

Elemental law, history and poetry are indelibly linked and the best connection among the three was sought by none other than Derek Walcott who wrote, "For every poet it is always the morning in the world, and History a forgotten insomniac night; History and elemental awe are always our early beginning, because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History." Zafar Anjum's sprawling book, a reminder of the *raison d'être* of what Walcott said, begins with a question posed to him by one of his friends, 'Why the biography of Iqbal?' Zafar gives four answers splendidly. It is to, 'narrate Iqbal's life once again for those who have forgotten him. 'and further because- 'I am attached to Iqbal by an umbilical cord that is both spiritual and intellectual: 'during languid summer afternoons and buried winter evenings, while we did our school work, Iqbal seeped into us'; and finally 'The great poet, in an oblique way became a real presence in my life.' And thus emanates the justification.

The book is neatly divided into four parts: each part covering distinct period of Iqbal's life and evolution as a statesman. Readers' inclination to read the book is not of much relevance here nor do they have to toil to make good of lines as there are no stumbling stones; Zafar knows the art of excavating by traversing forgotten pages of history. Zafar locates the self of Iqbal which signifies Iqbal's belief in 'living a straight forward, honest life' as 'life is a state of war'. In the backwash of history and culture he portrays Iqbal's feelings with the solitude of an observer. The book is not only for those whose mind permits the elasticity of its openness to myriad personalities that Iqbal was but also for unenthusiastic wanderers. Zafar makes this well-researched book available to a scholar as well as a novice reader in equal measure. Even a swift, fast reading will help any reader to absorb the crux as all comprehension flows from vivid description of background material which Zafar lays bare before his readers prodigiously. Elegance and condensation marks Zafar's work. Nothing is over-explained.

In this book the writer continually looking through Iqbal from the centre of an old civilization lets images of forgotten era and ensuing era become one to determine smoother way into the prospects of contemporary life. Looking back at short, thought provoking poems of Iqbal as Zafar has quoted, one

realises that the poet had overcome ruptured images of the conflicts between good and bad as often times we find him providing a psychological armour to his readers to cope with contemporary issues. The aura of sycophancy Iqbal abhors.

'It is no life, if one has to live on others 'breath; Stop relying on a life of fame.'

Of Iqbal's connections with the Western world, Zafar correctly sums up- 'Europe transforms Iqbal's ideas about the world. It makes him reject territorial nationalism and begin to celebrate Islamic culture and history. There is no single event or series of events that propel his mind in this new direction but it's fair to say that an up-close scrutiny of Western civilization led to this transformation. Iqbal saw the seeds of Europe's destruction in its material culture, which he believed lacked spirituality.'

Zafar, in some places, compares Iqbal with Nietzsche and very rightly so as he writes, 'Like the German philosopher Nietzsche Iqbal rejected weakness and advocated the will to power.' Readers acquainted with Nietzsche may remember the description by Nietzsche of the market crowded with human beings, gossiping and purchasing, walking aimlessly when suddenly a naked man came running shouting "God is dead. God is dead." And then blamed the crowd for having killed God. And the crowd, in turn, dubbed that man as "mad." "The internal reality of things" was perhaps what Nietzsche, through his 'mad man', was striving for and which Iqbal too endeavoured to reach out to. For Iqbal as it was for Nietzsche, creativity is an experience that goes beyond

words despite the uneasiness that accompanies being an intellectual in rebellion as Iqbal was. Iqbal questions through his writings the order, autocratic order to which are subordinate human beings. 'God is dead' when juxtaposed along with Iqbal's 'The weak lose themselves in God.' shows how both elbow their way towards each other.

Zafar analytically shows how Iqbal became with the passage of time a public intellectual and a celebrity but he admits that while 'There is universal acknowledgement of Iqbal's greatness as a poet, the problem starts when we come to his politics. Indian journalist and scholar Khushwant Singh once aptly said that if you forget Iqbal's politics, he was a great poet. However, Iqbal's message cannot be appreciated without understanding his politics. At the same

time, one must note that Iqbal's politics was his response to his immediate circumstances.' Here an avid reader will not miss the fact that Iqbal drove his skills from his conceptual strength, the concrete events, places and people that shaped his vision as a man aspiring for unique civilizational structure. His intimacy with his milieu, myths, legends, customs and conventions helped him glance through the whole society. He always identified himself with the gullible, the fallen, and the neglected. It should be properly assimilated that to reach a harmonious state, one must not only understand and come to grips with the nature of 'clash' but also make others aware of such a 'clash'. This facilitates for harmonious co-existence. In politics, inflexibility paves the way for flexibility and vice versa. This is apparently Iqbal's most important contribution to politics.

An interesting episode Zafar highlights ensues from Iqbal's getting impressed with the philosophy of Henri Bergson: his ideas about time, pure duration and *elan vital* which reinforces Iqbal to bring out the philosophy of 'Khudi.' which in Zafar's words is 'a unified and comprehensive conception of personality. This became Iqbal's major contribution to the world of ideas.' About the meeting between Iqbal and Henri Bergson, Zafar mentions 'While they are having this discussion, Iqbal cites a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, 'do not abuse time: God says, I am time.' Bergson is astonished to hear this and asks Iqbal to confirm the authenticity of this hadith.'

Iqbal's lectures and addresses in Rome, London, Egypt and Palestine convince readers about the nature of questions Iqbal raised: about the self, tradition and modernity, ethics and politics- all very relevant to any meaningful discussion of civilizational culture of the world. As an intellectual Iqbal enjoyed freedom of communication at all levels with regard to many versatile issues, reinforced by constant cultural reorientation which in turn mixes together anxieties of modern human beings with the growing need to have a spiritualistic way of life.

This collection tackles broader structures of what

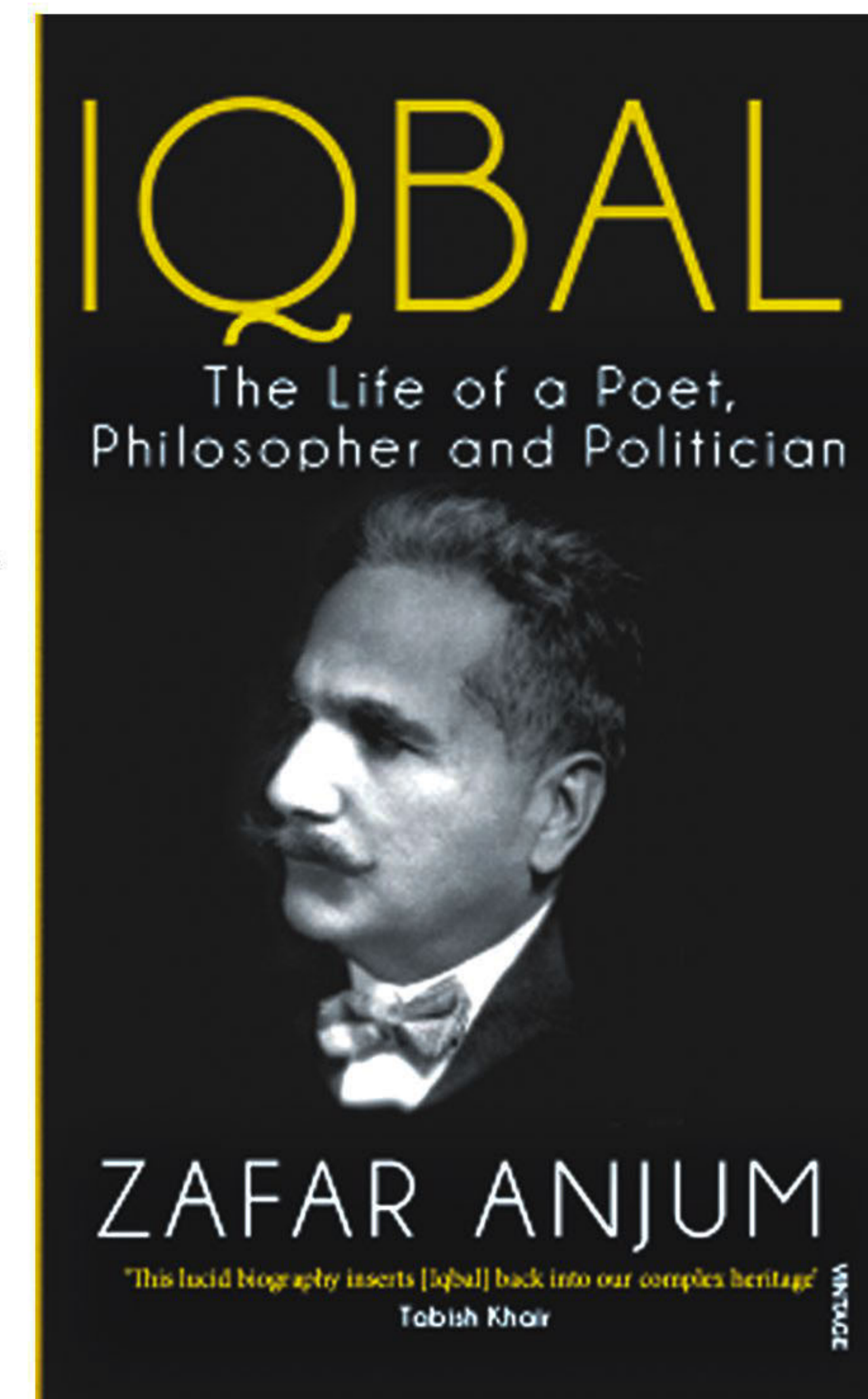
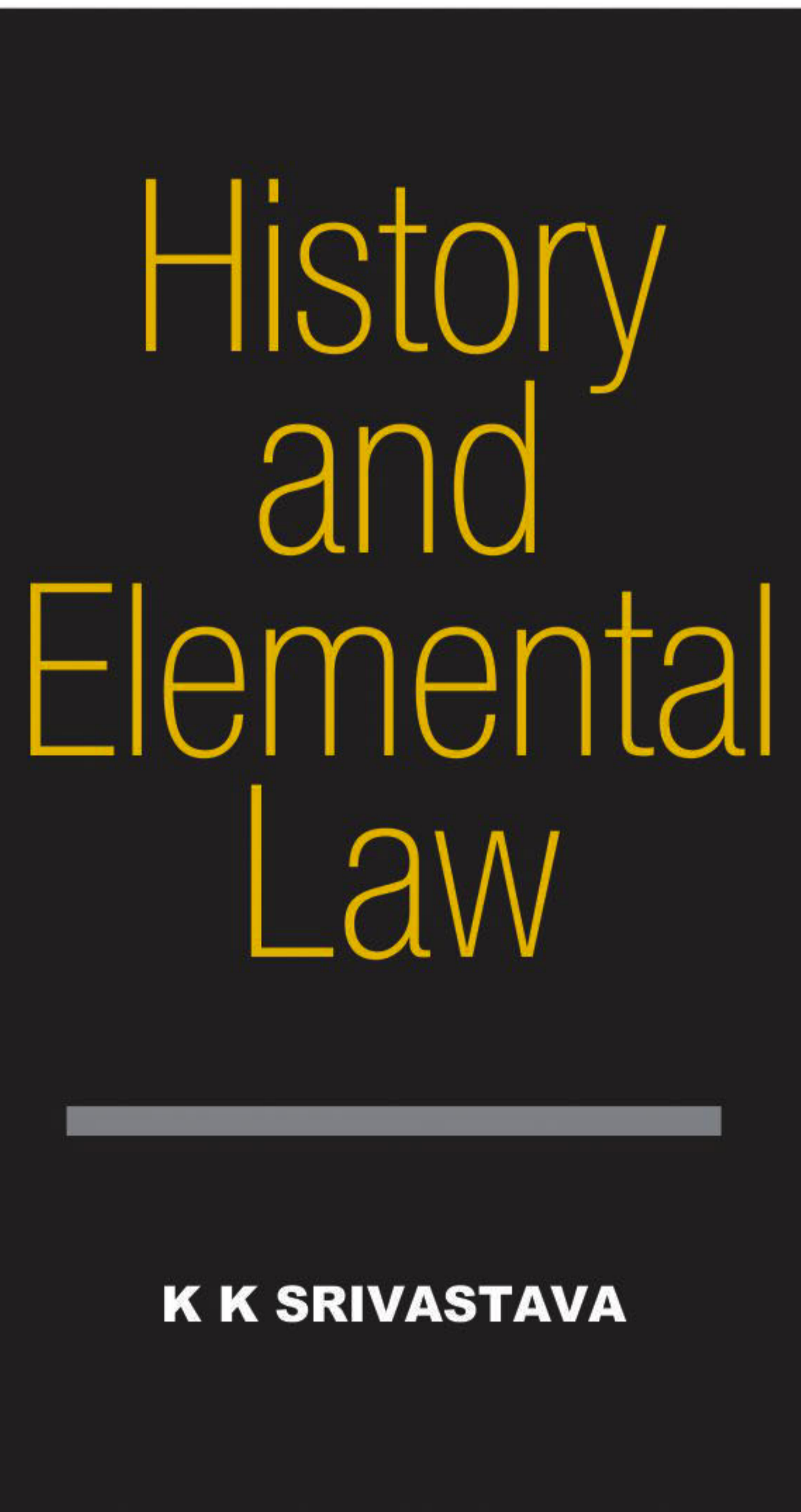
Zafar calls Iqbal's, 'action and continuous struggle. The book does not involve very complex narrative modes; the focus is rather on situations, events or incidents with a view to prove that, to cite Zafar, Iqbal 'was a staunch nationalist, a vocal communist, an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity, a humanist, a believer in Islamic revivalism, a freedom fighter, and an advocate of international brotherhood.'

Zafar, as a writer, is articulate, erudite, sober and knowledgeable. He believes in direct expression. It accounts for his success in highlighting varied and effervescent aspects of Iqbal's personality. He further acquaints readers with the pearls of Iqbal's achievements by writing with passionate energy, covering an impressive array of topics. Zafar's mind tackles

virtually everything from mundane to metaphysical, personal to political catching a variety of moods and perspectives Iqbal had been through. Most refreshing phenomenon about Iqbal's personality and his writings, as succinctly brought out by Zafar, is that Iqbal enjoys illuminating the world both internally and externally in all their radiance. Iqbal's voice is ample, strong and built up from deep and intense eschatological, rational, existential and philosophical concerns which human civilization and humanity at large would keep pondering over in times to come. Iqbal is too great a poet, seer, thinker and philosopher to be the subject matter of a review or even a book. Zafar realises it too and so he says, 'Iqbal, the man remains veiled in mystery. This enigmatic mystic and seer had once said about himself, I myself am not aware of my own true self, there's a greater depth in the ocean of my thoughts.' Zafar's work is a

solid, remarkable and honest attempt to delve into Iqbal's, 'greater depth in Iqbal's ocean of thoughts.' and demystify him.

The writer hails from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. He is currently Principal Accountant General, Kerala. He has three poetry collections- Ineluctable Stillness (2005), An Armless Hand Writes (2008) and Shadows of the Real (2012). He is literary reviewer for Kitaab, The Pioneer and Bureaucracy Today. His fourth book The Diary is expected to be out in 2016.



Iqbal-The Life of a Poet, Philosopher and Politician
By Zafar Anjum
Random House India.
Price 499/ Pages-274