

“THE PRESSING OF MY SOUL”
(Some Observations on Iqbal’s Concept of the ‘*Ajam*’)

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ABSTRACT

The multi layered metaphor of '*Ajam*' is one of the oft-repeated motifs of Iqbal's poetry alluding to a particular human collectivity, a specific geographical area, genius of a human race and a mind-set that proved to be one of the most important formative influences that moulded the Islamic civilisation in its present form. Iqbal's evaluation of Persia's legacy is nuanced and complex and cannot be appreciated correctly unless one takes into consideration all that he had to say on the question. The article tries to analyze all the relevant materials and seeks to arrive at a balanced and comprehensive view.

شراب میگذرد من نه یادگار جم است
 فشرده جگر من به شیشه عجم است

*No Jamsbid's memory, the wine that floweth in this inn of mine
 It is the pressing of my soul that sparkleth in the bowl of Persia*

*

Thus sang Iqbal in his *Zubūr i 'Ajām (Persian Psalms)*.¹ The multi-layered metaphor of 'Ajām was one of the oft-repeated motifs of Iqbal's poetry. He used it, in various contexts, to allude to a particular human collectivity, a specific geographical area, genius of a human race and a mind-set that proved to be one of the most important formative influences that moulded the Islamic civilisation in its present form.² In his view the Islamic civilisation was created from the twin elements which he defined, in his short poem "Islamic Culture", in a symbolic manner as 'عجم کا حسن طبیعت، عرب کا سوز و زردن! *'Ajām kā husn i tabī'at, 'Arab kā sūz i darūn*. (finesse and refinement of the Persian genius and inward burning of the Arab soul).³

As Mustansir Mir has noted, Iqbal's view of the role of Persia in Islamic history at first sight appears to be ambiguous, or even self-contradictory, but a closer look will present the matter in a different light. Iqbal speaks approvingly of the refining influence of Persia on rugged Arabian character, yet he is critical of the enervating effect of Persian mysticism on Islamic culture. But this only means that Iqbal's evaluation of Persia's legacy is nuanced. He takes a similar view of the influence of the West on modern Islamic history. He is severely critical of certain aspects of Western culture and repeatedly warns Muslims to beware of imitating the West slavishly. At the same time, he admires certain other aspects of that culture, and, furthermore, regards as highly positive the role of the West in giving a wake-up call to the slumbering Muslim world. In the same vein, he is also critical of the decadence and deviation to which the Arab part of the Islamic civilization became subject to. A representative comment would help elucidate the point. In his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* he lamented, "To my mind these arguments, if rightly appreciated, indicate the birth of an international ideal which, though forming the very essence of Islam, has been hitherto

overshadowed or rather displaced by Arabian Imperialism of the earlier centuries of Islam.”⁴ Would that warrant us to conclude that the “Arab” as such was responsible for the overshadowing of the “very essence of Islam”? Similarly would the verses given below, which criticize the Arab world, provide us a sufficient reason to conclude that Iqbal saw nothing of value in the Arab world and anchored no hopes for the future of Islam in the genius of the Arab race?

عرب کہ باز دہد محفل شبانہ کجاست
عجم کہ زندہ کند رود عاشقانہ کجاست

*Where is the Arab, to revive
The old night-revelry,
And where the Persian, to bring alive
The love-lute's minstrelsy?*⁵

خود را کنم سجودی، دیر و حرم نمائندہ
این در عرب نمائندہ آن در عجم نمائندہ

*I bow down before myself— there is no temple or Ka'bah left!
This one is missing in Arabia, that one in other lands.*⁶

در عجم گردیدم و ہم در عرب
مصطفیٰ نایاب و ارزان بولہب

*I have wandered through lands, Arab and non-Arab,
Bū Lahab is everywhere, Mustafā nowhere.*⁷

خودی کی موت سے رُوح عرب ہے بے تب و تاب
بدن عراق و عجم کا ہے بے عروق و عظام

*The Arabs have lost their former zeal,
Their souls are shrunk, they can not feel;
Iraq and Persia are bereft
Of bones and veins and naught is left.*⁸

As could be seen easily, these remarks and other statements to the same effect address certain specific situations or problems that the Muslim community had faced during the course of the historical unfolding of its cultural ethos. So is the case with his observations on the ‘*Ajam*’ which, if taken out of context or studied in isolation, can lend them to an interpretation that, to say the least, would be misleading and would stop short at giving us an inaccurate view of Iqbal’s real assessment of the role of Persia in Islamic history.

Thus we observe that many commentators of Iqbal and even distinguished authorities in Iqbal studies do take a partial, often

truncated, view of the highly nuanced usage of the concept/ theme of ‘*Ajam*’ in Iqbal thus arriving at results that cannot be supported by the poetic and prose works of Iqbal. We would like to elucidate through a representative sample. In his otherwise excellent discussion of the concept of ‘*Ajam*,’⁹ Mirza Muhammad Munawwar, brilliantly guides his readers through the corpus of Iqbal’s works with reference to his nuanced and multilayered usage of ‘*Ajam*,’ but leaves us with a half truth by highlighting only the negative side of the story; the enervating effect of Persianate ethos on the Islamic culture. Iqbal’s view is much more complex and cannot be appreciated correctly unless one takes into consideration all that he had to say on the question.

In Iqbal’s view, Muslim communal life depends not only on the ‘unity of religious belief,’ but also on ‘the uniformity of Muslim Culture’.¹⁰ Muslim culture is ‘relatively universal’ in the sense that it is not the product of a single race.¹¹ Hence he recognised the importance of the fact that the Persians had a brilliant pre-Islamic civilisation of great spiritual and artistic beauty, and played a major role in the very foundation of Islamic civilisation.

In fact, although Islamic thought and culture succeeded in freeing itself from becoming only ‘Arabic’ or ‘Persian’ during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, both of these peoples left their indelible mark upon its historical deployment and development. The Persians on the one hand, played a central role in building Islamic civilisation¹² and, on the other, were able to integrate within the universal perspective of Islam many elements of their pre-Islamic past, which thus became completely Islamicized. They therefore not only became thoroughly Islamic and have remained one of the most productive of Islamic peoples intellectually and artistically, but they were also able to preserve their own identity and remain distinctly Persian, creating a second cultural focus within the unity of Islamic civilisation, which in its classical phase and almost up to modern times could be divided culturally into the Arabic and the Persian zones. Let us analyse the issue now with reference to his prose and poetic works in order to arrive at a conclusion that is squarely rooted in his views and provides us a comprehensive answer while steering clear of the confusions that have come to surround the question over the years.

As early as 1910 we find a note in his personal diary which reads as follows:

If you ask me what is the most important event in the history of Islam, I shall say without any hesitation: The Conquest of Persia. The battle of Nehāwand gave the Arabs not only a beautiful country, but also an ancient civilisation; or, more properly, a people who could make a new

civilisation with the Semitic and Aryan material. Our Muslim civilisation is a product of the cross-fertilisation of the Semitic and the Aryan ideas. It is a child who inherits the softness and refinement of his Aryan mother, and the sterling character of his Semitic father. But for the conquest of Persia, the civilisation of Islam would have been one-sided. The conquest of Persia gave us what the conquest of Greece gave to the Romans.”¹³

He expanded on the same subject. In the same year, while delivering his seminal address “The Muslim Community—A Sociological Study”, Iqbal made a statement that revealed his views on the subject in more detail and in a manner that is no less than categorical. The extract is so important for the issue at hand that it deserves to be quoted in full.¹⁴

The Arab Race, the original creation of Islam, was certainly a great factor in its political expansion, but the enormous wealth of literature and thought—manifestation of the higher life of the spirit—has been the work of chiefly non-Arabian races. It seems as if the birth of Islam was only a momentary flash of divine consciousness in the life-history of the Arab race; the working of its spiritual potentialities was due to the genius of people other than the Arabs.just as the Muslim Community does not recognize any ethnological differences, and aims at the subsumption of all races under the universal idea of humanity, so our culture is relatively universal, and is not indebted, for its life and growth to the genius of one particular people. Persia is perhaps the principal factor in the making of this culture. If you ask, me what is the most important event in the history of Islam, I shall immediately answer—the conquest of Persia. The battle of Nehāwand gave to the Arabs not only a beautiful country, but also an ancient people who could construct a new civilisation out of the Semitic and the Aryan material. Our Muslim civilisation is a product of the cross-fertilization of the Semitic and the Aryan ideas. It inherits the softness and refinement of its Aryan mother and the sterling character of its Semitic father. The conquest of Persia gave to the Musalmāns what the Conquest of Greece gave to the Romans, but for Persia our culture would have been absolutely one sided. And the people whose contact transformed the Arabs and the Mughals are not intellectually dead. Persia, whose existence as an independent Political unit is threatened by the aggressive ambition of Russia is still a real centre of Muslim culture, and I can only hope that she still continues to occupy the position that she has always occupied in the Muslim world.the loss of the Persia’s political independence would not be a territorial loss. To the Muslim culture such an event would be a blow much more serious than the Tartar invasion of the 10th century. But perhaps I am drifting into politics which it is not my present object to discuss, all that I mean to establish is that in order to become a living member of the Muslim Community the individual besides an unconditional belief in the

religious principle, must thoroughly assimilate the culture of Islam. The object of this assimilation is to create a uniform mental outlook, a peculiar way of looking at the world, a definite standpoint from which to judge the value of things which sharply defines our community, and transforms it into a corporate individual giving it a definite purpose and ideal of its own.”

The elements that Iqbal, in his above quoted remarks, claimed to be the God given mediums of “the working of Islam’s spiritual potentialities” were also mentioned time and again in his Urdu and Persian verse through the use of a variety of symbols. For example he declares it to be a manifestation of Divine Mercy, using the symbol of “the waters or rainfall of Mercy” in the following verse:

رگ تاک منتظر ہے تری بارشِ کرم کی
کہ عجم کے مے کدوں میں نہ رہی مے مغانہ

*The vine awaits Your bounteous rain: no more
Is the Magian wine in Persia’s taverns sold.¹⁶*

Because the Persians became thoroughly Islamicized and yet created a distinctly Persian Islamic culture related on a certain plane with their pre-Islamic past, to understand their role in the formation of the Islamic civilisation, it is necessary to cast a brief glance at the religious history of the people during the past three thousand years but that is the topic of a full length book and can not be compressed in the space of an article.¹⁶ For the purposes of our immediate discussion it suffices to point out that the major spiritual transformation in Persia came, strangely enough, not from one of the new members of the family of Iranian religions but from a religion of Abrahamic and Semitic background, namely Islam. Although the military defeat of the Sassanids before the Arab armies was a sudden and rapid process, the spiritual struggle between Islam and Zoroastrianism was a gradual one and did not really terminate until the fourth/tenth century. This fact itself indicates that the Persian accepted Islam, not through force, as is claimed by some modern historians, but because of an inner spiritual need.¹⁷ When the Persians regained their political independence from the caliphate there were still very sizeable Zoroastrian communities in Persia. But instead of showing any inclination to return to this tradition, the newly independent Persian rulers became themselves the champions of the spread of Islam, while insisting on the independence of the literary and cultural life of Persia. Most of the Muslim lands of Asia have, in fact, been Islamicized through the intermediary of the Persian form of Islam. And to this day, when a person belonging to the Persianate world thinks of the domain of ‘Persian culture’ he sees

before him nearly the whole of the Eastern lands of Islam from the Western borders of the Iranian plateau to Western China, with Iraq as an intermediary realm where the Persian, Arabic and, later, Turkish elements met.

It should not, thus, come as a surprise when we notice Iqbal saying, “my religion is from Hijaz but it has reached me through Isphahan, Kabul and Tabriz”¹⁸ or when he sings, “My heart is from the sanctuary of Hijaz, my song from Shiraz”.¹⁹ In his view, the Arabs and the Persians (*al-‘Arab wa ’l-‘Ajam* in traditional Islamic sources) together founded the Islamic civilisation and have influenced nearly every phase of its subsequent history.

عرب کے سوز میں سازِ عجم ہے حرم کا رازِ توحید اُمم ہے
تہی وحدت سے ہے اندیشہ ’غرب کہ تہذیبِ فرنگی بے حرم ہے

“Building” of the ‘Ajam is contained in the “burning” of the Arab,
The secret that keeps the “sacred precinct” is the unity of nations.

Western thought is bereft of the idea of Oneness,

Because the Western civilization has no sacred precinct.*

Islam, like any universal religion, aims at creating a larger circle of human unity and solidarity to which various human collectivities, different racial genius and diverse national temperaments can contribute while retaining their distinctive features and individuality. The first semicircle that builds this Truth-centred circle is, in a sense, inward and pertaining to the self while the other arc is civilizational and outward. The first bow i.e. *sūz i ‘Arab* allows the human self to reach perfection by making it a manifestation of the Truth while the latter i.e. *sāz i ‘Ajam* brings the world to its complete fruition by making it a medium through which the Truth can manifest itself in the outward realm. The ‘Ajam, because of its racial temperament and brilliant pre-Islamic civilisation of great spiritual and artistic beauty, played a major part in creating new conceptual frameworks and intellectual manifestations of the Truth based on Islam and it also moulded Islam into a civilisation. In other words, the rock like stability and permanence that is essential to a religion is manifested through the Arab temperament while the cultural diversity required of a civilization unfolds through the medium of the mind of the ‘Ajam. That is to say that *sūz i ‘Arab* stands as a metaphor for the originality (in the sense of unbroken, living link to the origin) of religion and religious ethos while the *sāz i ‘Ajam* stands for the unfolding movement and creativity that brings forth cultural forms and intellectual constructs.

He returned to the same theme in one of latter verses, this time using a different set of terms (that is ذکرِ عرب [the Arabian remembrance] and فکرِ عجم [the Persian Mind]) lamenting the decline of both these constituent elements of the Islamic civilization in the times of decadence.

ذکرِ عرب کے سوز میں، فکرِ عجم کے ساز میں
نے عربی مشاہدات، نے عجمی تخیلات

The burning of the Arab remembrance, the building of the Persian thought

No more carry either the Arabian contemplative visions or the Persian imagination.¹

To sum up, Iqbal gives due importance to both the aspects of the Islamic civilisation and is very clear as to how did the “*Husn i Tabi‘at*,” of ‘*Ajam* manifested itself in Islamic history through making its rich contribution to the deployment of the Islamic civilization and his insights are remarkable with regard to the intellectual and spiritual activity that unfolded itself through the medium of “*Sāḡ i ‘Ajām*” leaving its indelible imprint not only on Islamic history but in the annals of cultural heritage of all mankind.²² We wish to end our remarks by presenting to the readers the beautiful verses ²³ that enshrine the tribute through which Iqbal²⁴ has acknowledged the debt:

چون چراغِ لاله سوزم در خیابانِ شما	ای جوانانِ عجم جانِ من و جانِ شما
غوطہ ہا زد در ضمیرِ زندگی اندیشہ ام	تا بدست آورده ام افکارِ پنهانِ شما
مہر و مہ دیدم نگاہم برتر از پروینِ گذشت	بیختم طرحِ حرم در کافرستانِ شما
تا سناش تیز تر گردد فرو پیچیدمش	شعلہ کی آشفته بود اندر بیابانِ شما
فکرِ رنگینم کند نذر تہی دستانِ شرق	پارہ لعلی کہ دارم از بدخشانِ شما
میرسد مردی کہ زنجیرِ غلامان بشکند	دیدہ ام از روزن دیوارِ زندانِ شما
حلقہ گردِ من زنید ای پیکرانِ آب و گل	آتشی در سینہ دارم از نیاگانِ شما

*In the avenues of your garden, I burn like the lamp of a tulip
By your life, O youth of ‘Ajām, and by mine!
Time and again, my thought dove into the depths of life,
Until I seized hold of the hidden thoughts of yours.
I saw the sun and the moon, my vision soared higher than the Pleiades:*

*In your infidel land, I laid the foundations of the Sanctuary.
That its point may become sharper still, I twisted it down—
A listless flame it was in your wilderness.
My colourful thought presents to the empty-handed of the East
A piece of a ruby that I have from your Badakhshan.
There is about to arrive a man who will break the chains of the slaves
I have looked through the window in the wall of your prison.
Make a circle round me, O creatures of water and clay:
In my breast, I have a fire that I carry from your ancestors?²⁵*

Not only that, he has to register a complaint as well:

نواى من به عجم آتش کهن افروخت
عرب ز نغمه شوقم هنوز بی خبر است

*My song has relit old fires in Persia,
But Arabia is still a stranger to my ardent lays.²⁶*

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *Zabūr i ‘Ajām in Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 398. *Zabur-i ‘Ajām (Persian Psalms; Persian; 1927)*. In one of his letters, Iqbal summarises the contents of this four-part work: the first two parts present, respectively, man in conversation with God and man commenting on the world of man; the third part offers responses to a series of philosophical questions raised in a poem by a Muslim mystic of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; and the fourth part discusses the impact of slavery on a nation’s religion and culture. In general usage, however, the title *Zabur-i ‘Ajām* refers to the first two parts, each of the last two parts having acquired an almost independent status as a poem. Both for profundity of thought and exquisiteness of diction and style, *Zabur-i ‘Ajām* occupies a distinctive place in Iqbal’s poetical corpus. Also see Mustansir Mir, *Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2006.

² In some instances, the word was used, no doubt, with certain negative connotations. But this did not change his essential position on the question of Persian influence on the Islamic civilization. Iqbal criticises the arts that have a soporific effect on people and kill their *khudi* instead of building it up (*Zarb i Kalim*, p. 562, 576, 580-1 in *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994). Iqbal was of the opinion that the Arab element in the Islamic literary tradition was basically healthy, invigorating, and life-affirming, whereas the *Ajami* or non-Arab element— especially that represented by some of the medieval Persian mystics— was effete and lethargy-inducing, and should, therefore, be avoided by Muslim readers.

³ The complete line, which occurs in his poem “Islamic Culture” reads, “*Anāsir is ke hain rūḥ al-quḍus kā dhawq i jamāl | ‘Ajām kā husn i tabrāt, Arab kā suḡ i darīn*” (Its constituent elements are the taste of Beauty imparted by the Holy

Ghost / finesse and refinement of the Persian genius and inward burning of the Arab soul). The verse comes from a small poem entitled “*Madaniyyat i Islām*” (Islamic Culture) in *Zarb i Kalim*, in *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 561.

Sāz (literally, burning, blazing, fiery and by extension, fervent, ardent, passionate) and its complementary term *sāz* (literally, building as well as musical instrument and by extension, edifice, structure, creativity) are among the most important of metaphorical devices that Iqbal had employed, not only for describing character types, mind-set or conceptual paradigms point toward modes of approaching reality, formulating a vision of reality and relating to the Infinite.

⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan/Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1989, p. 13.

⁵ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 393.

⁶ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 423.

⁷ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 719.

⁸ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2006, pp. 593. The following verse (*Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu), pp. 561) also speaks in the same vein:

وہ لذتِ آشوب نہیں بحرِ عرب میں

پوشیدہ جو ہے مجھ میں، وہ طوفانِ کدھر جائے

⁹ Mirza Muhammad Munawwar, “Kalām I Iqbāl mein ‘*Ajam kā mafhum*’”, in *Mizān i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1992, pp. 41.

¹⁰ Latif A. Sherwanī, (Ed.), *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1995, p. 125.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² For the contribution of the Persians only to the purely religious sciences of Islam, see S. H. Nasr and M. Mucahharī, “The Religious Sciences”, *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. IV, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 464-480; as for Persian contributions to Islamic philosophy and the sciences see S. H. Nasr, “Philosophy and Cosmology”, *ibid.*, pp. 419-441 and “Life Sciences, Alchemy and Medicine”, *ibid.*, pp. 396-418; see also H. Corbin, *Terre celeste et corps de resurrection*. The most thorough discussion of the mutual influence and interplay of Islam, its civilization, and the Persians is to be found in the Persian work of M. Mucahharī, *Khadamāt-i mutaqābil-i Islām wa Irān*, Tehran, 1349 AH solar.

¹³ “The Conquest of Persia”, *Stray Reflections*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2006, p. 49. This entry was incorporated into the paper ‘The Muslim Community’ later the same year. Only minor changes were made. Namely, “but also an ancient people; or, more properly, a people who could...” was tightened up as “but also an ancient people who could...” In the same sentence, “civilisation with the...” was changed to “civilisation out of...” Next, “It is like a child who inherits...” was changed to “It inherits...” and “character of his...” to “character of its...” The last two sentences were re-arranged to read: “The conquest of Persia gave to the Musalmans what the conquest of Greece gave to the Romans. But for Persia our culture would have been absolutely one-sided.”

¹⁴ “The Muslim Community—A Sociological Study”, *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, (Ed. Latif A. Sherwanī), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1995, p. 125.

¹⁵ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2006, pp. 353. The following verse could also be construed in the same vein:

نہ اٹھا پھر کوئی رومی عجم کے لالہ زاروں سے
وہی آب و گل ایراں، وہی تیریز ہے ساقی

(*Ibid*, pp. 351);

¹⁶ When we look at Persia today, or to be more accurate, the Persiante zone of the Islamic world, we see that it is one of the most overwhelmingly Muslim areas in the world. The life of the vast majority of Persians today is dominated and moulded completely by Islam, while, at the same time, the religious and cultural life of the country naturally reflects the long history of the Persian people. Persia has been both a centre from which major religious influences have radiated and a cross roads at which the religious traditions of the Mediterranean world and Asia have met, resulting often in new currents of religious life. Having originally belonged to the same ethnic and linguistic stock as the Aryan conquerors of India, the early Iranians who settled on the plateau possessed a religion akin to that of the Vedas. From this early background there arose the reform of Zoroaster and the establishment of the specifically Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism. Although the dates of Zoroaster are still much debated, there is no doubt that in the fifth century BC his teachings became the official religion of the Persian Empire. The sacred book of Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, is the most precious religious document of the early history of Persia as well as a basic source for the study of the Iranian languages. Zoroastrianism, with its firm belief in the angelic world, its accent upon the moral dimension of human existence, its emphasis upon the reality of the after-life and Last Judgment, and its stress upon the purity of the elements and the sacred character of human life, left an imprint both on the later religious life of Western Asia and on the general outlook of the Persians.

The positive qualities that this religion implanted in the souls of the Persians survived and became transmuted into the Islamic mould after Zoroastrianism itself had decayed and lost the spiritual struggle against the new forces of Islam. For example, the care that many devout Persians take in keeping their clothing, food and habitat clean in a ritual sense, sometimes even over-emphasising this elements of religion, is founded upon an old Zoroastrian teaching reinforced by the emphasis of Islam upon cleanliness. Whatever survived of Zoroastrianism in the Persian soul was, however, thoroughly Islamicized and interpreted in the light of the unitary point of view of Islam.

From the matrix of Zoroastrianism, which is the stable and orthodox background of Iranian religions, there grew several religious movements that had worldwide repercussions and also shook the foundations of Zoroastrianism itself. With the fall of the Achaemenian Empire, Hellenistic influences spread throughout the domain of the Persian people. This cultural movement was combined with a religious one known as Mithraism (considered as a distinct religious movement and not general devotion to Mithra, which ante-dated Zoroastrianism itself) which itself contained important Hellenistic elements. The mystery cult of Mithra, which spread as far West as Germany and Scandinavia, was a synthesis of Zoroastrian, Hellenistic, Babylonian and Anatolian elements, as well as pre-Zoroastrian Persian religious practices. If, for the world at large, this religious movement meant the spread of Iranian religious elements, for Persia itself it implied perhaps more than anything else the establishment of a religious sanction for the syncretic cultural life through which the Persians were now passing as a result of the conquests of Alexander and the establishment of Seleucid rule.

During the Parthian period, Zoroastrianism and the proper Persian cultural tradition began to reassert themselves until, with the advent of the Sassanids, the religion of Zoroaster became once again the official state religion, remaining in this position until the fall of the Sassanid empire. Nevertheless, its authority did not go unchallenged even on the religious plane. In the third century AD, a second world sweeping Iranian mystery religion, Manichaeism, came into being. Its founder, Mani, first found favour with the Sassanid ruler but was finally put to death through the opposition of the Zoroastrian priesthood. His cult nevertheless spread from China to France and in Persia itself gained many adherents. At once a socially revolutionary and a religiously mystical movement, it marked a major protest against established religious institutions. Although some of its cosmogonic and cosmological teachings found a place in certain forms of Islamic philosophy, for Persians of the later period Manichaeism has appeared as a rebellion against religious authority. It has never enjoyed the same status as Zoroastrianism, from which it came into being and against which it revolted.

The Sassanid period was also witness to other religious movements such as Mazdakism, a 'religious communism' known today mostly through what its enemies, both Zoroastrian and Christian, wrote against it. This movement, which was soon crushed, was again a protest against the Zoroastrian social order and foretold the collapse of this order that occurred with the coming of Islam. Also at this time there developed within Zoroastrianism the philosophico-religious school known as Zurvanism, which indicates a blend of Iranian religious thought with certain Greek philosophical ideas. Finally, it must be remembered that through rivalry with the Byzantines the Sassanids encouraged Oriental Christian sects, especially the Nestorians. These sects were given a free hand to establish schools and missions throughout the Sassanid empire, with the result that notable Christian communities came into existence in Persia and became an important minority religious community in the Islamic period. The Jews also had several centres in Persia from Achaemenian times, and continued to thrive under the both Zoroastrian and Muslim rule. The tolerance toward minority religions shown by Cyrus the Great has with few exceptions the rule in the religious history of Persia.

¹⁷ In a letter to A 'Abbās Ārām, an eminent Iranian, written in 1932, (recently discovered and published in *Iqbal Review*, October, 1999) Iqbal wrote, "These days when I was busy setting the question paper for the postgraduate level Persian language and literature, my assistant brought me an article published in the Persian Journal *Irānshahr* or *Kisrā*. Writer of the article was a Persian who held the view that Persia was converted to Islam by force. My assistant thought that we could give it to our postgraduate students for English translation. I, however, rejected the idea and selected an other text. These Persian gentlemen are either totally ignorant of the history of their country or else they play in the hands of European politicians and propagandists whose sole objective is that Muslim countries should lose the sense of unity with one another."

¹⁸ Quoted from his letters.

¹⁹ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 331. In his Urdu verse he has many parallels to the same idea expressed variously, for example:

عجمی خُم ہے تو کیا، سے تو جازی ہے مری
نغمہ ہندی ہے تو کیا، لے تو جازی ہے مری!

(*Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2006, pp. 1999;

مرا ساز اگر چه ستم رسیده زخمه هائے عجم رہا
وہ شہید ذوقِ وفا ہوں میں کہ نوامری عربی رہی

Kulliyāt i Iqbal, (Urdu) pp. 313);

²⁰ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2006, pp. 407.

²¹ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Urdu) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2006, pp. 439.

²² Which he had else where termed as “an ocean with out shore”

عجم بحریت ناپیدا کناری
کہ در وی گوہر الماس رنگ است

Kulliyāt i Iqbal, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 236.

²³ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 415.

²⁴ A study of Iqbal’s Persian poetry (and Iqbal’s Urdu poetry itself is highly Persianized) will show that it, too, has rich– perhaps richer– folds of meaning. Ehsan Yarshater’s evaluation will come as no surprise to students of Persian literature: ‘Iqbal may well be considered the most significant poet in the classical Persian tradition since Hafez [d. 1390]’ (Yarshater, in *Yarshater*, p. 31).

²⁵ Translated by Mustansir Mir, *Iqbal Quarterly*, Volume 8, Numbers 1–2, Winter and Spring 2008, pp. 3.

²⁶ *Kulliyāt i Iqbal*, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 295. The following verses also refer to the same theme:

عجم از نغمہ ہای من جوان شد ز سودایم متاع او گران شد
ہجومی بود رہ گم کرہ در دشت ز آواز درایم کاروان شد

عجم از نغمہ ام آتش بجان است صدای من درای کاروان است
حدی رایتز تر خوانم چو عرفی کہ رہ خوابیدہ و محمل گران است
بہ نیستان عجم باد صبحدم تیز است
شرارہ کی کہ فرو می چکد ز ساز آور

Kulliyāt i Iqbal, (Persian) Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, pp. 235; 355.