



Iqbal: A Bridge between the East and the West

MUSLIM Institute organized a Roundtable Discussion titled “Iqbal: A Bridge between the East and the West” on Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at the National Library of Pakistan, Islamabad. Ambassador of Hungary to Pakistan, His Excellency Dr. Zoltán Varga, was the chief guest of the event, whereas Prof. Dr. Nazir Ahmad Zafar, Dean of the Faculty of Information Science and Technology at COMSATS University, Islamabad delivered the opening remarks. Other distinguished speakers included Dr. Abdul Basit, Senior Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Studies at Bahria University, Islamabad; Dr. Sajid Mehmood, Assistant Professor at Government Postgraduate College, Mansehra; and Mr. Muhammad Azeem, PhD Scholar at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. The session was moderated by Ms. Zunera Mumtaz lecturer Kohsar University Muree.

Honourable Speakers



Dr. Zoltán Varga

Ambassador of Hungary to
Pakistan
(Chief Guest)



Prof. Dr. Nazir Ahmad Zafar

Dean of the Faculty of Information
Science and Technology at COMSATS
University, Islamabad
(Opening Remarks)



Dr. Abdul Basit

Senior Assistant Professor in the
Department of Media Studies at
Bahria University, Islamabad



Dr. Sajid Mehmood

Assistant Professor at
Government Postgraduate
College, Mansehra



Mr. Muhammad Azeem

PhD Scholar at the University of
the Punjab, Lahore



Ms. Zunera Mumtaz

Lecturer Kohsar University
Muree
(Session Moderator)

Summary of the Round Table Discussion

The poetry is not a mere aesthetic expression, but as a civilizational force, a moral, spiritual, and intellectual power capable of shaping human consciousness, rebuilding dignity, and guiding societies through historical crisis. Civilization is not defined by technology, empire, or economic strength, but by moral consciousness, spiritual depth, freedom, dignity, and ethical responsibility. True progress of an individual is not external expansion but inner development, and true civilization is rooted in values rather than structures.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal appears as a universal thinker whose philosophy integrates Eastern spirituality and Western intellectual discipline into a single moral and ethical vision. From the East, he draws Qur'anic wisdom, Sufi metaphysics, spiritual purification, inner transformation, and sacred consciousness; from the West, scientific knowledge, philosophical reasoning, and modern intellectual discipline. This synthesis produces harmony rather than contradiction. Iqbal critically engages with Western civilization, learning from its strengths while resisting spiritual emptiness, moral crises, and excessive materialism. At the heart of his philosophy lies the concept of *khudi* (selfhood), defining the human being as a morally sovereign and spiritually autonomous self. Inner freedom becomes the foundation of all other freedoms like psychological, emotional, spiritual, ethical, and political. Freedom means liberation from fear, dependence, imitation, borrowed identities, and borrowed emotions, and the courage to think independently, act responsibly, and live with dignity.

Iqbal's intellectual depth is shaped by profound engagement with Western philosophy and literature, including thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, and Karl Marx, as well as literary figures such as

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. His inspiration from Goethe's West-östlicher Divan reflects his belief in cross-civilizational dialogue rather than civilizational conflict. Simultaneously, his spiritual identity remains deeply rooted in Islamic spirituality and Eastern traditions, shaped by the moral and spiritual influence of the Prophet (ﷺ), Muhammad Jalal ad-Din Rumi, Mansur al-Hallaj, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. These influences form a living ethical and spiritual foundation that integrates faith, intellect, spirituality, and universal human concern.

Parallel to this Iqbalian vision, Sándor Petőfi was a revolutionary humanist whose poetry transformed language into resistance, awakening, and moral intervention. Living under political domination, Petőfi redefined poetry as an instrument of liberation and ethical struggle. His humanism affirms that human beings are inherently free, dignified, and morally responsible agents capable of shaping their destiny. Ethics becomes action rather than theory, and freedom becomes the highest moral value. His role in the 1848 Hungarian Revolution exemplifies this philosophy, where the recitation of Nemzeti Dal transforms poetry into a political spark that ignited national awakening. In his symbolism, chains, swords, blood, sacrifice, and homeland became moral metaphors for dignity, resistance, and liberation. Love transcends romance and becomes compassion, solidarity, devotion to humanity, and commitment to homeland. Freedom and love emerge as inseparable moral forces; freedom without love leads to cruelty, and love without freedom leads to submission.

Despite differences in temperament, symbolism, and style, Iqbal and Petőfi converge toward the same ethical destination: the awakening of human dignity, moral

responsibility, and collective self-respect. Iqbal employs spiritual and philosophical symbols such as the Self, the Falcon, Dawn, and the Desert; Petőfi employs revolutionary symbols such as chains, swords, blood, and homeland. Yet both seek the formation of a morally awakened human being and a dignified collective consciousness. Their connection is further symbolized in Iqbal's Persian poem honoring Petőfi in Payam-e-Mashriq, where Petőfi is presented as a symbol of revolutionary sacrifice and moral courage, uniting word and action, suffering and beauty, despair and hope, martyrdom and rebirth.



Iqbal appears as a philosophical and reflective thinker, and Petőfi as a passionate revolutionary filled with humor, irony, humanism, and romantic spirit; both combine thought with action, philosophy with activism, and spirituality with struggle. One represents intellectual and spiritual revival, the other revolutionary and ethical resistance, yet both pursue national awakening, collective dignity, and moral sovereignty. Their lives embody failure and triumph, sacrifice and courage, struggle and commitment, making them national heroes and universal moral symbols. One functions as a bridge between East and West, integrating civilizations into dialogue; the other

stands as a guiding light of revolutionary humanism, leading people away from tyranny toward dignity and moral courage. Their shared philosophy unites freedom, responsibility, dignity, ethics, spirituality, and human struggle into a single civilizational vision.

History is not as East versus West, religion versus civilization, or culture versus culture, but as oppression versus justice, exploitation versus dignity, and materialism versus moral and spiritual revival. The real journey is not territorial or political; it is the journey of the human heart. Political defeat, humiliation, and oppression are not endpoints but sources of ethical revival and creative resistance. Wherever someone speaks against injustice, they extend the life of humanity itself.



Through the legacies of Iqbal and Petőfi, poetry becomes a path of national revival, ethical awakening, and human unity. Their message affirms that freedom begins with inner awakening, that spiritual strength sustains political strength, and that human dignity is non-negotiable. It is ultimately the

struggle for the human soul itself. Their shared legacy continues to inspire cultural dialogue, intellectual connection, and moral courage across nations, reminding humanity that dignity, freedom, love, courage, and responsibility are universal and timeless values.

In conclusion, lives and works of Muhammad Iqbal and Sándor Petőfi stand as symbols of how shared ideas and values can unite people across time, space, and culture. Their intellectual and moral courage, their commitment to freedom, and their visionary poetry continue to inspire, reminding us that the pursuit of liberty and dignity is universal. By studying and reflecting upon these two remarkable figures, we gain insight into the power of literature and philosophy to connect humanity and to illuminate the path toward national and personal awakening. Let us honor their legacy and continue fostering cultural and intellectual dialogue between our nations.

Question Answer Session



Pakistani poet Sarwat Muhammad Din translated Petőfi's poetry into Punjabi to make it alive to two civilizations. Similarly,

Iqbal's works have been translated into Hungarian language, which further strengthens the cultural dialogue between Hungary and Pakistan. In Hungary, almost every Hungarian city has a road or square named after Petőfi, which shows how respected and celebrated he remains even today. Both Petőfi and Iqbal are alive in the academics of both nations. Regarding Petőfi, his legacy remains very much alive and continues to generate discussion, activity, and sometimes even controversy. Petőfi's legacy is often referenced in political debates in Hungary, and different groups, whether government supporters, opposition voices, or intellectual circles.



When Nelson Mandela visited Islamabad in May 1999 he acknowledged the influence of Iqbal's philosophy. Research shows that Iqbal's ideas were not limited to Germany or Hungary but extended globally, leaving a deep intellectual impact.



In 1848, revolutionary movements spread across Europe, and Petőfi and his companions demanded sovereignty and freedom from censorship. The public response was revolutionary yet initially peaceful, leading to some early success when Hungary, which was under the Habsburg Empire, received certain concessions such as reforms and a new government. However, the situation changed when the Habsburg court, supported by Tsarist Russia, intervened, and after months of conflict, the revolution was suppressed. Despite this, Petőfi's legacy endured and later contributed to a period of prosperity before the First World War. Similarly, the intellectual legacy of Iqbal lived on and ultimately contributed to the emergence of an independent Pakistan, after many decades of imperial rule. The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, the ideas of Iqbal, and neoliberalism explain that there is an ongoing global debate about neoliberal economic thinking, particularly after the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009, and many believe the world is currently moving through a transitional phase in which a new system may emerge.



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