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Iqbal Studies and Annemarie Schimmel

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Abstract:

Annemarie Schimmel was a renowned Orientalist of current century. She wrote extensively on topics related to Islam, especially Sufism. Iqbal Studies remained her passion throughout her life. She translated most of Iqbal's works into German language. She produced a number of articles besides eleven books on Iqbal. Her most celebrated book on Iqbal was *Gabriel's Wing* which won her fame in the Iqbal loving circles. Being one of the best books to understand Iqbal's thoughts, it has been translated into Urdu as well. *Gabriel's Wing* has also attracted criticism from some Iqbal scholars who pointed out some weaknesses in the book. Anyhow, on the whole the book is a comprehensive work and a veritable addition to the Iqbal Studies. This article is a study of Annemarie Schimmel's literary services with special reference to Allama Iqbal.

Keywords:

Annemarie Schimmel, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Rodulf Pannwitz, Pakistan, Lahore, German, Orientalism, Hans Meinke, Suhail Umer, Aslam Kamal, Ikram Chaghatai.

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal's works, both prose and verse, attracted a large number of scholars from different parts of the world. Iqbal infused a new spirit into his nation through his matchless

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poetry. He taught them to abhor slavery of all kinds including politico-economic and socio-intellectual. He firmly believed that his nation would no longer be a subject of any foreign or local powers once it recognized its Ego and worked constantly for its elevation. Renowned Iqbal scholar Yousuf Khan is of the view that the idea propounded by Iqbal to establish a political center for Indian Muslims brought forth wide range impacts afterwards. If we look deep into it, it will come out that the demand of independent state for Muslims is indeed in accordance with his philosophy of ego and reflection of the trends prevalent after 1857 debacle in one shape or another. It is therefore understandable why Iqbal's nation feels indebted to him for his unique national services. An Arabic poet from Egypt goes to the extent that Pakistan is but a couplet of his poetry. He says:

بيت القصيد لشاعر موهوب هل قبل ذلك صح حلم اديب؟ (1)

Pakistan is but a couplet of an ode by a God-gifted poet

Is there any writer before him whose dream got realized?

Surprisingly, a good deal of scholars hailing from different religious background and nationalities have made Iqbal Studies nucleus of their academic pursuits. They richly contributed to Iqbal Studies. They range from Ali Shariti of Iran, Abdul Wahhab Azzam of Egypt to R.A. Nicholson of England and Annemarie Schimmel of Germany. Among the rest, Schimmel remained a lifelong student of Iqbal Studies.

Schimmel was born in 1922 in Erfurt, Germany. She was inclined towards eastern languages and Islamic Studies in her initial stage of life. She developed a special taste for Islamic Studies chiefly Islamic Sufism. She wrote more than 100 books and innumerable articles on various topics related to Islam. Her main forte was Sufi tradition of Islam and allied topics. She availed a chance to serve as a teacher in Turkey. She interacted vastly with scholars from Pakistan, Iran and other Muslim countries. This background played a very positive role in developing her soft corner for Islam and Muslim World. Thanks to her personal study and direct interaction with the Muslim, she was free of traditional prejudice associated with the Orientalists. She was famous for her balanced approach towards Oriental Studies and eastern people. The following excerpt indicates her defining trait:

“The German Oriental behavior played a vital role in intellectual and spiritual formation of Schimmel. German Orientalism is free of charge of propagating Islam’s negative image. She was fortunate to have such good teachers during her formative period whose training helped her sprout spiritually.”(2)

Schimmel was an extra ordinary intelligent since her childhood. A teacher of her school where she admitted at the tender age of four, earned her doctoral degree by writing on Schimmel.(5) She obtained her first PhD degree when she had not yet celebrated her 20th birthday. She earned a PhD on Islamic Studies from Berlin University when she was only of 19 years old. She spent some months as interpreter at German Foreign Office. But she was interested in teaching and research. It is why she could not feel at home with office work. She left the job shortly. (3)

It is pertinent to note that Schimmel had also earned another doctorate in collaboration at the age of 28. (4)

She enjoyed a special status in the Muslim World due to her research work on Islamic Studies, especially Sufism. She was bestowed with national awards by many Islamic countries including Pakistan. She joyously remembered that she earned her first honorary doctorate from Pakistan. She wrote:

“...I was honored with an honorary doctorate from University of Hyderabad; it was the first one in my life, which was later followed by honors from Peshawar and Islamabad universities.” (5)

Schimmel loved the Muslim World; particularly she developed close association with Pakistan. Among other, the main reason for her loving Pakistan is its being the Land of Iqbal. She loved Pakistan so much as she took it her second home. She always received a warm welcome and special treatment from the people of Pakistan. She was declared an honorary citizen of Pakistan’s new designated capital city well before it was built. She reminisced about it in her autobiography:

“...I, among other honors, was made honorary citizen of Islamabad, a city, which at that time, had not even been planned.”(6)

Schimmel loved Iqbal’s birth place -Pakistan so much that she yearned to be buried here after death. She died in Germany in

an accident. Thus, she had to be buried there and her wish of burying in Pakistan was fulfilled by building her symbolic grave. Aslam Kamal, one of her close friends, writes in his memoirs “In order to honor her wish to be buried in Pakistan, staff of the German embassy led by German ambassador, Ghulam Rabbani Aagro, son of Pir Hussamuddin Rashidi and his son, who used to call Schimmel as his grandmother from Karachi and a delegation comprised of Suhail Umar, Ikram Chaghtai and this scribe from Lahore led by Justice (R) Nasira Javed Iqbal travelled to Thatha’s old and historical graveyard to erect a symbolic grave of Schimmel.”(7)

Schimmel’s mother was a Protestant. It was natural for her to be strict in her behavior. But her study of mystic literature of many other religions softened her and her daughter definitely inherited this softness. (8) Music has been an essential part of Western culture since long. It is common for children to learn how to play musical instruments and dance. Probably there is no house which does not follow this practice. Luckily, Schimmel’s house was an exception. They loved literary activities instead of music. In fact, attachment to literature played an important role for her parents to come close to each other. According to Schimmel, her home more echoed with literary activities rather than music. This love for literature caused her parents’ marriage. (9)

Little Schimmel inherited literary taste from her parents. Her father used to read verses loudly first German and then French on Sundays’ afternoon. Thus, it can be ascertained that her parents played primary role inculcating in her love for literature and Schimmel’s own interest quickened the pace.(10)

Akhtarul Wase rightly observed in the preface of his book *Danai e Raz* that Annemarie Schimmel directed her attention towards internal and spiritual sources of Islamic civilization instead of its outwardly look. Then she absorbed its epistemological interpretation and explanation. She introduced the West with its beauty and grandeur. Her scholarship spanning over larger part of the 20th century helped in bridging centuries’ old conflict, overt or covert, between the East and the West.

Schimmel was equally famous in literary as well as journalistic circles of Pakistan. Everybody showed respect for her.

She was much esteemed for her pro Islam and pro Muslim stand. She remained steadfast to fill the gap between the East and the West. By her death Muslim World lost one of its enthusiastic supporters in the West. Qazi Javed lamented her sad demise saying:

“Dr. Schimmel’s lifelong work is like a bridge between the East and the West. She strived for bringing two civilizations closer to each other. She died at a time when gap between the East and the West widening day by day. It seems that the predictions about clash of civilizations propounded by Samuel P. Huntington and other pessimists turning to be true. Today, we are in more need of her in times of accelerated tension among the civilizations.”(11)

Renowned journalist of Pakistan late Irshad Ahmad Haqqani wrote an obituary on her death. He rightly demanded setting up of a chair in Schimmel’s name in recognition of her services. He said:

“It would be suitable to establish Dr. Schimmel Chair in one or two top most universities of Pakistan. Research may be conducted on her work and utmost effort be employed to spread her work and message. She was a well-wisher of the Islamic World particularly Pakistan. We should not hesitate to appreciate her because in doing so we would be appreciating ourselves. An Arabic proverb goes: There is no reward of a virtue but virtue.”(12)

As mentioned earlier, Sufism was very close to her heart, she loved this subject very much. She was of the view that without studying Sufism, spread of Islam in the Sub-continent could not be understood properly. She was right that “Islam in Pakistan and India could not be imagined without Sufism. Sufism paved the way for spread of Islam in these areas. It spread not by gun powder or sword instead with the message of love and affection.”(13)

Dr. Schimmel wrote on variety of Islamic topics and the most prominent among her academic pursuits was Sufism. She abundantly wrote on Sufism and its allied topics. According to

Ghulam Qasim Mujahid Baloch her main claim to fame is Allama Iqbal. (14) Schimmel herself mentioned that she was introduced to Iqbal's work when she was a student and his work impressed her very much. However, she associated with Iqbal's work seriously in 1958 when she visited Pakistan at the age of 36. (15)

Her introduction to Iqbal and his impact on her academic life is evident from the following rather long excerpt: "I have been an admirer of Iqbal's work since my student years. Iqbal is a poet of Muslim India and is called Pakistan's spiritual father. His work is a beautiful amalgamation of poetic values of the East and the West whose representatives are Rumi and Goethe respectively. I was lucky to have his some books after the creation of Pakistan. A queer incident led me to an old German poet through Rudolf Pannwitz. He had some time ago translated some of Iqbal's verses from English into German and sent them to Lahore, now on display at Iqbal Museum. Iqbal sent him some of his book as a token of thanks. Since he could not read Persian, he handed over two books to me. This was German poet Hans Meinke. These books were *Payam e Mashraq* and *Javednamah*, in latter the soul journeys seven stages. I could not resist but to translate *Javednamah* in German language. I was so overpowered by thoughts of Iqbal that I remained talking on his extra ordinary conciliatory but deep mystic ideas. Resultantly, my Turk friends goaded me to translate this epic(*Javednamah*) into Turkish language which I did, not a poetic one but a translation with commentary. I was invited to Pakistan in 1958 in recognition of this work." (16)

Though Schimmel has written eleven books and twenty articles on Iqbal, English and German included; and all her work is very invaluable addition to the Iqbal Studies, yet she is remembered mainly for her wonderful work she rendered under the title of *Gabriel's Wing*. Given the importance of the book, here is given its brief introduction.

Gabriel's Wing in Brief

Annamarie Schimmel wrote this book in 1962, published by E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherland, later published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore. The book comprises 428 pages including bibliography and index. This is considered one of the

comprehensive works on Allama Iqbal in English language. It helped introducing Iqbal's poetry and thought to English speaking world. Allama Iqbal's literary contribution spans over many books in Urdu, Persian and English. Presenting art and thought of a literary giant and poet philosopher like Iqbal in a book is an uphill task. Luckily, Schimmel has been successful in doing so in her wondrous book *Gabriel's Wing*. The book has also been translated into Urdu. Dr. Ghulam Ali Allana rightly pointed out in the introduction to the Urdu translation that though she had written this book in 1962 (aged 40only), yet the readers would find that this work of hers was not inferior by any definition in the field of Iqbal Studies.(17)

The book starts with Foreword written by Schimmel herself followed by abbreviations of the books/materials used in the book. The first chapter consists of eighty five pages. The chapter is foundational one where Schimmel has discussed the historical as well as socio-political background of the Sub-continent in which the great poet of the East Allama Muhammad Iqbal was born, raised, participated in politico-literary activities and contributed to the awakening of the Muslims through his poetry. This very chapter also covers the literary beauties found in his work and finally Schimmel tended to the religious motives working behind the poetry and other works of Iqbal. The second chapter contains one hundred and sixteen pages. It is in continuation of the first chapter, covers Iqbal's religious motives which his work is characterized with. Belief in Oneness of Allah, prophet-hood of Muhammad(PBUH), Prayers, Fasting, Zakat and Pilgrimage are the five pillars on which the edifice of Islam is built upon. Besides these five pillars, Schimmel has touched the topic of Jihad as well.

The Muslim children are taught *Iman e Mujmal* and *Iman e Mufasssal* in their early years. The third chapter comprises one hundred and fourteen pages. This chapter of the book extensively deals with these two basic bodies' component of Islamic belief in light of Iqbal's understanding. Undoubtedly, Iqbal was a wide read person. He not only initiated in eastern tradition of scholarship but also well aware of western advancement in knowledge. He keenly observed the western culture and civilization. He read Shah WaliUllah, Bedal, Ghalib but he was mostly influenced by

Maulana Rumi in the East, and in the West he loved many personalities including Goethe, Bergson and the likes attracted him much. The fourth chapter points out the eastern as well as western imprints on Iqbal. This chapter is spread over sixty one pages.

The last chapter of the book may be termed as the results of the research carried on in this book. This is the briefest of all the chapters and has ten pages in toto. It mainly highlights the contradiction found in Iqbal's works with possible explanations on employment of contradictory statements in Iqbal's poetry.

Contents of the Book:

1- MUHAMMAD IQBAL

It consists of following sub-captions:

- a. The Historical Background
- b. His Life
- c. The Aesthetic Side of His Work
- d. His Religious Motives.

2- HIS INTERPRETATION OF THE FIVE PILLARS OF FAITH

This chapter is divided into following sub-chapters:

- a. There is no God but God
- b. Muhammad is the Messenger of God
- c. Prayer
- d. Fasting, Zakat, Pilgrimage and Jihad

3- HIS INTERPRETATION OF THE ESSENTIALS OF FAITH

It is further divided into five sub-chapters:

- a. I believe in God ...and His Angels
- b. ...and in His Books
- c. ...and in His Messengers
- d. ...and in the Last Day
- e. ...and in the Predestination, that Good and Evil both come from God

4- SOME GLIMPSES ON WESTERN AND EASTERN INFLUENCE ON IQBAL'S THOUGHT, AND ON HIS RELATIONS TO MYSTICS AND MYSTICISM.

5- TO SUM UP.(18)

There are some errors and mistakes in the book. Occurrence of mistakes in a book is not a rare phenomenon at all. Dr. Muhammad Riaz, the able translator of *Gabriel's Wing* has rectified them in the foot notes of the translation titled *Shahpar e Jabreel: Allama Iqbal kay Deeni Afkaar* published by Globe Publishers, Lahore in 1985. Hence, there are some Iqbal scholars whose understanding directed them to believe that Schimmel is but a traditional Orientalist. Dr. Syed Muhammad Akram Ikram points a paragraph from her book in proof of his claim. Schimmel has written in the book "Yet the meaning of the concept "West" is not clearly comprehensible from his work-as little as from the works of his contemporaries in all parts of Asia. It might either be the historical adversary of Islamic power in which position the West stood in the Middle Ages, or Europe which had formed cultural values distinguishing it from the widely common medieval civilization which remained prevalent in large parts of the Islamic world, or it might be the West of the Enlightenment period which developed the concepts of Human Rights, or the 19th century Europe which was reduced in the eyes of India on its imperialistic aspect. And it might even be the West which issued a rather uniform conglomerate of civilization in which the cultural peculiarities of all countries slowly got submerged. The last two aspects of the West seem to be the most important ones in Iqbal's work..." (19)

Dr. Ikram inferred from the aforementioned paragraph that Schimmel has glorified the West in all possible four aspects: firstly, the West is of prominent status; secondly, the West is torch-bearer of the Human Rights; thirdly, the West is a symbol of imperialism whereas actually it was not and finally, the West is great as it is conglomerating other cultures and civilizations.

Reprobating Schimmel's assertion, Dr. Ikram put it emphatically that given Iqbal's thoughts; there is no specification of any period as regard to criticism on the West. Certainly, the imperialistic character of the West and modern secular cultural onslaught are objectionable in the eyes of Allama Muhammad Iqbal. (20)

S.A. Wahid came up with a detailed critique of the book. He wrote an article entitled "Gabriel's Wing- A Critical Study of

Prof. Dr. Schimmel's Book on Iqbal's Religious Ideas". (21) He raised number of questions ranging from intention of Schimmel for writing this book to the very ability of her to cope with the topic. Wahid had analyzed her book chapter by chapter and topic by topic. He alleged her for wrongly dragging unnecessary material. Though at times, he appreciated her scholarship, yet kept on finding fault in the book. He was disappointed with the start of the book and suggested how it should have been started. He pointed out some personalities quoted out of context and inclusion of authenticated and unauthenticated materials.

It seems unfair to criticize efforts of someone for petty reasons and not recognizing the labour put by a person belonging to another continent, language, culture and religion. The right behavior in this regard is that of Dr. Muhhamd Riaz. He righted what was wrong while translating the book in Urdu without showing any abhorrence towards the intention of Schimmel or questioning her scholarship.

M. Ikram Chaghatai in collaboration with Burzine K. Waghmar prepared a bibliography of Schimmel's literary work. The bibliography also includes Schimmel's complete work on Iqbal, German and English both. The article is being ended with reproducing the same for the benefit of the researchers and the common readers. (22)

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