



IQBAL—THE CONNOISSEUR OF CALLIGRAPHY

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Very few people know that Allama Iqbal, apart from being a great poet, was also a great connoisseur of the art of calligraphy and himself a competent calligrapher of *shikasta* script. His talent as a calligrapher has so far remained hidden because of his pre-eminence as a poet not only of national level but also truly of an international repute. It was a normal practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Punjab, and particularly in Sialkot and Gujranwala districts, to emphasize exercise or learning of calligraphy by young children during the early days of their education.

Shikasta Script

During the later Mughal period, about 30 Muslim calligraphers have been reported as well-versed in *Shikasta* script. The long list shows that the art of calligraphy continued to be practiced enthusiastically both by Hindus and Muslims till 1857, when the Mughal rule in India came to an end. But the public and social upheavals of the Mughal period were reflected in this art. The turbulent period was responsible for the decline and degeneration of all artistic activities. In the 20th century most of the scholars, writers, poets, etc., were good calligraphers. Their experience in either one of the styles: *nasta'liq* or *Shikasta*, is confirmed.

Allama Iqbal appears to have acquired the expertise in calligraphy as a result of this process. He certainly had a good sense of calligraphy. The best examples are his three letters⁵² (figs. 1-3) written to Abdul Majeed Perveen Raqam giving him instructions with regard to the calligraphy of his book *Bal i Jibrâl*⁵³ and the first edition of *Payam i Mashriq*, printed in 1924. Allama Iqbal revised the same for the second edition. At page 29 of the same book, the quatrain No. 52 he himself corrected in his own handwriting as a calligrapher. The angles of the words () and () (fig. 4) were

⁵² See letter No. 1977-416/1-3 in Letters Section of the Allama Iqbal Museum, Lahore.

⁵³ Allama Iqbal, *Bal i Jibrâl*, first edition, Taj Co, Lahore, 1935, pp. 18, 20, 22.

got corrected and the size of letter (⊛) was reduced to the scale of five dots (*qaÇ*) according to the standard calligraphic rules.⁵⁴

Iqbal was very serious about the selection of calligraphers for his works. It speaks for his taste of calligraphy. All of the calligraphers selected by him were highly experienced persons and held positions of excellence among other calligraphers.

Iqbal is a prominent figure in *Shikasta* style of calligraphy. The manuscripts of his books were written in his own handwriting in *Shikasta* script. Those exhibited in Allama Iqbal Museum require serious study. Even a cursory glance at these manuscripts enlightens us about the personality of Allama Iqbal as calligrapher. Since Allama Iqbal was not satisfied with the work of Abdul Majeed Perveen Raqam, mainly due to his slow calligraphy of *Bāl i Jibrāl*,⁵⁵ he tried to find another calligrapher of a high caliber.

The letter (fig. 1) shows that Allama Iqbal was not satisfied with the speed of calligraphic work by Abdul Majeed Perveen Raqam. Somewhere he had instructed him about the size of letter according to the basic rules of calligraphy which were never accepted by Perveen Raqam because he was enjoying the leading position among the top-most calligraphers due to his innovation in *nast'alaq* style of calligraphy. One of his disciples told another story about the conflict between Allama Iqbal and Parveen Raqam. According to this version, Allama Iqbal calculated the payment of calligraphy according to the page and half page at the time of payment; this was not acceptable to Parveen Raqam. These are the three main reasons due to which Iqbal-Parveen Raqam conflict occurred. On the contrary he has been reported to have said: "If Parveen Raqam refuses to write my works I will abandon poetry".

He had also collected the specimens of top-most calligraphers for the calligraphy of his poetic work. Among them were Muhammad Abdullah Warsi of Kot Waris, Muhammad Sadiq Almas Raqam and several others. After a minute study of various specimens of calligraphy Iqbal selected the

⁵⁴ Allama Iqbal, *Payāmi i Masbrig*, Ist Edition, p. 29.

⁵⁵ See letter No. 1977-416/1-3, Letter Section, Allama Iqbal Museum, Lahore.

work of Muhammad Sadiq Almas Raqam, who originally belonged to Sialkot District, for the calligraphy of his book: *Zabër i 'Ajam*.

Maulvi Ghulam Rasool, owner of the magazine entitled *Babāristān*, compiled all the volumes of Allama Iqbal's works in one issue of his magazine for presentation to dignitaries of the city of Lahore. One copy of it was presented to Allama Iqbal through Mr. Nazish Rizvi, the Editor of *Babāristān*. Allama Iqbal was so happy that he inquired the name and address of the calligrapher.⁵⁶ Allama Sahib was told that calligraphy for *Babāristān* had been done by Muhammad Siddique Almas Raqam, who belonged to Mauza Goriala, Dist: Sialkot. Allama Iqbal engaged him for his forthcoming book: *Zabër i 'Ajam*, published in 1934.⁵⁷

Allama Iqbal was not only a great poet but he was also a very gifted calligrapher of *Shikasta* script. Here we examine his script according to the basic rules of this script. We have a few examples of his *Shikasta* style in the collection of Allama Iqbal Museum.

The letter dated 12th March 1822 by Allama Iqbal addressed to Ghulam Ahmad Mahjur regarding compilation of biographical work on the poets of Kashmir⁵⁸ (fig. 5). In this letter, although the *qalam* is very sharp, it is also perfect according to the basic joining and strokes of calligraphy. The *Shikasta* script itself underwent some changes as later calligraphers simplified it. The new simpler version was called *dast-e-tebrir*.⁵⁹

Amir Nizam Garrusi of Iran is famous as master of *tebrâr* with his own special style⁶⁰ (fig. 6). Here we compare the script of Iranian calligrapher Amir Nizam Garrusi with the handwriting of Allama Iqbal (fig. 5).

⁵⁶ S. Feroz, "Fan-i-Khattatâ aur Allâma Iqbal," Monthly *Khusb Navâs*, Vol. I, No. 3, May, 1995, pp. 15.

⁵⁷ Allama Iqbal, *Zabër i 'Ajam*, Maqbool Alam Press, 1st Edition, Lahore, 1934.

⁵⁸ Letter No. AIM.1977-401.

⁵⁹ Dr. Salim Neysari, "The Development of Persian letter shapes with special reference to the teaching of hand-writing to Beginners", *Journal of the Regional Cultural Institute*, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Vol. IV, No. 1 to 4, Tehran, 1971, p. 145.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 145.

- a) Compare the word 'شکست' in the first line of Allama Iqbal's letter (fig. 3) with the eighth line of Garrusi's script (fig. 2).
- b) The word 'شکست' in the eleventh line of Garrusi's script be compared with 'شکست' in the first line of Iqbal's letter.
- c) The word 'شکست' written as 'شکست' is similar in each place which shows that Iqbal was competent to write *Shikasta tebrâr*. This word is used in line number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 12 where the word 'شکست' is written as 'شکست' in a similar manner which is used only in the *Shikasta* script.
- d) The word 'شکست' written in the third and seventh line of the Amir Nizam's script can be compared with the first line of Iqbal's letter which are similar to each other.
- e) In the word 'شکست' the letter 'ش' is similar in the line number two and four in Iqbal's script, the same letter may be compared with seventh line of Amir Nizam's script.
- f) The word 'شکست' in the seventh line of Iqbal's letter may be compared with the word 'شکست' in the seventh line of Amir Nizam's script. It is pertinent to mention here that each calligraphic stroke, line, length and fluency is similar to Amir Nizam's script (figs. 5 & 6).

This shows that Iqbal was not only the poet of international repute, but he was also an excellent calligrapher of *Shikasta tebrâr*.