are not based on any definite evidence we can disregard them straightaway. For example the year of birth as inscribed on the *lapis lazuli* tomb-stone as supplied by the Government of Afghanistan is 1875. As there is hardly any evidence in support of this, we can straightaway disregard it as based on a mere guess. Another well-known writer on Kashmiri families, Mr. Muhammad Deen Fauq has mentioned the year of Iqbal's birth as 1875, although he corrected it later on as 1876.⁴ Mr. Fauq was a friend of Iqbal, and had carried out detailed researches about the Kashmiri families living on the sub-continent, still, we need not attach much weight to the years as given by him in view of the fact that he has not mentioned any evidence in support of his statement. Similarly, *Oxford History of India* gives the year of Iqbal's birth as 1876.⁵ This is perhaps based on the year as given by Iqbal in *Lebenslauf*. In view of these improbabilities against accepting the date as given in the Municipal records as the date of Iqbal's birth several writers have devoted their time and energy to the examination of this question. The first man to express serious doubts about the correctness of the date of birth as given in the Sialkot Municipal records was Mr. T. C. Roy who used to teach Urdu in Bonn (Germany). In 1957 Mr. Roy wrote a letter to the Cultural Attache of the Pakistan Embassy in Bad Godesberg pointing out that there was a good deal of confusion about the date of Iqbal's birth and actually three different dates were mentioned by different writers and authors. So he suggested a thorough investigation of this matter.

In 1958 Professor John Marek, of Prague University, wrote a detailed article in *Archiv Orientalni*, 1958, 26/4, published by Nakladatelstvi Ceskoslovenske Akademie Ved, Praha, in which he arrives at the conclusion that the date of Iqbal's birth was 9th Nov. 1877. Since then Faqir Syed Wahiduddin has given a good deal of time and thought to the consideration of this question in his beautifully printed "*Rozgar-i-Faqir*" (1963). The conclusion at which Syed Wahiduddin has arrived confirms the findings of Professor John Marek. But it must be noted that whereas Professor Marek has relied mostly on the evidence of

4. Muhammad Deen Fauq. *Tarikh Aqwam-i Kashmir* Vol. II, p. 325

5. *Oxford History of India*, Third Edition, 1961 p. 805

European scholars, Fakir Syed Wahiduddin has been able to collect the evidence of members of Iqbal's family, which he could obtain through Iqbal's nephew Mr. Ijaz Ahmad. It must be recorded here that we are lucky to have living amongst us today Shaikh Ijaz Ahmad, nephew of Iqbal, and one of his sisters whose evidence is of great importance.

We have already referred to the fact that several writers have given 9th November, 1877, as the date of Iqbal's birth, and in view of the confusion and uncertainty that surround the whole question, it will be worthwhile to examine this date.

1. According to Allama's statement in the *Lebenslauf*, the date of his birth is 3 Ziqidh 1294 A. H. (*vide* Exhibit B). This date corresponds to 9th November 1877, of the Christian Era.

2. In the Calendar of the Punjab University for 1896-97, page 348, the result of Iqbal's examination is announced as per statement *vide* Exhibit C. According to this statement the age of Iqbal, when applying for permission to appear at the examination, was 19, so it must be 20 or so when he actually passed the examination. This points to the year of his birth being 1877 rather than 1873.

3. According to a statement of Iqbal's sister, based on the authority of their mother, he was born early in the morning on a Friday.⁶ Now 3rd Ziqidh 1294 A. H. was on a Friday.

4. V. Kubickova states in her *Novopeskon Literatura XX stoleti* that Iqbal was born in 1877.⁷

5. Professor J. W. Fluck gives the year of Iqbal's birth as 1877 - *vide Muhammad Iqbal under indomuslimische Modernismus Westostliche Abhadblungen*. Rudolf Tschwdi Zum 70 Geburtstag, Wiesbaden 1954, p. 357.⁸

6. Syed Wahiduddin: *Rozgar-i Faqir* p. 232

7. Jan Rypka and collaborators: "*Dejiny perske a tadzicke literatury*." (History of Persian & Tajik Literature), Praha, 1956, p. 305

8. J. W. Fluck. *Muhammad Iqbal und der indomuslimische Modernismus Westostliche Abhadblungen*, Rudolf Tschudi Zum 70, Geburtstag, Wiesbaden, 1954, p. 357

6. Gottfried Simon in his '*Reformbewegungen in Islam*' gives the year of Iqbal's birth as 1877.⁹

It must be mentioned here that too much reliance cannot be placed on the dates as given by the European scholars. They have evidently relied on information as furnished by Pakistani writers or in the *Lebenslauf*. Still the statements of these scholars assume importance when they support the other available evidence.

7. *The Civil & Military Gazette* of Lahore when publishing an Obituary Note about Iqbal mentioned the year of his birth as 1877.

While there is overwhelming evidence in support of the fact that Iqbal was born on Friday, 9th November, 1877, there are also certain facts which tend to throw some doubts. These are mentioned below :—

1. There is no mention in the Municipal records of this date, or of the birth of Iqbal, if that birth happened to be on any date other than 22nd February 1873.
2. In the International Passport issued to Iqbal in 1931 (vide Exhibit D) and also in *Lebenslauf* the year of birth is given as 1876.
3. G. Taffarel in his *Notizie biografiche sur Mohammad Iqbal* gives the year of Iqbal's birth as 1876.¹⁰
4. Helmuth von Glasenapp also gives the year of Iqbal's birth as 1876.¹¹

As regards there being no entry in the Municipal records of Sialkot about the birth of Iqbal it may be pointed out that such omission was a common occurrence on the sub-continent. Regarding the entry in the Passport it must be pointed out that converting Hijri dates into Christian dates or *vice versa* is a very difficult process and involves complicated mathematical calculation. But luckily for us this process is today rendered easy by the accurate and laboriously prepared tables that we possess today. Unfortunately no such tables of conversion

9. According to the review of the book in *The Muslim World* XXVII, 1937 p. 437, as mentioned by John Marek.

10. *Oriente Moderno* XVIII, 1938, p. 322

11. *Die Literaturen Indiens*, Potsdam, 1929, p. 227

were easily available fifty years ago. Hence probably Iqbal had to carry out the conversion without the help of any tables, and so he converted 1294 A.H. into 1876 C.E. more or less approximately. An indication of the difficulty Iqbal felt is given by the fact that he did not mention any date along with the year. Thus the discrepancy is easily explained.

As regards the two European Orientalists, their statements only serve to emphasise that even as early as 1929 there was a strong feeling against accepting 1873 as the year of Iqbal's birth.

When considering the degree of reliance that can be placed on their statements it may be pointed out that they have evidently based their statements on the information given by Iqbal in *Lebenslauf*. It must be noted that G. Tafferel is not a very reliable author as he says that Iqbal died in Bombay, which, as we all know, is not correct.

In addition to the evidence we have mentioned above there is a certain amount of secondary evidence which is also worth consideration :—

- (a) Shaikh Ijaz Ahmad's mother told him that at the time of her marriage Iqbal was reading in V class, and his age was between 10-12 years. This makes him 16 or 17 at the time of Matriculation in 1893. So the year of his birth must be 1876 or 1877. In any case this evidence rules out 1873 as the year of Iqbal's birth.¹²
- (b) In July 1938 Shaikh Ata Muhammad, elder brother of Iqbal, wrote to his son, Shaikh Ijaz Ahmad, that Iqbal's first wife was about 3 years older than Iqbal, and at the time of writing the letter her age was about 65. This letter also tends to prove that the year of Iqbal's birth could not be 1873.¹³

Before concluding it must be recorded that the writer owes a debt of gratitude to Professor John Marek of Prague University and Faqir Syed Wahiduddin of Karachi for their patient, painstaking, and thorough work in collecting evidence about the date of Iqbal's birth. The writer

12. Information supplied by Shaikh Ijaz Ahmad in a letter

13. *Ibid.*

was always interested in this question and had collected considerable evidence but his task was rendered considerably easy by the work of these two scholars.

It must be put on record that whenever the question of the date of Iqbal's birth arose his great friend, Choudhry Muhammad Husain used to say that it was impossible for him not to believe any information supplied by Iqbal himself. And we would be quite safe in following Choudhry Mohammad Husain in this matter.

In dealing with this subject we have relied to a very great extent on evidence supplied by Iqbal himself. So we must also say something about the source of Iqbal's information. In most families important dates are recorded in family journals, but even if there was no such journal in Shaikh Noor Mohammad's family the old father must have informed the young son about the date of his birth before his memory blurred. The elders in every family remembered the dates of birth of various younger members and also transmission of the dates of birth is maintained in every family in the sub-continent even to this day. In the case of Iqbal this method of oral transmission was to a certain extent natural as in his family Iqbal was the only child who had adopted a scholarly career. Thus, the date of his birth must have been frequently mentioned in family circles as a date of great significance. To sum up we come to the following conclusions :—

1. There is absolutely no reason for us to disregard the date of Iqbal's birth as given by him, that is 3rd Ziqidh 1294 A. H. corresponding to 9th November 1877 ¹⁴ although the Municipal records of Sialkot town make no mention of this date.
2. There is no doubt that a son was born to Shaikh Noor Muhammad on 22nd February 1873 as shown in the Municipal records, but this child died in infancy.

In order to avoid all confusion in future, Iqbal Academy and other Societies as well as the Government of Pakistan may be requested to accept 9th November, 1877 as the correct date of Iqbal's birth.

14. According to F. Wustenfeld - *Mahler'sche Vergleichungstabellen der Mohammedanischen und Christlichen Zeitrechnung* 2 Aufl. Leipzig 1926

Date of Iqbal's Birth

EXHIBIT 'B'

EXHIBIT 'A'

لکھنؤ، ۱۲ مارچ ۱۸۹۱ء کو پیدا ہوئے۔

تاریخ	مقام	نام	پیشہ	تاریخ	مقام	نام	پیشہ
۱۲ مارچ ۱۸۹۱ء	لکھنؤ	آغا محمد علی	مدرسہ	۱۲ مارچ ۱۸۹۱ء	لکھنؤ	آغا محمد علی	مدرسہ

1. Name of the Applicant
2. Name of the Applicant
3. Date of Birth
4. Date of Completion
5. Date of Issue
6. Copy of the
7. Signature of the
8. Original Fee

ATTESTED

MALHOTRA CITY



BIRTH & DEATH CLERK
MUNICIPAL COMMITTEE
SIALKOT

یہ سہیل کھننیا لکھنؤ کے مدرسہ میں تاریخ پیدائش کا وہ انداز ہے
جس سے ڈاکٹر صاحب کی تاریخ پیدائش کے متعلق غلط فہمی پیدا ہوئی۔

EXHIBIT 'B'

LEBENS LAUF

I was born on the 3rd of Dhū Qa d 1294 A. H (1876 A. D.) at Sialkot—Punjab (India). My education began with the study of Arabic and Persian. A few years after I joined one of the local schools and began my University career, passing the first Public examination of the Punjab University in 1891. In 1893 I passed the Matriculation and joined the Scotch Mission College Sialkot where I studied for two years, passing the Intermediate Examination of the Punjab University in 1895. In 1897 and 1899 respectively I passed my B. A. and M. A. from the Lahore Government College. During the course of my University career I had the good fortune to win several gold and silver medals and scholarships. After my M. A. I was appointed McLeod Arabic Reader in the Punjab University Oriental College where I lectured on History and Political Economy for about 3 years. I was then appointed Asst. Professor of Philosophy in the Lahore Government college. In 1905 I got leave of absence for three years in order to complete my studies in Europe where I am at present residing.

S. M. IQBAL.


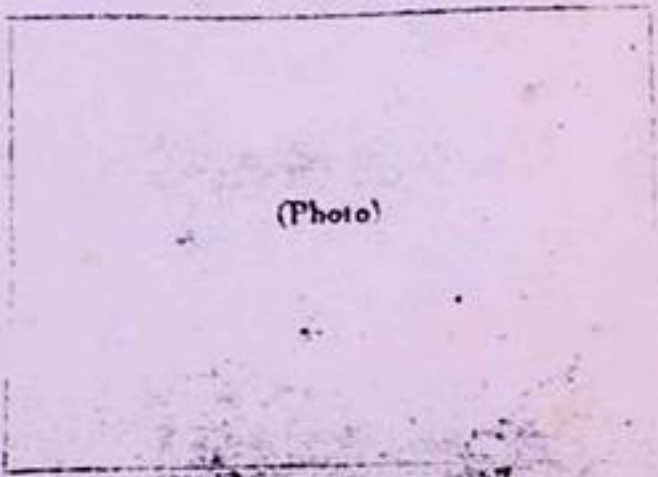
EXHIBIT 'C'

Merit No.	Name	Race	Age (as given in application form)	Total number of marks obtained	Institution	Subjects in which the candidate was examined
11	Sheikh Mohd. Iqbal	Mohammadan	19	260	Govt. College Lahore	English Arabic Philosophy

Date of Iqbal's Birth

Date of Iqbal's Birth

EXHIBIT 'D'

DESCRIPTION SIGNALEMENT		Wife	Photograph of Iqbal's
Profession Profession	Student at school		
Place and date of birth Lieu et date de naissance	Sheikhpur, 1876		
Denomination Dénomination	Free		
Height Taille	5 ft 0 in	ft in	
Colour of eyes Couleur des yeux	Black		
Colour of hair Couleur des cheveux	Black, wavy		
Visible distinguishing marks Signes particuliers			
CHILDREN ENFANTS		Wife Femme	
Name Nom	Date of birth Date de naissance	Sex Sexe	

پاسپورٹ میں تاریخ پیدائش کے اندراج کا عکس