

CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN
AUSTRIA AND SOUTH ASIAN
SUBCONTINENT WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO IQBAL

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ABSTRACT

The extensive and deep rooted interactions between Austria and Turkey can still easily be traced in the family and place names, mostly familiar in present day Austria, and also in some of the dialects of the federal provinces like Steirmask and Kainten in which numerous loan- words of the Turkish origin are used. In the comity of world nations, Austria is the third major European power to develop relations with Muslims and it came into contact with the Islamic world through the Ottoman Empire that was knocking the doors of the Eastern Europe in the fourteenth century. After the conquest of Constantinople (1453), the Turks undertook frequent expeditions which took them further and further to the west and thus became a permanent threat to the Hapsburg patrimonial lands. Twice the Ottoman arises reached the gates of Vienna (1529 and 1683) and their proximity affected the development of the knowledge of Muslim society and Islam in Europe. This political expansion led to a new subject of study Islam in its Ottoman context, and Islam being now largely identified with the Turks and their rule.

Centuries ago, a commercial contact with India was carried on by Europeans through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, and consequently they had to pass through a long tract of countries to Asia. But the discovery of a maritime passage to India facilitated, in a great measure, their commercial connections. First, the Portuguese obtained a firm footing in India but they were encroached on by other European states, particularly by the Dutch. The immense profit reaped by these states encouraged also the English and the French to open a commercial link with India. As the Mughals control over Delhi waned, these European merchants, striving for the political hegemony fought prolonged wars and finally the military, political and economic balance of power shifted in favor of the British.

In this arena of warring European nations, Austria stood aloof, as it had no expansionistic designs. Instead, it took another root and that was primarily aimed at capturing the mind and soul of the people, rather than to yoke them politically.

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These extensive and deep-rooted interactions between Austria and Turkey can still easily be traced in the family and place names, mostly familiar in present-day Austria, and also in some of the dialects of the federal provinces like Steiermark and Kärnten in which numerous loan-words of the Turkish origin are used.

A part from Turkey, Austria did not have such close relationship with other Muslim countries, particularly with the South-Asian

Subcontinent, as it was not colonial power. Here, the Austrians preferred to have a propound contact as scholars, orientalist, scientists, travelers and missionaries who made a substantial contribution to the study of Muslim India.

With reference to the Subcontinent, the name of Joseph Tieffenthaler, a Jerit missionary from South Tyrol, can be mentioned as one of the early Austrians who came to India in 1740 and lived there until his death in Lucknow in 1785. He extensively traveled to the remote parts of India and was an extraordinary expert of the Indian Literature, languages, geography and natural history. He is commonly called the “Father of the modern India Geography” and his ofrus magnum “Beschreibung von Hindustan”/ provides a vivid and original geographical, historical and linguistic description, based on his own experiences and in– depth observations. The voluminous book was published from Berlin in 1785 and almost simultaneously translated into French by the quetil due Peron from Paris.

Johann Martin Honigberger, an Austrian pharmacist, reached Lhore in 1828 and served there as a physician at the court of Sikh ruler, Maharajah Ranjit Singh. He practiced medicine in Lahore for about twenty years and then returned to his country in 1850, where he died in his native town Kronstadt in 1869.

His most interesting and entertaining book under the title *Frichte and dem Morgenlande*, he vividly described his adventures from the time he left Austria, as well as varied life– styles in the countries he visited, but especially at the court of Ranjit Singh. A major part of this book deals exclusively with his medical experiences and reports of different cures he attempted with the people, containing western medicine with what he had observed in the oriental countries.

Carl Alexander Auselm Freihar Von Higel (1795 -1870), a wealthy Austrian diplomate and officer, traveled in far– fetched Indian regions, especially in Kashmir and Punjab. He was a diligent and faithful observer of nature. His voluminous illustrated work is entitled *Kashchmir and das Reich der Siek* (4 vols., Sffuffgart 1840 - 42, also available in abridged English translation) contains a peculiar account of the ancient and modern history of Kashmir, with sundry miscellaneous particulars, both geographical and physical, also adding useful information about the products, resources and inhabitants of the mountain regions. Von Higel entered Lahore on 11th January 1936 and after a sojourn of ten days proceeded to Delhi. In Lahore, he was welcomed by Ranjit Singh, who died a year later. He was very much impressed by the architectural grandeur and beauty of some historical monuments like Jahangir’s Tomb and Shalamar Gardens- two splendid edifices of the Mughal period.

Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1840 – 1899), a reputed scholar, linguist, educationist, explorer and ethnologist, was also an Austrian as he himself declared in his certificate of Naturalization of 1892, now housed in the National Archives of England. Brought-up and educated in the Muslim environment in Istanbul, his profound studies of Islamic beliefs and practices are replete with his personal experiences. He came to Lahore in early 1860 and soon became a central figure in educational and language reform in the Punjab. In those days, Lahore overtook Delhi as the centre of educational learning and literary culture after 1857. As a founding member of the Punjab University and the first principal of the Government College, Lahore, he gained considerable influence in disseminating education among the masses. He used his position as an Islamicist, researcher and educator to work with the colonial officials, the local elite and the literati: most of Leitner's compatriots have concentrated more on his ethnological, anthropological and linguistic researches on the areas lying between Kashmir and Afghanistan, a named by him Dardistan, but a comprehensive study of his life and educational reforms are still waiting for a denoted scholar.

In Austria, a specific kind of initiative was taken to differ knowledge about Muslim history and culture. Joseph Van Hammer-Purgstall (d.1856), “father” of Austria orientation, played a pioneering role in establishing the scholarly study of major Islamic languages and literatures, not only in his own country but also in other neighboring German-speaking regions. No doubt, he has been called, with great reason, “der grosse Anteger”.

Hammer-Purgstall was an enormously prolific scholar who wrote on a wide variety of subjects concerning the Islamic world and it would be difficult here to speak in comprehensive details of his oeuvre. From his huge corpus of books (76) and articles one can hardly find sufficient material relating to India in general and to Muslim India in Particular. His seven years stay in the East (1799-1806) did not bring him further afield than Turkey and Egypt. Even in ten occidental and oriental languages of the inscription on his grave in Weidling, no Indian language is included. However, it is evident from fame of his writings that he was fully aware and well conversant with the literary and cultural achievements of Indian Muslims and had personal relations with scholars, residing in India, and the learned institutions functioning in the different parts of India. Though Hammer's contribution to Muslim India is comparatively meager it deserves a special attention. Here a few aspects of his intellectual links with Muslim India are briefly touched upon.

Hammer's German translation of *Divan-i-Hafiz*, a work after spoken of disparagingly, inspired Goethe to write his "Weststchfer Diram" which is turn, was to inspire Iqbal is third passion poetic collection "Payam-i-Mashriq" (Botschaft des Ostens) as a response to Geothe's 'Divan' and headed the "Fundgraben-Mutto:

Gottes ist der Orient
Gottes ist der Occident

(exactly a German translation of Quran Verse *قل لله المشرق والمغرب* 2:142) while discussing the 'Oriental Movement' in German Literature the Urdu preface, Iqbal has paid a tribute to Hammer in these words:

In 1812 Von Hammer published a complete translation of the "Diwan" of Hafiz and it is this translation which work the beginning of the "Oriental Movement" of German literatureVon Hammer's translation not may fired Goethe's imagination but served at the same time as the source of his remarkable poetic ideas.

Personally, Hammer knew only one Indian and that was Mirza Abu Talib Khan who sailed from Calcutta to Europe in 1799 and on his detour to India, he met Hammer in 1802 in Istanbul where the later was an interpreter in the Austrian Embassy at the Othoman poete. Hammer was impressed by Abu Talib Khan's Persian poetry and translated some of his odes that were published in various European journals. In his Persian travelogue entitled "Masir-i-Talibi fi Bitad-i- Afrang" (completed in 1804), Abu Talib Khan referred his meeting with Hammer. A few excerpt from the relevant past are as follows:

From Hammer's company, I got much satisfaction. He is a young man of a most amiable disposition and enlightened understanding ... He is now in the service of Austrian emperor ... This gentleman translated several of my odes into English, French and German and sent them to Jordan, Paris and Vienna. He visited me everyday and introduced me to the Austrian ambassador. The ambassador and his wife are very highly esteemed in Istanbul; and , judging from their conduct and that of some others of their countrymen whom I have met ..., I concluded that the Austrian stand very high in the scale of cultured nations.

Reciprocally, Hammer also mentioned this Indian traveler and historian in his autobiography "Erinneumagen aus meinam Leben" (1940) but rather briefly and stressed note on the correct pronunciation of his name.

The friendly relations between Hammer and Abu Talib Khan continued even after the death of the later in 1806. The first edition of his 'Travels' was published posthumously in 1812 from Calcutta and was sent to Hammer. Soon its German translation by Georg Eedel came out from Vienna which was reviewed by Hammer in the

fourth volume of his “Fundgresben Des Orients” in 1814. A year before, Hammer published in this journal the Persian text (with English translation) of the verses of Abu Talib Khan in praise of Lady Elgin’s beauty.

Hammer corresponded with almost all the prominent European scholars of his time. Among them an outstanding English Sanskirtist Horace Hayman Wilson (d.1860) was also included. Commencing his oriental studies by learning Urdu, Wilson switched over to Sanskrit in which his life long contribution manifests his immense erudition. The correspondence reveals an intensive relationship between Hammer and Wilson and it chronicles the period of more than forty years. It started when Wilson was the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta). Hammer’s eighteen English letters are still unpublished in which he usually comments on Wilson’s books or reviews the activities of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

It would be interesting to note here that Wilson also responded to Hammer and at present his ten letters, from 1813 to 1841, are available: eight in the private archives of Scholars Hairford and two in the Handschriftensammlung of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. In one of these letters (June 1823) it is mentioned that Wilson sent seventeen pamphlets, published by Ram Mohan Roy who was introduced to Hammer as the modern reformer of both the Hindu and Christian faiths.

A distinguished Austrian orientalist and a pupil of Hammer. Purgstall and Vincenz Von Rozenzweig– Schwannau (d. 1865) was Alois Sprenger, a Tyrolean “landsmann” who is considered one of the leading authorities on the literature of Muslim India. Undoubtedly, his studies of Persian and Urdu Manuscripts are as valuable as his superb collection of hand-written material (Nachlass Sprenger) that is now housed in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

Fourteen years study of Sprenger in India (1843-1856) proved pivotal to his profound scholarship and wide-ranging bibliographical knowledge of Islamic sources. He brought to light such authentic sources of Islamic history and culture which seemed to have disappeared, for example the “Sira” of Ibn-ul-Hisham with Suhail’s commentary, parts of Waqidi, the first volume of Ibn-i-Sa’d’s *Tabaqat* in a private library of Cawnpore and further volumes in Damascus, Parts of the annals of Tabari, Gurgani’s *Vis-o-Rami* (a Persian romance) the mystical treatise of al-Muhasibi, a famous Sufi of the ninth century and Kashshaf’s encyclopaedic work on terms, used in different Muslim sciences.

Spranger's services to the Muslim educational institutions of North India (Delhi College) and Bangal (Calcutta Madrasa and Hooghli Colege) he took numerous steps not only to improve their prevalent curriculum and teaching standard but also accelerated the process of translation from the Western languages into Urdu. Thus, he brought about a scientific renaissance particularly in Delhi where he was supervising a society for Urdu translation in a very plain and accessible prose style.

Despite his own studies, spenger prompted also many local titerato for their scholarly pursuits like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan who on his suggestion wrote *Asar-us-Sanadid* which shows the author's prodigious archaeological and historical recapitulation of Delhi life and also evinces a knowledge and appreciation of all facets of life in the city.

Spranger fonded in Delhi on illustrated weekly journal under the file Kiran-al-Sadayn, means the conjunction of the two auspicious planets, Jupiter and Venus, which stand for the occident and the orient. This journal covered the political and literary events of the period but its real objectives was to introduce western ideas, especially the scientific and technological progress of the West to the natives. It is also very significant for the early history of Urdu journalism.

Suffice if say, that Sprenger was the only Austrian scholar of the nineteenth century who made diligent researches in Arabic, Persian and Urdu Languages and literatures and immensely contributed to understand the intellectual cultural and historical insights of the Islamic world, including the Muslims of the South-Asian Subcontinent.

Two years after the death of Aloys Sprenger, Prof. Ernst Bannerth was born in 1895 at Eilenberg. From his youth, he took keen interest in the muslim Orient and learnt Arabic and Persian languages. In performing his duties as an interpreter of German army, he was captured in Mosul by the British who brought him to India as a Pow. In his period of captivity, he made an acquaintance with some Jesuits and with their help, he learnt Urdu. His two books entitled "*Hindustani Briefen*" (1943) and "*Lehrbuch da Hindustani Sprache*" (1945), in collaboration with Prof. Otto Spies, show explicitly the mastery he had over this language. Afterwards, he had to face many adverse circumstances, but he continued his oriental studies in Vienna University fro where he obtained his doctorate and finally received a title of "*Ausserodentlider Universitate professor*" (1965). Since 1961, he permanently settled in Cairo and as a Catholic priest and well-known orientalist, he was associated with Al-Azhar

University, Austrian consulate and the Dominicon Institute of Oriental Studies, till his death in 1976.

Most of Bannerth's studies deal with the contemporary Islamic theology and the metaphysical concepts of some leading Sufis like Abu al-Katm al-Jili, al-Ghazzali and ibn al-Arabi. During his stay in India as a war prisoner, Urdu attracted him because this language was becoming very rapidly an important vehicle of Islamic thought. His muslim friends informed him about the proformed influence of Iqbal's poetry on the masses and the literati as well. Bannerth started studying him in original when he came to know that Iqbal was also called the "Indian Goethe". As soon as two most popular poems of Iqbal namely "Shikwa" and "Jawab-i-Shikwah" (Complaint and Answer) became accessible to him, he senduced them eloquently into English verse under the tittle "Islam in Modern Urdu Poetry", published in a swiss journal "Anthropos International Zeitchrift fur Volker-und Sprachkunde" (Freiburg, 1942-45). Many versified or free English translations of there two poems have so far appeared including A.J. Arberly, and Khushwant Singh's renderings, but Bannerth took the initiative of translating them into English and maintained their poetical beauty and depth of thought.

There two poems of Iqbal extol the legacy of Islam and its civilizing role in history, bemoon the fate of Muslims everywhere, and squarely confront the dilemuas of Islam in modern times. The first poem (Shikwah) is, thus, in the form of a complaint to God for having let down the Muslim and its supplement (Jawab-i-Shikwah) is God's reply to the poet's complaint. The poem employ some of the traditional mystical imagery, are full of allusions to Persian poetry and have both historical and spiritual oucctones.

In 1942, Bannerth's translation was published and after passing the Pakistan Resolution (1940), the movement for having a separate homeland for India Muslims gained a momentum. In this context Bannerth's following remark is worth to mention:

He (Iqbal) stresses the Muslim Kingdom of God upon earth, which means nothing after than the reformation of life according to ethical principles derived from the deepest conception of God and mankind. Indian Muslims of today see also in Iqbal the creator of the Pakistan-programme. This is the demand for an independent Muslim state in a free India, which would be in touch with the whole Islamic world, where social and political life could be leased upon the fundamental teachings of the Prophet and the world-wide love of Sufism. This would imply the true natural ethics on theistic basis.

As a prisoner of war, Bannerth could not meet Iqbal, but he who fully aware of his political and poetical influences on Indian Muslims. The first Austrian who met Iqbal, was Leopard Weiss alias

Muhammad Asad (d.1992). Born in Lemberg in a Jewish family, he started his career as the correspondent of “Frankfurter Zeitung” was converted to Islam and took the name of Muhammad Asad.

As detailed under “Biographische Uebersicht” in Gunther Windhager’s recent book on an Asad (Vienna, 2002), he came to India in 1932 and soon established intimate relationship with Iqbal. The following passage of his book “Road to Mecca” (1954) clearly indicated their close friendship.

“..... after leaving Arabic I went to India and there met the great Muslim poet-philosopher and spiritual father of the Pakistan idea, Muhammad Iqbal. It was he who soon persuaded me to give up my plans for traveling to Eastern Turkestan, China and Indonesia and to remain in India to help elucidate the intellectual premises of the future Islamic state which was the hardly more than a dream in Iqbal’s visionary mind.”

Some of Iqbal’s Urdu letters of 1934 and the recollections of his close associates reveal that he knew the extraordinary capabilities of this young Austrian and tried to find a suitable job for him in Lahore but due to certain reasons he failed. Nevertheless, their friendship continued till Iqbal’s death in 1938 and he completed his early projects on the guidelines drawn by Iqbal. Later, Muhammad Asad served Pakistan in different capacities upto 1952 and tried to reconstruct the ideological foundations of this newly-emerged Islamic state, as visualized by his mentee, Iqbal.

Iqbal was educated in England and Germany and traveled through various European countries like France, Italy and Spain. Some of his Urdu letters still unpublished and preserved in the National Museum of Pakistan (Karachi) and Iqbal Museum (Lahore), inform that once he made up his mind to come to Austria. In 1927, he had an attack of renal colic but it was controlled by the local medical treatment. In 1934, he felt affected by exposure to cold. There was a mild attack of colic. His vocal chord was badly affected and he lost his voice. According to some medical experts, there was something wrong with the vein connecting the vocal organs to the heart, some thought that surgical operation would be necessary: some were of the view that electric treatment would cure. He preferred the treatment by ultra-violet rays and it led to some improvement, though the ailment persisted.

Meanwhile, one of Iqbal’s friends belonging to a wealthy family of Lahore, came back from Vienna after having a successful medical treatment of his chronic diabetes. During his stay in Vienna, he also consulted with the concerned physicians about Iqbal’s illness and got the assurance that if the patient could come to Vienna, he would be

all right. Iqbal's friend insisted to take him to Vienna for his proper medical treatment but he declined to accept this offer. In those days, Muhammad Asad was in Lahore and he arranged for his complete medical check-up by two German doctors who practiced there. Probably, on his suggestion, Iqbal finally decided to go to Vienna. He sent his medical reports to a close relative of his friend who was at that time a student of medicine in Vienna. Iqbal was mentally prepared to proceed to Vienna, but at the last moment he changed his mind on account of some domestic problems and the lack of traveling expenses. A few months later, he passed away.

Here, it would be interesting to mention that Iqbal, in a private gathering in Shalamar Garden (Lahore), was deeply moved by the two Austrian ladies who were invited there by the daughter of Daleep Sing, the last sikh ruler of the Punjab. He wrote two beautiful poems in Urdu (on seeing a cat in the lap of someone/on being presented with a flower) in which he has paid a homage to these Alpine beauties.

Before leaving the subject, I would like to add a few words about these seven illuminated Urdu manuscripts which are still extant in the "Handschriftenteilung" of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. Calligraphed and decorated by the royal scribes and painters, attached to the court of Wajid Ali Shah, the last ruler of Awadh, all this hand-written material provides the authentic information about the emperor's literary and artistic accomplishments, political maneuvering of the British colonialists, intriguing character of the influential courtiers and the inner life of the harem. Franz Unterkircher listed them briefly in his "Inventar der illuminierten Handschriften, Inkunabeln und Frühdrucke der ONB", but their significant contents deserve a comprehensive study and critical evaluation.

At the end, I would like to mention Schlegel's "Lebensplan" or "Lebensgefühl" that he expressed in the preface of his monumental work "Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammed" and that is:

... ganz asiatische Studien zu widmen, das Morgenland zu besuchen, dort zur Einföhrung europäische Kultur beizutragen und hinwieder eine richtige Kenntnis des Orients und seiner Literatur nach Europa zurückzubringen.