

## Annemarie Schimmel<sup>1</sup> on Iqbal

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Schimmel is well versed with the works of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, Baba Bule Shah, Shah Abdul Bhatai, the Shair-i-Haft Zaban Sachal sarmast and Hakim-i-Umat Sir Muhammad Iqbal<sup>2</sup>. She has spent a lot of her time researching the poetry of Allama and has great interest in his works. She is a devotee of the mystic poets of the sub-continent and is considered as an authority on Allama. She is revered in the sub-continent and has been honoured by the highest Civil Award of Pakistan 'Sitar-i-Qaid-i-A'zam' and a street in Pakistan which was earlier called Canal Road has been renamed after her. She has been honoured with Federal Service cross of first class in 1980. She was the President of International Association for the History of Religions between 1980 and 1990.

Schimmel studied Arabic language at the age of 15 in Erfurt under the able guidance of renowned scholar Dr. Allan Berg, who would also give her books on Islamic history and culture. She got her Ph.D. at a tender age of 19. She received a Doctorate in Islamic Languages and Civilisation from the University of Berlin. She worked under the guidance of Richard Hartmann in Berlin. Her encounter with H. H. Schaeder was paramount. This genius laid an imprint of spiritual and cultural history on her mind. He also initiated her in the poetry of John Donne, the great poet of Shakespear time. Schimmel's translation of sonnets and love poems under the title "Nacked thinking heart" are dedicated to the memory of Schaeder.

*The Mystical Dimensions of Islam* appeared during her stay in Harvard in 1971 and has been translated into German in 1995. She is a prolific writer and types herself. She can type as many as 30 pages in a day and J.C. Buergel has written a poem praising her typewriter.<sup>3</sup>

Iqbal was hardly known to the German orientalists till Schimmel took up the study. She was introduced to Iqbal through R.A. Nicholson as she read his article in the magazine *Islamica* in which he had introduced *Payam-i-Mashriq* to European readers.<sup>4</sup> *Payam-i-Mashriq* is an answer to

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Goethes Oest-Westlicher Divan. Schimmel found in the collection a connection between Goethe and Jalal-ud-din Rumi. She was particularly moved by the poem in which Iqbal shows a friendly meeting between Goethe and Rumi in Paradise<sup>5</sup>. She dreamt of knowing more about the author and work on him.

In early 1947 Schimmel started lecturing on Orient in German Literature in Marburg University, the year in which India got independence. Pakistan also came into existence and she was requested to write articles in *Pakistan Quarterly*. She got to know Hannes Meinke, who introduced her to philosophy of Rudolf Pannwitz. After attending the lectures of Schimmel became a great admirer of Iqbal as a thinker and poet. Meinke had translated three times three poems of Iqbal into German and sent them to Lahore to the poet and are seen in Iqbal Museum even today. She received two works i.e. *Payam-i-Mashriq* and *Javaidnama* as a reward which she in turn gifted to Schimmel. In 1957 appeared, *Buch der Ewigkeit* as translation of *Payam-i-Mashriq*.

In the foreword of the translation Hermann Hesse wrote, "The three realms of the spirit belong to Sir Muhammad Iqbal, the three realm of the spirit are the sources of his overpowering works: the world of India, the world of Islam and the thought of the West".

Since Schimmel was teaching in Ankara and talked a lot about Iqbal and his fascinating works. She was requested to translate him into Turkish with a detailed commentary and Schimmel has been praised for her achievements. She preserves a letter from a person from eastern Anatolia who was a bearer in a restaurant in a small town and showed his admiration for Iqbal. He has written, "I have read *Javidnama* in translation and I believe that the philosophy fulfills all the aspirations of present times."

It confirms that Iqbal appeared to simple minds too. They may not understand the philosophy of the poet, but are moved by the force the poems provide and this through a medium of translation as well. Translation appeared in the year when Schimmel was invited to Pakistan to deliver lectures on Iqbal. There she met Javaid Iqbal, Munira, Atiya Begum and numerous friends of Iqbal and Pakistan became second home for her. She traveled far and wide to take the message of Iqbal. She has



traveled to Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Dakha, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Lyalpur Faisalabad and even to the Valley of Kashmir. She spread the message of Iqbal in Europe, Canada and USA. She calls herself 'Iqbal di Malangni' as someone in Punjab (Pakistan) called her laughingly.

Schimmel wrote numerous books and her life-long mission was "to awake understanding for Islam", arguing that "Islam was among the most misunderstood religions". The German scholar was seen as a bridge-builder with the Islamic world. Her works on Islamic mysticism are popular in the West. She published 80 books and the most widely read book is *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* published in 1975 and seven editions of this book are published so far. This is a detailed analysis of the Islamic Mysticism, Sufism from the beginning to present. Based on the original texts it covers the entire Islamic world. It contains teachings, methodology, history and literature and artistic expressions. The another important book is *And Mohammad is his Messenger* (1986). The last chapter of this book deals exclusively with Iqbal's prophetology. Schimmel considers Iqbal as a prophetic and poetic thinker, whose thought boils down to a central theme of strengthening an individual within the Islamic society in particular and in human society in general.<sup>6</sup> He attains the strength by constant contact with God.

In *Gabriels Wing*, Schimmel aims to introduce to the western world Iqbal's views of the essentials of Islam. She judges Iqbal in the right manner. A poet who faced difficulty struggling against heavy odds. Schimmel classifies him as a person who was neither ultra-conservative and orthodox; although he very strongly believed in the tenets of Qur'anic revelations. He was modern in the sense that he liked to combine Qur'anic revelations with the experiences of modern science<sup>7</sup>, nor was he the follower of the traditionalist school which rejected everything European and neither was he a westerner for whom European civilization meant everything. Iqbal's personality contained all the divergent elements of conservatism and liberalism of prophetic and mystical religious experience. He was a man with his contradictions.

Schimmel finds the works of Allama relevant not only for his scholars but feels that his poetry can polish the thought of man and raise

him to the highest level of human thought and culture; provided he is able to understand Allama's soul.

Schimmel discovers new aspects in Iqbal and sees him in new light of scientific discoveries. She feels that the message of the development of an individual which does not end with the physical death is the call for unceasing activity and the stress Iqbal lays on changing uniformity principles in Islam are very important. Concept of *khudi* according to Schimmel Allama has adopted from Mawlana Rumi whom he considers his spiritual guide. One finds traces of concept of *Khudi* in Rumi's *Fihima Fihi* (of all and one) as a sign of a human individual, who cannot be lost. Schimmel feels that Iqbal has got the understanding about Rumi as a dynamic mystic from Shibli, who in 1912 has mentioned about this great mystic of the middle ages<sup>8</sup>. During her visit to Pakistan in 1994 Schimmel described the concept of *Mard-i-Momin* and *Khudi* in a Lecture organized in the Auditorium of Foreign Office in Islamabad. While comparing *Mard-i-Momin* with the *Uebermensch* of Nietzsche she described *Mard-i-Momin* superior to *Uebermensch* and the reason for this was that *Mard-i-Momin* was in love with God.

According to Schimmel, Allama had understood Goethe and Nietzsche in a better way and it makes him better than his contemporary European poets<sup>9</sup>. Iqbal took Nietzsche's form and images but his ideal — the *Mard-i-Momin* or the true believer is the opposite of Nietzsche's *uebermensch* and it appears only once the God is dead; while as Iqbal's realized person grows always as he approaches *Mard-i-Momin*. Prophet ﷺ of Islam is the best example of *Mard-i-Momin*.

Not only did Iqbal's philosophy appeal to Muslims but to non-Muslims as well. Schimmel traces the similarities between Allama and the great German Philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz, who was influenced by Nietzsche in the beginning and wrote to Schimmel that he was sorry not to have known Iqbal before his death and he would have had good and mental understanding with him. Again after going through lectures he wrote to Schimmel about Iqbal on 17.12.61:

*I see it confirmed once again what you make clear that the agreement is important. Above all; the exhaustive realization of the ego through inner activity which is not*



mystic.... He is quiet contrary to Europe and his criticism to a larger extent is our own. Important is that the parallelism of the methods have same aim; the reality and the — awakening which he demands from both for the science & religion. His attitude towards Descartes and Kant, the view on Hume to Einstein and where he sees Nietzsche there you see him and it is rightly so and there is no one among us like him.

Iqbal is and should be understood in the background of Islam and his thought is rooted in the prophetic tradition and in the mystical thought. This is how he is understood by Schimmel as well. Schimmel traces the roots of *Shikwah* in Hali's *Musadas* which speaks about the bright past of Muslims and their present suffering. This was the development of modern literature in which the backlash of historical event were very common. It was in this context that Iqbal in 1912 published *Shikwah* keeping in view the increasing sorrows of Muslims. She also feels that the Balcon War could have provided an extra momentum<sup>10</sup> in which the Indian Muslims provided a help to their bothers in religion through a medical mission. There was a great affinity of Indian Muslims towards Turkish as great many Indian Muslim Dynasties in north and south were of Turkish descent.

Iqbal according to Schimmel aims to show a dynamic world view to Muslims by reinterpreting Islam through the instrument of modern western philosophy so that they ponder upon their spiritual inheritance and put a new life to their position. He stood in a storm of swinging western religious philosophy which lead him to further strengthen his position in Islamic thought.

Schimmel is all praise for *Javidnama* and traces the influences of various traditions on the book. It is a journey through various spheres, in the Islamic tradition, and also makes one think about the *Me'raj* of the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ as it describes the model of the *Me'raj* as described by Sufis. Schimmel feels that Ghauth Gawalior, Dante's *Divine Commedia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* have helped Iqbal to frame his ideals. One should in no way forget the influence of Goethe not only in its form as Prolog in Heaven and Prolog on Earth, but also the form and the

structure of Satan seems to have been influenced by Goeth's *Mephistopheles*. Iqbal himself was very proud of producing this book and had predicted that its translator would become very famous in Europe. The book has been translated in Italian, German, Turkish, English and French.

Germany was a spiritual home of Iqbal which he could not visit again during his European visits but his old connections were renewed after he took in his house a German lady to look after his children after the death of his wife. Iqbal had much liked in his last years of life to write a book on the forgotten Prophet in the style of Nietzsche's Zarathushtra and for this purpose tried to establish an Islamic centre in Punjab but unfortunately the project could not be completed. As a coincidence the last visitor to the great philosopher poet in the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> April was the traveler from Germany H. H. Von Veltheim-Ostrau with whom he had a long discussion about the situation of world and in particular about German literature and philosophy. This shows how great interest Iqbal had in German philosophy and literature till last moments of his life. The admiration of Schimmel for the poet-philosopher can be judged from the fact that she is in love with the part of the world he lived and left a will to be buried in the land of the poet in the famous *Mazâr* of Thatha in Pakistan. The teachings of Islam and Iqbal had molded Professor Schimmel and her so modest and simple that when I in 1997 met her in Bonn and offered myself to work on her, she simply declined and said, "I have to go from here and shall become dust with dust". She herself felt always in western axil and considered herself as '*ghuba gharbiyya*'<sup>11</sup>.

Prof. Schimmel, the renowned German scholar of Islam, died on January 25, 2003 at the age of 80.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> I got to know Prof Dr. Annemarie Schimmel in 1980 in Srinagar, when she was visiting Kashmir on the invitation of Iqbal Institute and I was in Srinagar as a young student on summer vacation and using time to collect some material for my M.A. Dissertation in Jawaharlal Nehru University entitled, 'Iqbal and Goethe'. Meeting Schimmel was a treat for me and in the first meeting itself I became her disciple. I met her in the same year in Delhi, couple of times, in Malcha Marg and in Auwani Ghalib. My association with her continued and I made it a point to visit her whenever I was in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> *Maloumat*, January, 1994, No. 30, Bonn, Vol. 30.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Buerger, *Audatio auf Annemarie Schimmel* on her 70 birthday on 12 May 1992, Bonn.

<sup>4</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Muhammad Iqbal: Prophetischer Poet and Philosoph*, Eugen Diederichs verlag, Muenchen, 1989, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 385.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad, p26

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Buerger, *Audatio auf Annemarie Schimmel* on her 70 birthday on 12 May 1992, Bonn.