

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IQBAL AND SHAWQI

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Ahmad Shawqi, a modern poet of Egypt, is one of those who revived classical Arabic poetry. He was a contemporary of Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the Indo-Pak sub-continent who wrote Persian poetry in the style of the great classical masters. It is doubtful if they ever met or studied each other's writing. Nevertheless, similarities between them are numerous enough to warrant a closer look.

Shawqi was born in 1868 in a fairly wealthy family of mixed Arab, Turkish, Circassian and Greek origins. Iqbal was born in 1877 in a modest Muslim family of Hindu origin which had migrated from the princely state of Kashmir to the neighbouring town of Sialkot in British India. Referring to his family origin, Iqbal calls himself the only Brahman who understands Islam.

Both of them started early education in secular schools of their home towns but received at the same time a firm grounding in religious learning. Iqbal got it from Shams-ul-Ulema Sayyid Mir Hasan, an acknowledged scholar of Arabic and Persian. Completing his undergraduate studies at the Scotch Mission (now Murray) College in Sialkot in 1895, he took a master's degree in philosophy from Government College, Lahore, in 1899. Shawqi had just finished secondary education in Egypt when Khedive Tawfiq sent him to Europe for higher studies, granting him adequate funds and taking full responsibility for his financial needs there. He studies law and literature in France, spending two years in Montpellier and two years in Paris. Iqbal's education abroad was financed with the meagre resources of his elder brother. He obtained a Ph.D. in philosophy from Munich University in

Germany, a Bachelor of Arts degree from Cambridge University, and qualified as a barrister-at-law from Lincoln's Inn, London.

On his return to Egypt in 1891, Shawqi was appointed to a high office in the courtland, became the favourite bard of Khedive Abbas Hilmi. Iqbal returned from Europe in 1908 and was appointed first as reader in the Punjab University Oriental College and then as assistant professor at Government College, Lahore, with permission to practice law at the High Court. He continued writing poetry while carrying on his two professions. Resigning his teaching job after some time, he continued legal practice which allowed him more time for poetry.

The early poetry of both poets appeared in newspapers, and literary information on Ahmad Shawqi is taken from the very interesting article written by Dr. Z.I. Oseni of the University of Ilorin in Nigeria and published in *Iqbal Review* (vol. 28, No. 1) for spring 1987 long before it was compiled and published in book form. In the case of Shawqi, these periodicals included *al-Ahram*, *al-Mu'ayyad*, *al-Liwa*, *al-Majallat al-Misriyyah*. *Ukaz* and *al-Zuhur*. His poems were later published in four volumes under the title of *al-Shawqiyyat*. He also wrote a number of other works in poetry and prose. Iqbal's poems first appeared in *Makhzan*, *Inqilab*, *Haq*, *Zahan*, *Khudang-e-Nazar*, *Ma'arif*, *Zamindar*, *Kashmiri Gazette*, *Panja-e-Faulad*, *Deccan Review* and *Zamana*. The first collection of his Urdu poetry, *Bang-e-Dara*, was compiled long after the appearance of his three books in Persian but was followed by a few others in both languages. In fact, his Persian poetry is more voluminous than the one in Urdu. Each poet has one book published after death. For Shawqi it is *al-Arab wa Uzama'al-Islam* (The Arab States and the Notables of Islam, Iqbal's book is called *Armaghan-e-Hijaz* (The Gift of Hijaz).

The recurring theme of the poetry of Iqbal and Shawqi is their love for Islam as a way of life. Both glorified the past achievements of Muslims, lamented over their present plight and yearned for their bright future. Both

were deeply devoted to the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and expressed their devotion in sublime poetry. Both composed special petitions addressed to him, in the manner done by Busiri, the 13th century Egyptian poet author of the well-known Qasidah al-burdah entitled al-Kawakib al-Durriyyah fi Madh Khayr al-Barriyyah (The Brilliant Stars in Praise of the best in the World). Busiri wrote this eulogy of 162 verses while suffering from paralysis. He is reported to have recovered after dreaming that the Prophet (PBUH) covered him with his mantle (burdah in Arabic and hence the title of the poem). Shawqi composed 190 verses in 1910 and named them Nahj al-Burdah (In the Path of Burdah). Iqbal wrote two petitions in Persian in the same style containing 62 and 65 verses. In both petitions, he refers to Busiri and prays for his own recovery. In his introductory note prefacing the second petition, he states that on the night of 3 April 1936, while staying at Bhopal, he saw Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (the founder of Aligarh Muslim University) in a dream, advising him to appraise the Prophet (PBUH) of his illness.

Though devoted to the teachings of Islam, neither Shawqi nor Iqbal had the privilege of performing the pilgrimage. Despite his poem entitled Arafat Allah (To God's Arafat), Shawqi refused the chance when visiting Mecca in 1911 at the pilgrimage time in the royal party of the Khedive. Iqbal yearned for the honour but did not go to Mecca during his trip to Europe, explaining that he preferred to undertake the journey at his own expense and not while travelling on behalf of the Government. Later his health did not permit travel abroad. His posthumous book is full of poetry describing his imaginary travel in the Holy Land.

Both poets spent some time in Spain. Shawqi was exiled there for a few years during World War I by the British Government for criticising its deposing of Khedive Abbas and annexing Egypt. Iqbal paid a short visit in the course of his London trip of 1932. Both describe with considerable pride and pleasure the glory of Muslim Spain. Shawqi tells the story of Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil, the first Umayyad ruler of Spain also known as Abd al-Rahman al-Awwal. Iqbal writes about the first date palm, planted on the

Spanish soil by the same ruler. He also translated into Urdu an Arabic poem of Mu'tamid, the imprisoned ruler of Saville. Shawqi was particularly fond of Ibn Zaidun, a classical Arab poet of Spain, to whose poem on the fall of Granada Iqbal refers in his own lamentation on Sicily (though he inadvertently calls him Ibn Badrun). Iqbal's poem on Masjid Qurtabah has been translated into English and Arabic.

Other world figures sharing the attention of Iqbal and Shawqi include Kamal Ata Turk, Tolstoy, Napoleon Bonaparte and Kitchener. Both condemned Ata Turk's abolition of the caliphate and composed verses after their visits to Napoleon's grave. Both used the Arabic version (Kishnar) of Kitchener's name. Shawqi titled his poem 'Masra' al-Lurd Kitshinar (Fall of Lord Kitchener). In Javed Namah Iqbal depicts him in the company of the Pharaoh, calling him Zul Khartum (which can be elephant's trunk as well as the Sudanese capital), and has the following message for him from Mehdi:

گفت اے کشز اگر داری نظر  
انتقام خاک در ویشے نگر  
آسمان خاک ترا گور نے نداد  
مرقدهے جز دریم شورے نداد

He (Sudani) said. "If thou

Has sight, O Kitchener, see a dervish's dust Has been avenged. The sky denied to thee

A grave save in the ocean's depths." (Mahmud Ahmad's translation)

Both poets criticized the anti-Muslim policies of one and the same colonial power which dominated their countries. Both represented their nations in international forums, Shawqi at the orientalist conference held in Geneva in 1894 and Iqbal at two round table conferences convened in London in 1931 and 1932. Both earned public esteem and admiration for their political and literary achievements. Shawqi was conferred the title of Amu al-Shu'ara (king of the poets) in 1927 at a gathering of scholars from all over the Arab world. Iqbal was addressed as Hakim al-Ummah Mufakkir-e-

Millat and Sha'ir-e-Mashriq (poet of the east) and became the most respected leader of the Indian Muslims.

When Iqbal visited Egypt after attending the Round Table Conference in London, he was not well known to the Arabs. Umm Kulsum had yet to sing his message in her melodious voice and only a few of his poems had been rendered into Arabic. He met selected literary figures to whom he was introduced by Abdul Wahhab Azzam. In his preface to the Arabic translation of Payarn-e-Mashriq, Azzam admits that he was not familiar with Iqbal until he heard Muhammad Akif (a Turkish poet visiting him at Halwan) reciting his Persian poetry. They studied his verses together, pondering over many of them. Azzam became so fascinated with Iqbal that he acquired more of his writings and started translating them into Arabic. On the other hand, nothing of Shawqi's poetry has been rendered into Urdu and he never visited India.

Iqbal and Shawqi shaped the thinking of their countrymen and aroused them for the freedom struggle. In it both made the best use of classical idioms and poetic terms to express modern ideas and politics. Iqbal took active part in politics and was an elected member of the Punjab Legislative Council from 1926 to 1930.

Shawqi died on 14 October 1932 before Iqbal's visit to Cairo. Iqbal died on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1938. Although contemporaries with similar ideas, the twain had no apparent links. Despite this lack of contact, their poetry testifies that great men think alike.