

HAFIZ AND THE PERSIAN LITERATURE  
OF THE SUBCONTINENT IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY  
(The case of Muhammad Iqbal)

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## ABSTRACT

Iqbal's attitude towards Persian literature can be understood by his approach towards two great Persian poets Rumi and Hafiz. He appreciated and followed Rumi and criticized Hafiz. In his opinion the poetical approach and the ideology of Hafiz was responsible for the decline of Muslim world. That is why he called Hfiz a poet of allowing sensitivity and idle dreaming. According to him the method of mystical gnosis of Hafiz is an immoral conduct because it propagates the ideas of intoxication. Iqbal appreciated only one type of mystic behavior – *Sahw* or sobriety and negated the *Sukr* or intoxication. However the beauty of Hafiz's poetry was also appreciated by Iqbal on some occasions. So, Iqbal's attitude towards Hafiz's poetry seems rather paradoxical.

The great poet of the East, Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) was famous as Urdu poet of the Subcontinent, but he never ceased to write in Persian till the end of his life. His Urdu and Persian *Kulliyat* are approximately of the same volume.

Iqbal's attitude towards classical Persian literature could be clarified by his approach to two great figures: Rumi and Hafiz. Iqbal contrasts one great poet with the other as representatives of opposite philosophies. He refers to Rumi constantly: 24 times in Urdu, and 75 times in Persian *Kulliyat*, and these are only the instances of explicit use. But many hidden allusions could be found in his poetry, too.

At the same time, Hafiz is mentioned in Persian *Kulliyat* only 4 times— and not in poems, but in the *prosaic* Preface to *Payam-i-Mashriq*; and in Urdu *Kulliyat*— three times in a *negative* context, and only once in a positive one.

Iqbal presented his first work in Persian— masnavi *Asrar-i-Khudi*, in Lahore (published in 1915), where he was popular as Urdu poet of the Northern India. It was obvious that for his audience Persian poetry appeared to be just the poetry in a foreign language. But Iqbal pursued his own goals, for him Persian was a device to spread his ideas firstly among the intellectuals and educated milieu.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand he was sure that his appeal would sooner or later be available to the Persian speaking people of Asia.

In the first edition of his Persian poem *Asrar-i-Khudi*, Iqbal came down on Hafiz. In his opinion, Hafiz was responsible for at least the decline of Islam. Later on Iqbal erased the poet's name from the masnavi; there remained only the critique of a poet whose work had blighted active life position of Islamic people. Iqbal treated Hafiz as a “poet of alluring sensitivity and idle dreaming”.<sup>2</sup> At the same time he did not share ideas of intoxication and so to say ‘immoral conduct’ of Hafiz's lyrical person as a way of mystical gnosis. Though Iqbal was initiated in the Qadiriya Sufi order himself, he recognized only one type of mystic behaviour— *sahw*, sobriety, and not *sukr*, intoxication. R. A. Nicholson wrote that “As much as he (Iqbal.— *N.P.*) dislikes the type of Sufism exhibited by Hafiz, he pays homage to the pure and profound genius of Jalaluddin, though he rejects the doctrine of self-abandonment taught by the great Persian mystic and does not accompany him in his pantheistic flights”.<sup>3</sup> Later on in *Javid-nama* (1932) Iqbal makes Rumi his guide through the spheres of Heaven; he lets Rumi declare the importance of poetry in people's life, and one of the prerequisites that Rumi provides is the following:

سوز و مستی نقشبند عالمی است  
شاعری بی سوز و مستی ماتمی است

*Ardour and drunkenness embroider a world; poetry without ardour and drunkenness is a dirge*.<sup>4</sup>

What is prohibited to Hafiz is allowed to Rumi!

If we take into consideration that Hafiz's connection with any specific Sufi order is not clear till now, and his Shaikhs are mentioned with an element of uncertainty, the only thing that can be stated with certainty, is: that Hafiz followed the customs and habits of *malamaties*. In his book *Hafiz and Iqbal*, Yusuf Husain-Khan says that he had found only one line in *Divan-i-Hafiz*, which could be regarded as a reflex of the philosophy of *wahdat-al-wujud* (radif *hame u-st*).<sup>5</sup>

The negative estimation of Hafiz continued in the course of Iqbal's poetic life, in different contexts, for instance, Iqbal criticized Hafiz implicitly in *Zarb-i-Kalim* (1936), his last poetic book in Urdu, since he "didn't sharpen the sword of his self".<sup>6</sup> Yusuf Husain Khan justly remarks that "the idea of personality in Hafiz is cardinally different from Iqbal's one. Hafiz didn't have any generalized concept of the Self. Not being the follower of *wahdat-al-wujud*, he nevertheless shared traditional Sufi understanding of the Self dissolved in the Beloved, who was partly realistic (*haqiqi*), and partly metaphoric (*majazi*)".<sup>7</sup> As for Iqbal, his concept of the human Ego was modern, and rather revolutionary for India of the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only once, in his last Urdu collection *Zarb-i-Kalim*, did Iqbal mention Hafiz's poetry in positive way as a symbol of a perfect work of art:

*From the blood of the architect are constructed  
The tavern of Hafiz, and the idle-temple of Bihzad*.<sup>8</sup>

As A. Schimmel puts it: "Hafiz and Bihzad, otherwise condemned as models of perilous traditional art and seducers of people are taken in verses like this as symbols of highest power of expression— that shows the ambiguity of symbolism which sometimes can be met with in Iqbal's poetry".<sup>9</sup>

This so to say 'ambiguity' results, in practice, in a deciding and sweeping victory of Iqbal-poet over Iqbal-philosopher in his poetic works, and in just the opposite in his prosaic writings.

While not mentioning Hafiz's name, Iqbal would allude to his ghazals implicitly both in Urdu and Persian works. What is remarkable, is that the first address to Hafiz (anonymous in the all editions except the 1<sup>st</sup>) in *Asrar-i-Khudi* contains an allusion to the well-known ghazal of the criticized poet made in a very beautiful way<sup>10</sup>:

نیست غیر از باده در بازار او  
از دو جام آشفته شد دستار او

Compare Hafiz:

صوفی سرخوش ازین است که کج کرد کلاه  
به دو جام دگر آشفته شود دستارش

In the Iranian edition of Iqbal's Persian poetry, *Ash'ar-i-Fārsi*<sup>11</sup>, the editor (Dervish) marked at least 55 instances of hidden references to Hafiz in it. They are scattered all over the *Kulliyat*, though they most frequently appear in *Zabur-i-Ajam* ("Persian Psalms"), the collection of most charming Persian lyrics of Iqbal. The editor gives every episode a definition such as 'following' (*nāzer*), 'meeting' (*istiqbāl*), 'quoting' (*tazmin*), and "use of the same meter and rhyme as Hafiz".

Perhaps something could have been omitted by the editor, but even this account refers to a good deal of allusions, quotations or hidden mentioning of Hafiz. Iqbal borrowed some fundamental notions from Hafiz, like wine of eternity (*may-i-bāq*), caravan bell (*bāng-e darā*)<sup>12</sup>, conventional poetic attacks against mullah's and 'clumsy bookish wisdom and lifeless traditionalism'.<sup>13</sup> In Javid-nama, the poet accepted the pen-name 'Zenderud', alluding to the small river of Isfahan (Zayanderud) mentioned in Hafiz's ghazal. (Iqbal was always stressing his spiritual proximity to the old cities of Iran like Isfahan, Shiraz and Tabriz).

The title of the first Urdu collection of lyrics *Bang-i-Dara* could be regarded as an allusion to the motif of caravan bell in Hafiz's ghazal.<sup>14</sup>

After Iqbal's 'critique' of Hafiz as a propagator of quietism and oblivion of the 'selfhood', the polemics took place in Urdu newspapers of Punjab in 1915– 1916<sup>15</sup>, and Iqbal himself was accused by *moulanas* of being a champion of Western values. His claim that the decline of Muslim world was the result of the influence of the Iranian Sufism was by no means accepted by his audience, and he had to explain his position and his own attitude towards the values of the Sufi tradition. Stressing the fact that he grew up in the environment which was mainly Sufi, he declared his loyalty to the traditions of the Subcontinent, and explained that he was rejecting only the type of intoxicated Sufism proposed by Hafiz. He juxtaposed *sukr* and *sabr* (drunkenness and sobriety as ideology of the different Sufi attitudes), and represented Hafiz as a partisan of the first, and himself as the

upholder of the second direction. To be exact, this assertion could be developed by referring to the Sufi tradition when *suker* and *sabw* become just the consequence of ‘states’ leading to the Truth when a Sufi experiences the state of *mabw* after intoxication, and then *sabw ba’d aṣṣ mabw* (sobriety after immersion into oblivion).

I’d like to dwell upon one statement of Iqbal which seems to be quite unusual, (I even dedicated an investigation to this episode<sup>16</sup>).

May be the anecdote itself contained nothing special compared to the other stories about Sufi saints and their deeds. It happened at the time of Aurangzeb (1659–1707), who became the Mughal Emperor after a series of battles against his relatives, claiming the throne.

The very story was related in Muhammad Iqbal’s article in a Punjabi newspaper *Vakil* (Amritsar) of 1916.<sup>17</sup> It was one of the five articles which he wrote as an answer to the criticism against the mentioned poem. As an example of the ‘poisonous influence’ of Hafiz’s poetry, Iqbal presents a legendary event, which happened in Delhi at the time of Emperor Aurangzeb.

‘Once the Emperor decided to clean the town off of the *tawaiif* or courtesans. These *tawaiif* were mostly well educated young ladies, who performed music and dances and knew poetry. The Emperor ordered them married, and those who didn’t manage to get married had to be put on a ship and drowned in the sea. There was a young singer among them who every day used to pass the street where a Sufi saint Kalimullah was sitting. She would greet him and pass by. But on that day she said: “Accept the last farewell from your slave”, and was going to leave. The Shaikh realized that she was preparing to die. Then he said: “Listen to my advice. When you and the other girls are lead to the shore to be put on the ship, do perform the following Hafiz’s lines:

در کوی نیکنای ما را گذر ندادند

گر تو نمی پسندی تغیر کن قضا را

*We were not allowed to go to the street of Pious*

*If Thou not approveth it do change the destiny.*

On the appointed day, the group of young women was conducted to the shore in the direction of the ship. They started to sing these lines with the ardor and passion, being sure that it was their last performance. Their singing came to the ears of Aurangzeb, and he cancelled his order’.

What *is* amazing— is Iqbal’s summary of the story. “Such was the poisonous influence of Hafiz’s poetry,— says he,— that the most pious Muslim ruler changed his mind, and didn’t perform his decision to

clean the city from such a dirty spot like prostitutes (*tawaiif*)”.

So we'd like to formulate two questions. The first is: How was it possible to summarize the event in the way Iqbal did?

The second question is more complicated than the previous one. It is a well known fact, that Aurangzeb was pitiless in his urge for the throne that he put to death his brother Dara Shikoh, one of the most splendid personalities of the epoch, and his son, and his other relatives; that he imprisoned his father; that by his will, the poet-mystic Sarmad was decapitated under a disputable religious pretext; that he prohibited music and dances in Delhi and was ready to get rid of *tawaiif* by simply drowning them in the sea. So, having in mind the rigidity and fanaticism of Aurangzeb, one may ask a question: how did it become possible that this person would change his mind under the influence of a single *bait*?

There is, however, some evidence that the Emperor had “intrinsic interest in spiritual matters”, and “special liking for men of learning, ‘ulama, Sufis, and dervishes from all lands...”.<sup>18</sup> Certain Sayyid Abd al-Fattah “was brought from Gujarat with great honor to spend some time with the Emperor, when the latter was told about his profound knowledge of the Mathnawi of Mawlana Rum”.<sup>19</sup> And the last but not the least is that “even stern Emperor Aurangzeb is said to have shed tears when listening to the recitation of this work (*Masnavi-ye Ma‘navi.— N.P.*)”.<sup>20</sup>

But did the emperor like Hafiz's poetry? And how can the power of this line be explained?

Hafiz's ghazal to which this line belongs is one of the most famous. Its common appeal is extremely positive (*bā dūstān muruvvat, bā dushmanān mudārā*). The only blamed person happens to be the lyrical subject of the ghazal, whose garments are stained with wine, and who is not allowed to settle in the corner of the pious. The flavour of *malamatiya* inherent to this position of the lyrical subject is stressed by the well known principles of this movement in Iranian mysticism: the behavior of a person in this system is fully oriented to his own moral code, which presupposes deeply concealed delicacy, fairness, dignity, sincerity and self-rigorousness. This is a special sort of spiritual work which doesn't demand the Divine interposition in the mundane affairs. If the Sufi is *mukhlis* that is chosen by God as His sincere friend, *malamati* is *mukhlis*— a sincere friend himself. And he himself performs his spiritual deeds (*karamat*).<sup>21</sup>

Aurangzeb could have known this ghazal, and having listened to one line he could have recalled it as a whole. The ethical premise of the ghazal could have emerged in the Emperor's mind evoked by the recitation of the singers, and could have changed his choice

from ethical discomfort of the severe decision towards the favourable solution.

In the spring of 2007, I happened to visit Turkey on the occasion of the International Rumi Conference. There were many scholars from everywhere, and among them Dr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, the great connoisseur of Iqbal and his work, Director of the Iqbal Academy of Pakistan, situated in Lahore. I asked him what he thought about this entire story, and how could one explain Aurangzeb's decision. I just learned that Aurangzeb was sobbing when he was listening to the Rumi's poetry, and herewith I could extrapolate that he might have been also well-disposed to Hafiz. My companion smiled, listening to these explanations, and said: "Aurangzeb kept Hafiz's Divan under his pillow!"

I had no possibility to check the information about the pillow, but I could conclude that Aurangzeb didn't make such a difference between Rumi and Hafiz, as Iqbal did! One can rather appreciate his sensitivity to the force of poetry which saved the lives of the innocent young women.

Contrariwise, Iqbal who appeared to be the member of Qadiri Sufi order, to which Dara Shikoh belonged, could be expected to be less appreciative to Dara's executioner Aurangzeb. Thus Iqbal's resume was still a great riddle for me.

There exists one sole reason for Iqbal's conclusion, which is presented by A. Schimmel: in his Note-book, in 1910 Iqbal regarded Aurangzeb as a religious politician and "the founder of Musalman nationality in India".<sup>22</sup> The time of the polemics we discussed above was between the time when his first Persian long poem was published, and the second one namely *Rumuz-i-bikhudi* (written in 1917 and published in 1918) was in creation. I could surmise that he was deeply absorbed in his thoughts about the concept of Muslim nation as distinct from the concept of Hindu nation which was presented by the theoreticians of Indian National Congress some several years earlier.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to his first long poem, which was focused on the theory of personality, the second Persian poem was dedicated to the problem of collective life of individuals and to the creation of Muslim nation (*millat-e islamiye*).<sup>24</sup> It seemed to be the first essay on the theory of Muslim nation in the Northern India in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Coming back to Iqbal's attitude towards Hafiz's poetry, one can say that the situation is rather paradoxical, it could be considered as an example of the ideological polemics manifested through inter-textual relations in Persian literature. Iqbal found the beauty of Hafiz's style too dangerous for the "common" reader, at the same



time he couldn't help drawing inspiration from Hafiz.

Nevertheless, Iqbal was totally rapt by the beauty of Hafiz's poetry, and he wrote in his Note-book: "In words like cut jewel Hafiz put the sweet unconscious spirituality of the nightingale".<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- <sup>1</sup> "I wanted my words to become known first to the restricted circle of selected people, so that my message was learned by this circle, and these people would reflect on it, and understand it. Later on people of this circle would convey it to the whole nation, for as far as I may suppose, even when it comes up to the experts and connoisseurs, some of them will understand it, and some will remain indifferent. Only gradually, the comprehension which the author strived for would be achieved." – The answer to the question why he wrote in Persian, asked by Indian students in London at the meeting in Iqbal's honor during the poet's visit in 1931 to participate in the Round Table Conference. See: *Nuqsh. Apbiti numar (Nuqsh, Autobiography number)*, Lahore, June 1964, p.13. Translated from Urdu.
- <sup>2</sup> Schimmel, A.2000:*Gabriel's Wing*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Lahore, p.42.
- <sup>3</sup> Nicholson R.A. 1997: *Introduction: The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi) A philosophical poem by Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal of Lahore, translated from the original Persian with introduction and notes by Reynold A. Nicholson, Litt.D, LL.D Lecturer on Persian in the University of Cambridge*. Farhan Publishers. Lahore. First published in Pakistan, p.xiv-xv.
- <sup>4</sup> Iqbal, M. 1973: *Javid-nama*. In: *Kulliyat-e -i farsi-yi Iqbal*, p. 632. Translation by J. Arberry 1966: Iqbal, M. 1966: *Sir Muhammad Iqbal, Javid-nama. Translated from the Persian with Introduction and Notes by A. J. Arberry*. George Allen and Unwin Ltd. p. 45.
- <sup>5</sup> Husain Khan, Yusuf 1976: *Hafiz aur Iqbal*. Ghalib Academy. New Delhi , p.256. (In Urdu)
- <sup>6</sup> Iqbal, M. 1979: "She'r-e 'ajam" In: *Kulliyat-e Iqbal, Urdu*, p. 590 (128). Schimmel, A. 2000, p. 63.
- <sup>7</sup> Husain Khan, Yusuf 1976, p. 255.
- <sup>8</sup> Iqbal, M. 1979: "Ijad-e ma'ani" In: *Kulliyat-e Iqbal, Urdu*, p. 593 (131).
- <sup>9</sup> Schimmel. A. 2000, p.71, footnote 125.
- <sup>10</sup> Husain Khan, Yusuf 1976, p. 1. These lines were excluded from the following editions.
- <sup>11</sup> Darvish M.2001: *Ash'ar-i Farsi-yi Iqbal-i Lahuri. Shamel-e Ghazaliyyat, Asrar-e Khudi etc. Muqaddima va Havashi az Mahmud 'Ilmi (Darvish)*. Tehran.
- <sup>12</sup> Schimmel. A. 2000, p. 46.
- <sup>13</sup> Schimmel. A. 2000, p. 77.
- <sup>14</sup> Schimmel. A. 2000, p. 46, footnote 77.
- <sup>15</sup> These articles along with the other Iqbal's statements and articles were collected and printed in Delhi in connection with poet's centenary jubilee in: *Iqbal ke natbri afkar*, 1977; Anjuman-e taraqqi-e Urdu (Hind). Delhi. (in Urdu).

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- <sup>16</sup> Prigarina, N. 1991: "Put' v obitel 'dobroy slavy'" (Way to the abode of good name) In: *Sad odnogo zvetka. (Garden of one flower)*. Ed. by N. Prigarina. M., "Nauka" pp. 31-53
- <sup>17</sup> *Iqbal ke nabhri afkar*, 1977: pp. 97-101.
- <sup>18</sup> *Mir'at al-'Alam* 1979: *History of Aurangzeb (1658- 1668) of Mubammad Bakhtavar Khan*. Persian text with introduction and notes by Sajida S. Alvi. Lahore, vol. 1, p. 46.
- <sup>19</sup> *Mir'at al-'Alam* 1979, p.48.
- <sup>20</sup> Schimmel. A. 2000, p. 355, see also note 75.
- <sup>21</sup> Schimmel. A. 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill, p. 87.
- <sup>22</sup> *Stray Reflections* 1992 : *A Note-book of Allama Iqbal* Edited by Dr. Javid Iqbal. Iqbal Academy, Pakistan Lahore, Revised and enlarged edition, p.56; Schimmel. A. 2000, p.11.
- <sup>23</sup> To 1916 relates the "Lakhnau Pact" about the separate electorate for Muslims and Hindu.
- <sup>24</sup> See: Iqbal, M. 1948: *Speeches and Statements*. Lahore, p. 223. In my book: Prigarina, N. 1978: *Poetika tvorcestva Muhammada Iqbala (The Poetics of Muhammad Iqbal's work)* , M., "Nauka" Glavnaya redakziya vostochnoy literatury, I discuss the following aspects of the poem in part I of the book – 1. Masnavi *The Secrets of Selflessness*; "Third language" of masnavi (on the Role of Qur'anic quotations); theory of 'Muslim Nation' and the structure of masnavi "Rumuz-i bikhudi"; *Bikhudi* and *millat* the key terms of masnavi; Subject-matter and composition of Masnavi; 'Metaphysical picture' of society and the Prophet as its model; The problem of Caliphate and theocracy; A 'State' having neither frontiers, nor other limitations in Space and Time; Qur'an, Sunna, Shari'a and *taqlid* as regulatory devices for the Nation.
- <sup>25</sup> *Stray Reflections* 1992, p. 128.