

# IQBAL AND HIS CRITICS

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All students of Iqbal are aware of his stupendous versatility and they try to grasp its true significance in order to gain an estimate of his greatness. But few appreciate the fact that this versatility while it leads to a large increase in the number of writers on Iqbal also increases the number of his critics, as each critic deals with a particular aspect of his multi-sided genius. This is all to the good, because after all criticism helps to add to our knowledge of a towering personality whose stature we are apt to misjudge otherwise. But this increase in the number of critics is likely to add to confusion if the critics disregard relevancy in their writings. To illustrate we have only to mention that Iqbal was a great poet, a great philosopher, a leading politician and a religious reformer. Now a critic trying to discuss his politics consciously or unconsciously refers to his poetry also. Those who do not like the stand Iqbal took in politics start discussing his sublime poetry also from the same angle. Such writers add nothing to our knowledge, but add considerably to our confusion. It is obvious that a student of politics is not necessarily the most qualified person to write on his poetry. Christian missionaries writing on Iqbal's religious ideas refer by the way to his poetry in which sometimes his religious ideas find expression. These writers may be entitled to their opinions in religious matters, and they may certainly criticize Iqbal from their angle., but when they drag in his poetry they are often guilty of a grave injustice. Their efforts to decry Iqbal and his art only mean that they are trying to stop a large number of Christian

readers from enjoying a wealth of art very rarely met with even in the greatest poets of the world. his obvious that an atmosphere surcharged with religious passions is not conducive to our appreciation of the poetic art of a transcendent genius. For a study of aesthetics one needs tools quite different to those required to approach a faith which rightly or wrongly is supposed to be a rival to one's own faith. We are glad that the number of critical writers on Iqbal is growing, but if their criticism is to serve any useful purpose it is imperative that our evaluation must be based on that aspect of Iqbal with which the critic is competent to deal. Classification of the critical literature on Iqbal is therefore necessary to facilitate the scholars to judge the significance of a particular criticism. Luckily for us in the case of Iqbal most of the criticism, if not all, can be ascribed to definite periods, and while these periods cannot be considered as rigidly water-tight, and in many a case they do overlap each other, yet their boundaries can be more or less distinctly recognised.

Iqbal started writing poetry while still a student in Sialkot, and even this poetry, while it lacked the charm of what was to come later on, attracted worldwide attention. And critics soon appeared who based their criticism mostly on some odd phrase or unusual idiom used by Iqbal. As we all know there were two schools of Urdu poetry: the Lucknow school and the Delhi School, and these schools criticised each other's diction vehemently. Unfortunately both schools were unacquainted with the modern principles of literary criticism and their tirades against each other were mainly concerned with points of diction. Both these schools criticised

Iqbal. There is no doubt that the language used by Iqbal was to some extent influenced by local usage, but perhaps the main reason for inciting the ire of both the schools was that although he got his early poems corrected by a master-poet like Dagh of Delhi school, he himself did not belong to either school. One of the items on which a good deal of criticism was based centred round gender. Gender in Urdu language is a ticklish matter and there exists a good deal of doubt about the gender of many articles in Urdu. Even the recognised masters of the language do not always agree about the gender of many objects, and so when they want to criticise each other gender provides an easy target. And it was the same in the case of Iqbal.

As regards the two schools Iqbal wrote:

اقبال لکھنؤ سے نہ دلی سے ہے غرض

ہم تو اسیر ہیں خم زلف کمال کے

This flood of criticism and literary squabbles was so great that they would have dismayed an ordinary poet, but Iqbal was made of sterner stuff. His friends wrote replies pointing out the utter futility of the criticism, and out of these replies the one written by Ambalvi and published in the *Makbzan* was most effective. As regards criticism the one by "Tanqid-i-Hamdard" which was published in the *Makbzan* was most pungent and broadbased, and Iqbal considered it as deserving of his reply. His reply was published in the same journal, and displayed a wide knowledge of

Urdu prosody. After this the storm of criticism, although it never died, subsided to a large extent.

From 1905 to 1908 Iqbal was in Europe and did not write much poetry and so criticism also shrunk in volume. On return, Iqbal wrote his epoch-making poems *Shikwa* and *Jawabi Shikwa* which extorted admiration even from the most hardened critics. Henceforth criticism was reduced to a mere minimum. And 1912 may be said to make the end of the period of literary criticism.

In 1915 appeared Iqbal's masnavi *Asrar-i-Khudi* in Persian which dealt with the philosophy of ego. This poem may be regarded as the starting point of the criticism of Iqbal's thought. In the first instance, Iqbal had translated Ego or Self as *Khudi*, but *Khudi* in Persian and Urdu languages meant pride and conceit. The result was that many readers misunderstood the title of the poem. Then Iqbal while describing a healthy literary ideal had made scathing remarks against Hafiz, describing him as a poet who advocated a life of ascetic inaction. Now Hafiz is one of the greatest lyric poets of the world, and rightly or wrongly is also esteemed as a great Sufi. Whether he was actually a Sufi or not is a moot point, but nobody can deny his claim to be the greatest lyric poet of the Persian language. Anyway, many Sufis took Iqbal's lines on Hafiz as an attack on Sufism. The result was that many poets and writers made virulent and vulgar attacks on Iqbal in poetry and prose. Amongst those who attacked Iqbal in this connection Khowaja Hasan Nizami of Dargah Nizamuddin Delhi and Khan Bahadur Muzaffar Ahmad Fazli, a retired Canal Deputy

Collector of the Punjab, deserve special mention. None of these two critics were great scholars and it is obvious that they did not understand the theme of *Asrar-i-Khudi* at all, yet their attacks appealed to the popular imagination. Khwaja Hasan Nizami was a forceful writer in Urdu prose and a very effective speaker. Draped in picturesque robes he travelled up and down the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent accompanied by his numerous disciples. He wrote a number of articles against *Asrar-i-Khudi* and Iqbal in high flown language. Iqbal replied to some of Hasan Nizami's attacks and exposed the hollowness of his tirades. But Iqbal's writings could be understood only by a few learned readers, while Nizami's writings influenced the men in the street.

Khan Bahadur Muzaffar Ahmed wrote a poem in Persian attacking Iqbal. This poem known as *Asrari-Bekhudi* was read by thousands of people all over the subcontinent. The vicious and violent attacks on Iqbal contained in Khan Bahadur's poems remind us of Pope's satires. The following lines will give an idea of the tone of the poem:—

دشمن جان آمدند اسلام را

رہزن جان آمدند اسلام را

وائے براین پختگان عقل خام

اولیا را میش و بز کردند نام

از دم مکر شغالان الحذر

الحذر از بد سگالان الحذر<sup>1</sup>

There were many other writers who attacked *Asrari-Khudi* and Iqbal's philosophy of ego and the story has been beautifully told by Mr. Abdulla Quraishi in the pages of 'Iqbal,' Lahore. There were several writers who wrote in appreciation of *Asrar-i-Khudi*, the most notable of these being Dr. Abdul Rehman Bijnori and Hafiz Aslam Jairajpuri. The former wrote in English in the journal *East & West*, and the latter wrote in *Al-Nazir*, an Urdu journal of Lucknow. Iqbal appreciated the reviews of both these writers and even wrote a letter to Hafiz Aslam Jairajpuri thanking him for this appreciative review. But in spite of these sympathetic and appreciative reviews many writers wrote against the poem. And the result was that in the second edition Iqbal had to drop those lines on Hafiz and in his introduction he wrote: "I have omitted in this edition lines written on Hafiz. Although the purpose of

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<sup>1</sup> They are enemies of the very life of Islam,

They mean to rob Islam of life.

Woe to these afflicted with infinity of intellect,

They have called saints oats and sheep.

Beware of the fraud of jackals

Beware of those addicted to evil ways!

waiting those lines was merely to criticise a literary ideal and they did not reflect upon the personality of Khowaja Hafiz, they have offended some of the readers, I have replaced them by new ones in which I have composed the rules according to which literature of a nation must be judged."

Anyway this period of criticism came to an end about 1920 or so and while Iqbal's thought continued to be criticised even later on, as for example his aesthetics by Prof. M.M. Sharif in 1950, it can be safely said that the main storm of adverse criticism of Iqbal's philosophy of ego had blown over by 1920. After that year people had studied Iqbal's philosophy better and wherever any criticism was made it was balanced and fair.

There was a strange development about this time. As the storm of adverse criticism of Iqbal's *Asrar-e-kehudi* as containing his philosophy of ego was subsiding, the poem was translated in English by Professor R.A. Nicholson of Cambridge. So it was read widely in Europe and many European readers began to read in it as a call to the Eastern nations to rise against European Imperialism. The most notable of these was C.A. Nallino, the Italian Orientalist, who in clear terms warned the European nations against the writings of Iqbal (vide *Oriente Moderno*, Rome 1922-23 p.191). Thus started a criticism of Iqbal for political reasons. Nallino remarked about *Asrar-e-kehudi* "un grids riscorisa MusaImana Conto 1'. Europeuna mainfestazione dellu peon ardura aspiraiziori del irredentessori parislamia."

About 1926 or so an Indian writer K.P.S. Menon, a member of the Indian Civil Service, also wrote against Asrar-e-khudi from the same angle. While this criticism was going on, Iqbal entered active politics by his election to the Punjab Legislative Council in 1926. After hearing and reading his speeches in the Council the Hindus and Sikhs began to criticise Iqbal for political reasons. Then in 1928 Iqbal gave evidence before the Simon Commission. And finally came Iqbal's address as the President of the Muslim League in which he said: "The principle of European democracy cannot be applied to India without recognising the fact of communal groups. The Muslim demand for the creation of a Muslim India within India is, therefore, perfectly justified".

So far as the Hindu politicians were concerned this speech acted as *a* red rag to the bull. Now the Hindu politicians as well as the Press attacked Iqbal mainly because he advocated cultural and political safeguards for a minority of 75 million living in the subcontinent.

As time marched on Iqbal began taking a more prominent part in politics. He attended the Second and Third Round Table Conferences. He presided over the All India Muslim Conference in 1932. He was elected Chairman of the Punjab Muslim League and was appointed Chairman of the Punjab Parliamentary Board by the Quaid-i-Azam in 1936. The Hindu politicians now began seeing in Iqbal one of the main obstacles to their attempts to dominate and crush the minorities of the subcontinent, and consequently their opposition to Iqbal gained in vehemence. Thus



the period in which political critics of Iqbal flourished lasted from 1926 to 1938, but it can be said to have actually started in 1920. During this period Hindu writers wrote numerous articles decrying Iqbal's work in all fields. Perhaps notable exceptions were Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Sarojini Naidu. They frequently talked of him in glowing terms. Sir Tej Bahadur could have never agreed with Iqbal's political views, and yet his admiration for Iqbal was boundless. But the most notable of the writings of the group which attacked Iqbal were '*Iqbal: The Poet and his Message*', by a fanatic Mahassabhaite Dr. S. Sinha, and another book known as *Ardent Pilgrim* by a communist Iqbal Singh. Both of these writers thought that Iqbal's suggestion to divide the subcontinent into two countries was a sacrilege which would lead to the eventual vivisection of Mother Bharat. Dr. Sinha's book was published in 1947 and Iqbal Singh's book was published in 1952.

Sinha was so angry with Iqbal for political reasons that he could see nothing right in Iqbal. According to Sinha, as a poet Iqbal was of a very mean order; as regards philosophy Iqbal borrowed all his ideas from others and so on.

Iqbal Singh, on the other hand, criticised Iqbal for his political views, but paid rich tributes to his poetry. Recording the reasons which led him to write the book Iqbal Singh says:—"And that is to record a personal enthusiasm for Iqbal's poetry — an enthusiasm which increases every time I return to it" (p. vi).

Now we come to the last group of Iqbal's critics and these deal with Iqbal's religious ideas. Iqbal delivered his lectures on

the Reconstruction of Religious Ideas in Madras, Hyderabad and Aligarh in 1928. These were published in a poorly printed edition from Lahore in 1930. They attracted worldwide attention. A nicely printed edition was published by Oxford University Press in 1934. This was a new approach to Islam and a challenge to the West. In one of the lectures Iqbal said "The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life, and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole function is to exploit the poor in the interest of the rich. Believe me, Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement."

As regards Christianity itself Iqbal says: "It is the sharp opposition between the subject and the object, the mathematical without and the biological within that impressed Christianity. Islam, however, faces the opposition with a view to overcome it. This essential difference in looking at a fundamental difference determines the respective attitudes of these great religions towards the problem of human life in its present surroundings" (p. 9). In these and similar remarks Christian missionaries and writers detected a real danger to their missionary activities. They planned an offensive against Iqbal and began attacking him in every way possible. The first Christian writer who attacked Iqbal was Cantwell Smith.

Cantwell Smith is supposed to be an Orientalist, but is actually a fanatic Christian who has merely changed his methods to adjust to the modern age. He attacks Islam in a very subtle way and one

of his favourite ways of doing this is to attack Iqbal. It is obvious from his writings that he has not studied Iqbal. When he first came to see the present writer he did not know any Urdu but he had already written copiously on Iqbal! Such are the ways of Christian Orientalists! In view of these facts it is not surprising to find this Christian author making such remarks about Iqbal: "He was a poet, not a systematic thinker; and he did not hesitate to contradict himself".

Then very patronisingly he says:

"We ourselves, in the treatment of Iqbal which here follows, have not made any undue effort to unify the contradictions of his prolific utterances."

in a fit of self-esteem Smith says about Iqbal: "He was not an economist, a sociologist, a politician, nor as we have said, an ethicist."

To judge the ignorance of Smith we have only to refer to the following remarks:

"During the First World War he was strongly pro-Islamic, pro-Turkish, and wrote some bitter verses against the enemy, *i.e.* Britain. Later he was an ardent Khilafated; some of his most passionate utterances belong to this period."<sup>2</sup>

Anybody acquainted with the history of the Khilafat movement in Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent knows that in spite of

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<sup>2</sup> Cantwell Smith: Modern Islam in India, p. 125.

the efforts of persons like Moulana Mohammad Ali, Iqbal kept aloof from the Khilafat movement. As regards ardent poems the most ardent poems in Urdu are Shikwa, Jawab-i-Shikwa, Tulu-i-Islam and Khizri-Rah. The years in which these poems were written are given below:

Shikwa	...	1911
Jawabi Shikwa	...	1913
Khizri-Rah	...	1922,
Tulu-i-Islam	...	1923

During the First World War Iqbal only published his famous *Asrari Khudi*. It should be obvious that it is hardly necessary to deal with the utterances of a man so ill-informed and ignorant. In spite of his colossal ignorance and strong prejudices Smith makes some honest remarks here and there, as for instance when he says:

"Iqbal had a vision of an ideal society, worth striving for-- There would be in it no aggressive wars, no colour or race or class or national distinctions, no beggars or unemployed. It would be permeated by the spirit of brotherhood, social services and a spiritual warmth".

A student of Iqbal will be astonished to read Smith's following remarks:—

"Iqbal's mind was simply incapable apparently, of dealing with men in community.

Evidently Smith has not read *Rumuzi-Bekbudi!*

فرد را ربط جماعت رحمت است

جوهر اورا کمال از ملت است

"Relationship with community is a source of strength to an individual whose latent capacities are thereby actualised".

To our great surprise Smith says:

"Theologically, although Iqbal was no theologian, For he made God immanent, not transcendent". And this! in spite of all that Iqbal wrote against *Wahdat-ul-wajud*. It shows how learned are the Christian Orientalists like C. Smith.

It is unnecessary to deal with other baseless remarks made by Smith in his book '*Modern Islam in India*', because in his latter book *Islam in Modern History*<sup>3</sup> he has himself remarked that the book was written when he was young and immature. In this book, Smith says about his earlier book: "This youthful work has Many defects; among them, those of which the writer is most conscious—chiefly the inadequate understanding of Islam and also of the crucial role played in history by ideological and moral factors—are corrected as far as possible in the present study". So we shall refer to some of the remarks in his latter work. In this book Smith says:

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<sup>3</sup> Cantwell Smith: *Islam in Modern History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, page 210.

"Yet Iqbal is so contradictory and unsystematic that it is difficult to assess him. He is the Sufi who attacked Sufism, and perhaps the liberal who attacked liberalism"

After Smith the Christian writer who attacked Iqbal was Sir Hamilton Gibb. But this must be said to the credit of this writer that he makes no attempt to hide his vituperations against the religious ideas of Iqbal under the cloak of attacks on his economics, sociology and politics. To that extent Gibb is more honest than Smith. He is quite frank in admitting that the basis of his criticism of Iqbal is essentially religious. He is honest enough to say: "In these days, when we are enveloped in an atmosphere charged with propaganda it is the duty of every investigator to define precisely to himself and to his audience the principle which determine his point of view. Speaking in the first person therefore, I make bold to say that the metaphor in which Christian doctrine is traditionally enshrined satisfies me intellectually as expressing the highest range of spiritual truth which I can conceive".<sup>4</sup> On page IX of his book Gibb, while pointing out that most of the Muslim writers on Islam are apologetic, says: "The outstanding exception is the Indian scholar and poet, Sir Mohammad Iqbal, who in his six lectures on The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam faces outright the question of reformulating the basic ideas of Muslim theology". (p. X).<sup>5</sup> Later on in the same book Sir Hamilton Gibb says: "He aimed to reconstruct the established theology of Islam; but the

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<sup>4</sup> Sir Hamilton Gibb: Modern Trends in Islam, p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.X

theology which he attempts to restate is not, in fact, the Sufi theology". Further on he says: "Iqbal has tried to refashion Sufi thought in terms of Western humanism". As if this fantastic attempt to belittle Iqbal's work was not enough the learned writer later on says "but Iqbal himself, by the contradictions and confusions in his thought, only accentuated

the instability and inner conflict of ideas". The main charge that Gibb has brought against Iqbal is that he has mistranslated some Quranic

verses. On p. 83 of his book he says: "Throughout the lectures he

constantly appeals to Quranic verses in support of his argument. But we cannot help asking ourselves two questions 'Do these quotations

represent the whole teaching of the Kuran on the point at issue' and 'Do they mean what Iqbal says they mean'? In one or two instances I suspect actual philological misinterpretations".

It is not enough to make such adverse comments. One would expect a scholar like Gibb to quote the verses of Quran which he thinks Iqbal has mistranslated.

After Sir Hamilton Gibb another Oxford man Alfred Guillaume has written on Iqbal in his book on Islam. Describing some of Iqbal's ideas that Paradise and Hell are not states, nor localities Guillaume says "It hardly needs saying that all this comes perilously near heresy in Islam". The superficial knowledge of the author may be obvious from his remarks: 'the reader can see that he (Iqbal) has left the Muslim with some principles based partly on texts which for generations have been interpreted in quite a different way, and partly on Christian thought in modern time". It is enough to point out that all that Guillaume has written covers Iqbal's religious thought only. it is safe to conclude that Guillaume has read very little of Iqbal's poetry. Perhaps Guillaume will consider even Einstein s Theory of Relativity as Christian thought.

After Guillaume we come to the American writer J. S. Badean who is a Professor at the American University of Cairo. In his book *The Lords Between* he has written that according to Iqbal the Quran was given as a guide only for the period when modern science was unknown. Misrepresentation could go no further.

A remarkable Christian writer on Iqbal is Professor Schimmel of Bonn University whose book *Gabriel's Wing* has been recently published as a supplement to *Numen*, the organ of the Society of History of Religions. It seems that the publication of the book has been subsidised by the Society at the instance of Rev. Dr. C. J. Bleker, Secretary of the Society. The book is supposed to be a 'A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Mohammad Iqbal but it tries to deal with almost every aspect of Iqbal. The book contains a



comprehensive Bibliography of Iqbal, and it is evident that in spite of the help given by the Iqbal Academy of Karachi, the learned author must have taken great pains over its preparation.

Schimmel has paid Iqbal a high compliment when she says: "Nobody will assert that he was a prophet, that would be both wrong from the point of view of history of religions and incompatible with the Islamic dogma of the finality of prophethood—but we may admit that he has been touched by Gabriel's wing". In spite of this compliment Schimmel has made some wide charges against Iqbal. We would prefer to repeat some of them in her own words.

On page VIII of her book she says: "Iqbal changed Western ideas according to his concept of Islam".

On page 242 referring to Ziya Gokalp she says "Iqbal did not know Turkish, has studied his (Ziya Gokalp's) work through the German translation of August Fisher, and it is of interest to see how he (Iqbal) sometimes changes or omits some words of the translation when reproducing the verses in the Lecture".

On page 585 the author says:

"Iqbal's interpretation of the Writ (The Holy Quran) is sometimes very personal and influenced by the wish of combining Quaranic revelations with the experience of modern science".

On the same page the author says:

"His criticism of the West sometimes took forms worthy of medieval polemics".

Further on she says:

"The Christian reader will be shocked by the devaluation of nearly everything Christian and European in Iqbal's work, and by the lack of understanding of the ethical ideals of Christianity (the dogmatic differences are not of interest to Iqbal and are not discussed in his work). He should then realise that Iqbal in this respect does not talk with the calmness required of a historian of religion".

Thus it will be seen that the Christian writers or Iqbal display wonderful homogeneity in their attacks on him. Their aim is to discredit him in the eyes of the Muslims as well as the Christians. To the Muslims they say that Iqbal has mistranslated Quran and misrepresented Islam; to the Christians they say that Iqbal is a fanatic Muslim.

It should not be inferred from these quotations that there are no Christian writers who have paid real homage to Iqbal and his genius. We have only to refer to Browne Nicholson, and many others. It is well known that Browne the illustrious author of the Literary History of Persia did not have a high opinion about those poets of the IndoPakistan subcontinent who wrote in Persian language. But he always treated Iqbal as one of the exceptions.

Nicholson introduced Iqbal to the West by translating *Asrar-iKhudi* in' English. In his introduction to the Translation he pays homage to the profound genius of Iqbal in these words: "Every

one, I suppose, will acknowledge that the substance of the *Asrar-i-Khudi* is striking enough to command attention. In the poem, naturally, this philosophy presents itself under a different aspect. Its audacity of thought and phrase is less apparent, its logical brilliary dissolves in the glow of feeling and imagination and it wins the heart before taking possession of the mind. Many passages of the original are poetry of the kind that once read is not easily forgotten".

Arbery of Cambridge has translated the *rubais* of *Payam i-Mashriq*, portions of *Zaboor-i-Ajam*, and *Rumuz-i-bekhudi* and is at present busy in translating *Javid Namah* in English verses. In a message to Iqbal Society Karachi Arbery once wrote:- "Iqbal's doctrine of the indestructible significance of the individual contains a message of hope and inspiration in these days when the rights and duties of individual men are so gravely threatened by materialistic conceptions of an all-powerful state. His doctrine of the place of the individual in society, with his interpretation of the term society to mean the whole community of right believing men and women, is no less important as a corrective to nihilist tendencies in contemporary thought. His message is of universal appeal and application". Massignon did not write much on Iqbal, but has paid highest tributes to Iqbal in his masterly introduction to the French translation of *Reconstruction of Religions Thought in Islam* by Madam Meyerovitch.

Northrop has not written on Iqbal but has made frequent references to him in his books on philosophy.

Bausani has translated Iqbal's *Javid Namah* and other poems in the Italian and has written on his poetry copiously. His translations are very good but his criticism is not always well-informed. The French Scholar Madam Meyerovitch has translated several of Iqbal's books in French and is a great admirer of Iqbal.

John Morek of Prague University has translated some of Iqbal's poems in the *Czech* language. His criticism of Iqbal is generally based on political grounds.

Reference must be made to two German writers who paid their homage to Iqbal's genius by translating some of his poems. Otto Von Glassenvopp, a former Vice President of the German State Bank and Professor Hall of Evlanger University. Here mention must also be made of the numerous Turkish, Persian, Afghan and Arab writers on Iqbal, *e.g.* Ganjeli, Tarlan, Mujtaba Manavi, Salahuddin Seljuqi and Abdul Wahab Aizzam and others. Their criticism is on the whole balanced and well informed.

Survey of these criticisms shows that although there is prejudicious response on the part of some orientalists and native critics, large-hearted and generous appreciation of Iqbal, far beyond the boundaries of this sub-continent, is not lacking. Those who deliberately distort the message of the Philosopher, the current world situation at academic level is, have gained upper hand. The days of Brown, Nicholson and Massignon are gone; now Schacht, Smith and Schimmel are moving figures, who do not care for objective study, but spend out their resources for

aims other than those appreciable to scholars and students of human civilizations.