

GOETHE IN URDU LITERATURE

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Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832), a great poet and a versatile genius of German literature, has exerted powerful influence not only in his own country but also on the cultivated classes of the whole world. He has a multi-faceted personality: an eminent novelist and dramatist, a notable philosopher, an excellent professional scientist, a successful political administrator, a famous architect and brilliant statesman, but what has made him truly immortal is his richly expressive lyrical poetry. For his poetic lyricism some of the superb literary masterpieces of the Islamic Orient provided a source of inspiration, particularly the Persian poetry of Hafiz, that captivated his imagination and creative prowess, which ultimately resulted in the compilation of his *West-Oestlicher Divan (West-Eastern Divan, 1819)*. Besides, Goethe, from his youth, was attracted by the literary traditions of the Islamic Orient that touched his creative instincts. His approach to Islam, in general, was balanced and sympathetic and his deep interest in the literary heritage of the Muslims culminated in the form of the *Divan* that made him popular among the litterateurs of the Islamic world.

Deeply impressed by Goethe's creative approach to the cultural traditions of the Islamic Orient, Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) responded to Goethe with his gifted poetic attainments and introduced him to the poets and scholars of the South Asian subcontinent. Goethe's impartial intellectual leanings towards the cultural history of Islam brought Iqbal very close to him, and, finally, his poetic appreciation was consummated in the form of *Payam-i-Mashriq* ('Message of the East', in Persian, 1923) that was primarily written in response to Goethe's *Divan*, as stated by him in its preface. Remarkable tributes paid by Iqbal to Goethe in his poetic and prosaic works drew the attention of several Urdu writers to Goethe and their contributions, mostly translations and adaptations, have been briefly discussed here.

Without Goethe, from the West, and Rumi, from the East, Iqbal's picture remains incomplete, as he succeeds them, both spiritually and ideologically, and in whom these two streams of thought met. This intermingling is made into a metaphor of stream or 'living stream', a name adopted by Iqbal for himself in his celestial journey, starting from the smallest beginning and growing to be an immense spiritual power, expanding, unfolding, and gloriously ending in the ocean, the symbol of limitless entities. In this respect, Iqbal carries the other writers and thinkers with him like the stream does with small brooks and rivers. Under the influence of Iqbal's interest in Goethe's infinite imaginative powers, as depicted in his lyrical poetry, new fountains sprouted but their spontaneous overflow scarcely crossed Iqbal's creative limits.

According to Hennig, Goethe as 'the last man endowed with a universal knowledge', a genius with unlimited '*Lebensbreite*', was in close contact with the countries where English was widely spoken, not only during his life but also after his demise, through exhaustive critical and biographical studies and translations. Though the South-Asian subcontinent also belongs to the English-speaking world, but here Goethe received a very weak response, except some brief and cursory remarks in the writings of some literatures, mostly educated from the Western universities, of the early nineteenth century. Iqbal is, no doubt, the first prominent literary figure of the subcontinent who brought Goethe here and highly ranked him in the pantheon of the literary annals of this part of the world.

Modern period of Urdu literature commenced when it came directly under the sway of some British scholars/educationists in the second half of the nineteenth century. With their practical support and encouragement, new Western literary trends and stylistic techniques gradually crept in and the centuries-old traditional forms and subjects began to peter out. From the rich literary treasures of the West, only English literature solely contributed in reshaping the whole Urdu literature, but after some time, other European literatures, including German literature, exerted their influence on Urdu but in contrast to English literature their impact was not deep-rooted and was only confined to the personal literary pursuits of some writers and scholars. Furthermore, the Romantic Movement of Urdu literature might have played a vital role in fostering the interest of the literary personnel to other European literatures, as it is a historical fact that romanticists remained very receptive to other literatures and cultures. Early followers of this movement in Urdu turned their faces to literatures other than English literature and the literary journals started to propagate this movement by devoting much space to their writings.

From the corpus of Goethe's prose works, this superb short novel *Sufferings (or Sorrows) of Young Werther (Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, 1774)* was the first one that greatly attracted Urdu writers who had a strong background of Western literature. It was translated, obviously from English, about one year before Iqbal completed his *Payam*.

Werther, a sentimental and psychological novel in epistolary form, established Goethe's fame internationally. It comprises two parts: the first contains a somewhat biographical account of its author's unhappy infatuation for Charlotte ("Lotte") Buff (1753-1828), fiancée of his friend Johann Christian Kestner (1741-1800) in Wetzlar, and the second is based on the unfortunate experiences of Carl Wilhelm Jerusalem (1747-1772), secretary of the Brunswick ambassador, who in love with wife of a colleague, committed suicide. All these incidents and characters coincided with an incident that Goethe experienced in February 1774 at the house of the jealous husband of Maximiliane Brentano (1756-1793).

All these factors were incorporated in the plot of this novel. Apart from the fact that Goethe wrote *Werther* to purge himself of the despair engendered by his

love for Charlotte Buff (who married another man), this novel gave utterance to the reaction against the facile and optimistic rationalism of the elders that marked Goethe's time. The work has little healthiness of tone, and is infected with the malady of the age: the excessive sentimentalism of the closing eighteenth century.

Werther took the world by storm, because, in Thomas Carlyle's words, it gave expression to "the nameless unrest and longing discontent which was then agitating every bosom". The enthusiastic response of *Werther's* readers, its reprints, translations, sequels, imitations and dramatizations caused a *Werther Fieber* (Werther fever) the world over and some of our Urdu writers were also deeply affected by it.

The first Urdu translation of this epistolary novel was rendered by Muhammad Hadi Hussain under the title, '*Gham Nasib*' published in installments in the monthly literary journal called *Risalah Hazar Dastan* which commenced in the beginning of 1922. As an introduction to the first part, the translator has given some biographical details of Goethe and the salient characteristics of his novel, *Werther*. After a gap of almost two years, when the translation reappeared, Hadi Hussain again wrote an explanatory remark in which he clearly indicated that a monumental work of Goethe's youth, *Werther*, proved an incentive for his undertaking. He has also summarized the contents of its previous parts. It would be interesting to note here that the translator has referred to Iqbal's *Payam* as an "immortal book" written in response to Goethe's *Divan* and with it the name of Goethe became known in India.

The centennial death anniversary of Goethe in 1932 took place all over the world but on this international scholarly event India kept quiet and very few writers participated in it individually. One of such literary figures was Dr. Riyaz-ul-Hasan. He presented his Urdu translation of *Werther* on this occasion. It was published in 1933 with an exhaustive preface (pp.58) in which Goethe's life, philosophical thought, prosaic style and the varied aspects of the novel were discussed in detail. It is, no doubt, the first instance of translating in Urdu any prose work of Goethe in such a comprehensive and scholarly way.

Fully conversant with literary masterpieces of Europe and having scholarly grasp of major languages spoken there, including English, Dr. Riyaz-ul-Hasan still owes much to Allama Iqbal whom he met twice; once in 1930 at Allahabad and once in 1935 in Lahore. Obviously, he, like one of his other contemporaries, was also influenced by the new literary inclinations towards German literature, particularly Goethe, which were intensified after the publication of *Payam*. He sent a copy of his translation of *Werther* to Iqbal in 1933 and during his second meeting with him, they conversed about Goethe, in which Iqbal commented, "You did well for having translated this novel in Urdu, but it must be read after the age of forty, for youth is unable to bear this sentimental severity and style". The translator responded that at the time of writing, Goethe was in the prime of his youth. Iqbal replied in affirmation and explained, "Goethe was an extraordinary man. In spite of having been involved in love affairs, he had complete control over himself. My friends send their books to

me. My son, Javed often reads them, but I have concealed your translation behind the books, so that he could not see it. I don't like him to read it at this tender age of eleven".

Of all the principal works of Goethe, including *Divan*, Iqbal's mind and thought were dominated by Goethe's *Faust*, his crowning dramatic poem, which wrought a great change in Iqbal's poetic diction and philosophical concepts. First part of *Faust* portrays the small world of inner experience and the second part, the greater world of social institutions, ideological systems and intellectual institutions. Although some Urdu critics opined that after *Payam*, Iqbal must have translated *Faust* in Urdu, it is to be believed with a grain of salt as Iqbal was concerned with much bigger poetic and creative pursuits than a mere translation. Undoubtedly, Iqbal is the first literary figure of the subcontinent who was enamoured of the infinitude of Goethe's creative imagination and made pioneering efforts to introduce it among the indigenous intellectuals. Under the enormous influence of Iqbal's longstanding attachment with *Faust*, some Urdu writers attempted to translate it in their language. Dr. Sayyid Abid Hussain (1896-1878) was the first Indian scholar who translated *Faust* with detailed introduction (pp.123), containing Goethe's biography, analytical study of the major character and its leading conceptual aspects. It is not indicated whether the translator has used the original text or he rendered it from any English translation. Dr. Abid Hussain did his doctorate from Berlin in 1925 and during his stay in the German capital he was very active in literary pursuits. Thus, it is assumed that he might have pursued the original text of *Faust* for his translation. Unfortunately, this translation is confined only to the first part of *Faust* and he could not translate its second part. Iqbal also extended his hand of cooperation for its translation, as he was fully aware of its manifold difficulties on account of the astronomical and other scientific allusions. Nazir Niazi, a close associate of both Iqbal and Dr. Abid Hussain in *Jamia Millya*, Delhi, states:

"When I met Iqbal some days later (in August 1931) and *Faust* was mentioned in the course of conversation, he again inquired why Dr. Abid Hussain had not translated the second part. He also offered to help Dr. Abid Hussain in this task. We observed that the second part was a little difficult as it contained numerous terms connected with astronomy and chemistry and also some references and allusions with which the people of the West were not familiar and which were properly understood only by Orientals. He said, 'During my stay in Germany, I had many an occasion to offer clarifications and explanations of these terms and usages and this used to leave a profound impression on my German audience. It was his belief, that, if one had not studied and examined the history to the past one thousand years, he could not claim to be cultured and refined. How was it possible, therefore, for every German to be familiar with all the usages and allusions that Goethe had culled from Oriental literature? To us, these terms are words of daily use. I had no difficulty, whatsoever, in digesting these sections of *Faust*. The Germans really marvelled at the ease with which I explained these terms'".

At the same time, Iqbal was also eager to know whether Abid Hussain had translated the 'Prologue in Heaven' in the beginning of the first part of *Faust* or not, because he required this information for his fourth Persian book, *Javidnama*, the magnum opus of Iqbal (1932), that was in completion in those days. It is said that a section of this new Persian book under the title "Heavenly Introduction", is a mere translation or imitation of Goethe's 'Prologue in Heaven' but Iqbal's source is still unknown. Perhaps, he has used the original text or its English translation as both were available in his personal collection or Urdu rendering of Abid Hussain.

This translation of *Faust* in fluent and elegant style of Urdu prose gave an impetus to some other writers to do the same as Dr. Abid Hussain had done and translate they did but, somehow, they also wouldn't undertake the translation of the second part of this classic literary masterpiece of German literature. They did not know the German language and, therefore, they had to follow the English translations of *Faust*, mostly Bayard Taylor's translation, of 1870, which were also incomplete and erroneous in certain aspects. Interspersed with frequent modifications, alterations and additions in their poetic renderings of *Faust*, all these Urdu translations contained literary merits and played a vital role in fostering the general interest in Goethe.

It is evident that Iqbal was extremely fascinated by the two main characters of Goethe's poetic drama — Faust and Mephistopheles. The former is intended by the poet to represent all mankind and as a mirror of human existence which all men may learn from while the latter possesses the most outstanding characteristics of skepticism and having a demoniacal power represents the negative elements of human personality. This Mephistopheles as the necessary element of activation in life is also met with Iqbal's figure of colourful and multi-faceted picture of *Iblis*, urging man to emerge a stronger person with ballast of character than he was before out of this psychomachy thus making man a real man by initiating him into the strife of good and evil. Well-acquainted with the traditional portrayals of Satan and the positive and negative reactions of theologians and mystics towards the *Iblisian* figure, Iqbal, following Goethe, held that colourful *Iblis* will certainly continue to tempt or at least confuse people and, thus, will constitute the principle of fruitful restlessness in human life without which true spiritual development is impossible. Both Iqbal and Goethe think that the role played by Satan in man's life, made the human pulse beat and turned the inert and dead matter into pulsating life.

Iqbal's unique concept of Satan attracted several writers of his age and in Urdu literature we come across different ideas about Satan by reading "*Ma'ullim-ul-Malakut*" by Abdur Rehman Bijnori, "*Yazdan Shikar*" by Josh Malih Abadi, "*Falak Payma*" by Sajjad Ansari and "*Muwahid-e-Azam*" by Simab Akbar Adabi. Besides, the Goethean figure of Satan, directly or indirectly, had a lasting impact on Urdu theatre and many plays were written and enacted on the saga of Satan which symbolizes the acuteness of the recurrent problem of good and evil that man has to face throughout the centuries.

Apart from these incomplete translations and dramatic imitations of *Faust*, another important work of Goethe was translated in Urdu by Sayyid Abid Hussain and that was his two-part novel *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's* apprenticeship, 1796) and *Wilhelm Meister Wanderjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Travels*, 1829). The main character, Wilhelm Meister, son of a rich merchant, was to become a master actor, producer and eventually the founder of a national theater for the purification of the public taste. The work excels in realistic descriptions of the lives of actors, burghers and aristocrats.

This novel is technically termed *Bildungsroman*, a novel of development that shows the inner growth of the artist-hero as a result of his ever-widening experience of the surrounding world. This kind of novel was characterized by introspection typical of the German seeking spirit. *Wilhelm Meister* is partly autobiographical but Goethe's personality cannot be identified.

This voluminous translation of *Wilhelm Meister* is a valuable contribution to enrich the tradition, though not very rich, of translating German classics in Urdu. It also evinces the masterly skill and erudition of the translator that enabled him to attract the readers by the facile prose style. He had already written in detail about Goethe's life and thought in a comprehensive introduction to his translation of *Faust* and he did not like to repeat the same information. However, he remarked that both *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister* are inevitable to understand the basic concepts of Goethe. He also included a brief preface in Urdu written by Prof. Eduard Spranger, who was his teacher. He was a reputed educationist and also ranked among the great Goethean experts. He commented on some of the basic concepts of Goethe, expressed in this novel and the mental development of the educated middle class of that period of Germany.

In the preface of *Payam*, Iqbal expressed his inability to write a complete history of Oriental Movement in German literature on account of shortage of time and the scarcity of relevant material, but he was hopeful that the next generation would keep this tradition alive, firmly established by him. All the aforementioned translators of Goethe's works in Urdu and some other scholars like Mumtaz Hasan remained in contact with Iqbal who inculcated in them a peculiar scholarly taste for Goethe and his intellectual relationship with the Islamic Orient. In the post-Iqbalian period they endeavoured to follow their mentor and, thus, opened new avenues for the development of Urdu literature. However, much is yet to be done in this field. We are still lacking an Urdu translation of Part Two of *Faust* and the *Divan* to which Iqbal responded in the form of *Payam*. Any young and enthusiastic learned person can undertake the subject regarding the Oriental influences on German literature for further research, including Goethe, as derived by Iqbal in the introduction of *Payam*.

