

BENGALI TRANSLATIONS OF IQBAL AND HIS IMPACT ON BENGALI LITERATURE

By: MUHAMMAD ABDUL HAI

Some months back a responsible journalist once commented in the editorial columns of the Pakistan Times to the effect that for lack of Bengali translation of Iqbal's work there was an intellectual vacuum among the Bengali Muslims and therefore the University circles of Dacca in particular suffered from an intellectual pull of Calcutta.

There was a marked resentment in University circles over this statement and it evoked their sharp criticism and some leading Dailies of Dacca came out with editorial comments.

The comprehension of Islam and its principles and the depiction and portrayal of glories of Islam and Muslim history were nothing new to Muslim Bengali literature. It can be traced as far back as the 16th century and since then there has been a long chain of Muslim Bengali literature representing Islamic culture and thought, ideas and ideals and the Muslim way of life. Regardless of the merit of the Muslim Bengali literature there has been no flagging of enthusiasm on the part of the Bengali Muslims to depict their own lives, and in the early twenties of the present century their tendency reached its high-water mark in the poetry of the rebel poet Nazrul Islam.

It is however true that it was left to Allama Iqbal the Philosopher and national poet of Pakistan to reinterpret Islam in terms of the modern world and kindle in man a 'unique consciousness of his true status in relation to God and the universe'. Although no attempt has yet been made on the part either of the Government or any individual or association to translate all the works of Iqbal in their chronological order, he began to be translated and articles on his poetry and teachings started appearing in Bengali literature long before the idea of Pakistan was conceived.

Of all the works of Iqbal the 'Shikwa and Jawab-i-Shikwa' has the largest number of Bengali translations. The earliest of these days back as early as 1928. A. H. Kalimullah elder brother of Dr. A. B. M. Habibullah the present Head of the Department of Islamic History and Culture in the University of Dacca, translated the work while he was a student of 2nd year class in the Islamic Intermediate college, Dacca. He died of typhoid a year later and his work was published in the (Sahityik'-the then monthly journal of the Bangiya Musalman Samiti (Muslim Society of Bengal) edited by the late Yakub Ali Choudhury and Golam Mostafa, the poet.

Ashraf Ali Khan a fiery youngman was the second person to trans-late Shikwa and Jawabi Shikwa in the thirties. It was published in book form most likely some time between 1136 and 1938. As a man Ashraf Ali Khan was very restless and he was, as one could see, attracted to Shikwa by the throbbing of his own

heart which bore similarity to Iqbal's. It is a sad story how Ashraf Ali Khan was consumed by his own burning passion and committed suicide.

Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah's translation of Shikwa and Jawabi Shikwa appeared as early as 1940. He rendered it directly from Urdu and gave a very faithful word for word translation.

Then came Aminuddin Ahmad's translation of Shikwa and the Jawabi Shikwa. It was serially published in the monthly Mohammadi in the early forties, Muhammad Sultan published his translation in book form in 1964 and Abu I Kalam Mustafa in 1952. The renderings done by Golam Mostafa first appeared serially in 'Purabi' the East Pakistan Regional Guild's organ and later in the form of a book in 1960 Mizanur Rahman another exponent of Iqbal also translated Shikwa and its Jawab and published it in book form alongwith the renderings of some other important poems from Bangi Dara under the title Iqbalika in 1960. The name of Moulvi Tamizur Rahman, Kazi Akrairi Hossain and Bazlur Rahman may also be mentioned as the translators of this work of Iqbal.

Although Asrar e Khudi has more than one translation in Bengali, they have not gained as much currency due perhaps to its subject matter as those of Shikwa. Of these Syed Abdul Mannan's renderings in free verse done as early as in 1945 have gained most currency. The second edition of his book appeared in 1950 with the financial aid of the Iqbal Academy. In his attempt to translate Asrar-i-Khudi, Mannan I think has been greatly influenced by

Abdul Majid Sahity Ratana who was the first man to translate *Asrar-e-Khudi* in forceful rhythmic Bengali prose. Majid was inspired by Nazrul Islam to undertake this work and his translation appeared serially in *Moazzin* a monthly organ of Khademul Insan Society, some time in the late thirties.

Iqbal-e-Kavita (1952) edited and compiled by Syed Ali Ahsan contains selections of Iqbal's poems translated by himself, Farrukh Ahmad and Abul Husain. In this work Ali Ahsan and Farrukh Ahmad attempted to translate parts of *Asrar-i-Khudi* but neither of these gifted poets made much headway. Ali Ahsan's contribution in this book is his incomplete translation of *Asrar-e-Khudi*. It is a pity that as yet we have no full Bengali translation of this very important work of Iqbal on the line of *Secrets of Self* done in English by Nicholson. The name of Mirza Sultan Ahmad also deserves mention as the translator of *Asrar-e-Khudi* and *Ramuz-e-Bekhudi* which appeared in book form in 1954. A. F. M. Abdul Huq Faridi's translation of *Ramuz-e-Bekhudi* came out in 1955. Although Faridi does not claim himself to be a poet his knowledge and appreciation of Persian is unquestionable. What his renderings lack in poetic quality, has been compensated for by his understanding of the original.

Although many selected poems from *Bange Dara*, *Bale Jibril*, *Zarbe Kalim* and *Payam i Mashriq* have been translated by many over and over again we have as yet no full translations of these books. *Iqbal-e-Kavya Sanchayan* (collections from Iqbal's poetry) by Moniruddin Yusuf deserves special mention in this regard. It is

a collection in one book of the translations of some notable poems from Bang e-Dara, Bal-e-Zibriil, Zarbi Kalim and Armughan-i-Hijaz and a Bengali Academy publication of the year 1960. Yusuf's translation in verse is pleasant reading and in some poems he drew on idioms and expressions used by Abul Husain in Iqbaler Kavita.

Mizanur Rahman's translation of Bale Zibriil was also published in 1960. It contains renderings of 50 rubais and qitas and some 53 selected poems. The author himself was the publisher of the book on behalf of the Iqbal Nazrul Society.

Kalam i-Iqbal also contains renderings of some select poems of Iqbal. Being commissioned by the Iqbal Academy Golam Mostafa undertook this work and it came out in book form in 1957. Kalami Iqbal and Iqbaler Kavita mentioned earlier have received appreciation of readers and critics alike.

We have no translations as yet of Zabure Ajam, Javednama, Musafir, Armughane Hijaz and Pasche Bayed Kard.

Apart from the part or full translation of the poetical works of Iqbal mentioned so far, his six lectures on Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam evoked keen interest among the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia. Abdul Huq a young essayist translated it in Bengali in early forties which appeared serially in the pages of Masik Mohammadi. Mujibar Rahman Khan also translated a few chapters which also appeared serially in the same periodical. None of them could how-ever bring out a book of

their translation and it was left 610957 to a board of translators including Kamaluddin Khan, Muhammad Moqsed Ali, Sayedur Rahman and Abdul Huq who succeeded in bringing out the complete translation in book form entitled 'Islame dharmiya Chintar Punargathan'. It was sponsored and published by Pakistan Publications and edited by Ibrahim Khan and Sayedur Rahman.

The translations apart, Bengalees have made a constant endeavour to introduce Iqbal to Bengali readers since the early twenties and as a matter of fact he was introduced in Bengal when the whole province was throbbing with Nazrul Islam's poetic fervour and there was a restlessness in the political horizon of this part of the country. Nazrul was more a freedom fighter than a Muslim; nevertheless it was he who more than any body else in Bengal established the individualistic attitude of man in general and Muslims in particular through his uncompromising and forceful pen. At the same time articles describing the message of Iqbal began to appear in Bengali periodicals and journals. One of the first to write on and translate from Iqbal was Golam Mostafa and his earliest writings on Iqbal were published sometime in 1929. S. Wajed Ali's name should also be mentioned in this connection, for he too evinced interest in Iqbal sometime in the early thirties in his own periodical Gulistan. Later he collected his own writings on and translations from Iqbal and published them in book form under the title Iqbaler paygam 'message of Iqbal'. The name of Abdul Quadir also deserves mention for having translated a number of poems from Bang-e-Dara and published them in the Bengali Mahenau edited by himself.

Not only have Bengali Muslims been interested in Iqbal's writings; Amiya Chakravarty—one time secretary of Tagore and a well known Bengali intellectual of the present day West Bengal, translated from Iqbal and wrote on him in the early thirties. In fact it was due to his writings in those days that the attention of the Bengali intelligentsia both Hindus and Muslims was drawn to Iqbal's great genius.

Contributions made by S. Wajed Ali, Dr. Shahidullah, Habibullah Bahar, Sayed Abdul Mannan, Golam Mostafa and Mizanur Rahman towards popularising Iqbal in Bengal are worth mentioning. Apart from his translation of Shikwa Dr. Shahidullah wrote a book on Iqbal in 1945 which ran into as many as four editions, the latest of which appeared in 1958 in enlarged and revised form. This book has served as a comprehensive introduction to Iqbal for Bengali readers. Habib ullah Bahar's book on Iqbal was published in 1944 and Syed Abdul Mannan's in 1951. Mannan also translated into Bengali K. G. Saiyyidan's work Educational Philosophy of Iqbal under the title Iqbaler Shiksha Darshan in 1958:— The latest-book Iqbalke jatatuku jenechi (The little that I could know of Iqbal) written by Mrs. Murjahan Begum an ex-student of mine in the University of Dacca and now a Professor of Bengali in the Eden Girls' College, appeared in December 1962. The present writer also wrote three articles in the late forties and early fifties entitled 'Pakistaner Jatiya Karl Iqbal' (Iqbal the national poet of Pakistan) Iqbaler Momen (Iqbal's interpretation of Momen) and Rani (The message of Iqbal). These

have been included in a book of essays entitled *Bhasa O Sahitya* (Language and Literature) published in 1960.

Since the establishment of Pakistan we can hardly come across any popular Bengali periodical which has not contained writings on Iqbal in either Bengali prose or poetry. The Bengali *Mahenawr*, published by the Regional Publicity Branch of Dacca apart from its special Iqbal numbers, publishes articles, poems and also translations from Iqbal as a regular feature in its every issue.

All these would indicate that there has been a considerable amount of translation and critical work in Bengali on Iqbal and the Bengali reading East Pakistanis are much better off now in this respect than ever before but the impact of Iqbal on Bengali literature has not been as great as it should have been. In Farrukh Ahmad, one of our ablest poets of today we find the greatest disciple of Iqbal. In his *Satsagarer Majhi* (The Sailor of the seven seas) first published in 1944 in Calcutta, Farrukh used the Sindbad myth to rouse his country men from deep slumber and prompt them to action in search of new frontiers much on the line of his great master. Older poets like Shahadat Hossain and Golam Mostafa also preached the idea of a brotherhood of all Muslim people as well as a nationalism based on Islamic faith beyond the frontier of a geographical territory. Among the essayists Md. Wajed Ali, Mujibar Rahman Khan, Dewan Md. Azrar and Hasan Zaman heavily drew upon Iqbal's interpretation of Islam and man's status in society vis-a-vis God and universe.

Iqbal to-day is better known and appreciated in East Pakistan more as a political thinker and philosopher than as a poet. The reason is not far to seek. Barring a few Bengalees of the older generation, there is hardly any one among the present generation of educated Bengalees who can read Iqbal in either Urdu or Persian in original and appreciate the linguistic artistry and genius of this great man. Secondly, excepting a few compilations in Bengali verse such as Iqbaler Kavita, Kalame Iqbal and Iqbaler Kavya Sanchayan other translations do-not evoke any enthusiasm among the poetry reading intelligentsia of East Pakistan. This proves the dictum that it is only the good poets who are usually the good translators and we have yet to see our good poet taking the responsibility of translating Iqbal in an organized and planned manner.