

Interliterary Influence: Goethe in Iqbal

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Abstract:

Ikram Chughtai in his paper called “Goethe in Urdu Literature” (2015) mentions that Iqbal was the first to introduce Goethe to writers of the subcontinent through the many notable tributes he has paid to the philosopher in his works. One of the reasons Iqbal was so impressed by Goethe could have been his impartial intellectual inclination towards Islamic cultural history, and his creative approach towards Oriental Islamic traditions. Iqbal was of the opinion that “a real insight into human nature you can get from Goethe alone”, as he wrote in his *Stray Reflections* (1961, pg 108). Iqbal’s many such elaborate and remarkable tributes to Goethe are what introduced him to the subcontinent’s Urdu writers. Goethe in spite of the range of his study had not gained much fame in the subcontinent, but it was Iqbal’s *Payam-i-Mashriq*, which he wrote in response to Goethe’s *West-eastern Divan*, that really led to Goethe being known in the region. Even in his personal diary, Iqbal refers to the philosopher Goethe more often than the other thinkers that he has mentioned.

Through this study, I want to see how Jauss’s theory of reception can describe the reception of the ideas of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the German philosopher and writer, in the works of Allama Iqbal. Much work has been done on Goethe and Iqbal, for Iqbal’s adoration for Goethe is very evident in his work, not just through direct mentions of Goethe and some references of his life or place of burial, Weimar, but also through the ideas in his work which can be seen as fashioned from Goethe’s ideas. Having found this work to be similar to the analyses I had made on which to look at the effect of reception, I shall use them to provide the contexts for this exploration.

Keywords: Goethe, Iqbal, Reception Studies, Influence

Our Soul discovers itself when we come into contact with a great mind. It is not until I had realised the Infinitude of Goethe's imagination that I discovered the narrow breadth of my own.

– Allama Iqbal, “2. The Discovery” *Stray Reflections*.

Introduction

I've started with a quote from Allama Mohammed Iqbal's personal diary, published posthumously by his son Javed Iqbal in 1933 as *Stray Reflections*. In my opinion, this quote demonstrates well how much of an impact Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the German philosopher and writer, had on Iqbal. Having read through the diary, I found Iqbal referring to Goethe the most. Iqbal also wrote his Persian work, *Payam-i-Mashriq*, in response to Goethe's *West-eastern Divan*, who he refers to as a “Philosopher of Life” in the preface.

Ikram Chughtai (2015) in his paper titled “Goethe in Urdu Literature” mentions that Iqbal was the first individual to introduce Goethe to Urdu writers of the subcontinent through the many notable tributes he had paid to the philosopher in his works. One of the reasons Iqbal was so impressed by Goethe could have been his impartial intellectual inclination towards Islamic cultural history, and his creative approach towards Oriental Islamic traditions. Iqbal was of the opinion that “a real insight into human nature you can get from Goethe alone”, as he wrote in his *Stray Reflections* (1961, pg 108). Iqbal's many such elaborate and remarkable tributes to Goethe are what introduced him to the subcontinent's Urdu writers. Goethe in spite of the range of his study had not gained much fame in the subcontinent, but it was Iqbal's *Payam* that really led to Goethe being known in the region.

Through this study, I want to read how Jauss's theory of reception can describe the reception of the ideas of Goethe in the works of Allama Iqbal. Much work has been done on Goethe and Iqbal, for Iqbal's adoration for Goethe is very evident in his work, not just through direct mentions of Goethe and some references to his life and place of burial, Weimar, but also through the ideas in his work which can be seen as fashioned from Goethe's ideas. Having found this work to be similar to the analyses I had made while

reading for this study on which to look at the effect of reception, I shall use them to provide the contexts for this study.

A Study of the Reception of the Ideas of Goethe in the Works of Allama Iqbal

Hans Robert Jauss in his paper “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory” (1970) talks of how literature is received by the reader, not the way it is in the reader-response theory by individual readers as such, with a specific theoretical or structural lens in mind, but one that includes larger readerships, in the context of the entire literary histories they are familiar with, and the horizon of expectations that they bring when they engage with a text. This horizon of expectations is created by what a reader brings from their previous experiences with texts, ideas, and their own life experience too, which determine how well a new text is received by the reader, individual or collective (as a society or a nation), in terms of the theme, content, ideas, form and even the aesthetics of the text.

“The relationship of literature and reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications. The aesthetic implication is seen in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works which he has already read” (Jauss, 1970, p. 8).

How well a text fits in or how far it strays from the horizon of expectations, as well as where its aesthetic value stands in relation to the horizon, determines the way it is received.

A cursory glance at Iqbal’s life makes one think that he was introduced to Goethe during his time in Germany for his doctoral degree, as Goethe wasn’t very popular in the subcontinent. The time Iqbal spent in Germany well explains the enthusiasm and fascination for the German philosopher, but that wasn’t quite the case, though Iqbal’s time in Germany definitely multiplied Goethe’s charm for him. There is barely any explicit reference to Goethe in Iqbal’s writings from before 1907, but his very first reference to Goethe appears in a poem titled “Mirza Ghalib” (first published in a local literary journal at the very beginning of the 20th century, and later published in the volume of poetry *Bang-e-Dara*, 1924), where young Iqbal places the two dead poets side by side.

aah tū ujḌī huī dillī meñ ārāmīda hai
gulshan-e-vīmar meñ terā ham-navā khvābīda hai
(Alas! You rest in the ruins of Delhi,
In the gardens of Weimar lies your counterpart)

He describes them as unisonant in their poetic ideals but points out with regret that while Ghalib's grave lies in the ruinous part of the city, Goethe's resting place in Weimar is like a garden. In this poem, Iqbal praises Ghalib by drawing parallels with him and a few other literary figures and allusions that he reveres, and he talks of how he hopes such literary genius once again comes from the land of Ghalib. Referencing Goethe here as Ghalib's counterpart without mentioning him by name sets the tone of influence Goethe has on Iqbal right from his first mention in his works. Clearly, Iqbal had been impressed by Goethe before he visited the country, perhaps through reading translations that were available in the subcontinent after being introduced to his ideas through his rich literary education, as Chughtai points out, the creative inspiration for the line seems to have come from Mathew Arnold's "Memorial Verses" (Iqbal and Goethe, 2000, p. 26).

Reception in Goethe

Goethe himself is a great specimen to study the reception of culture and ideas from halfway across the world as he was greatly influenced by the Oriental Movement in Germany, where classical ideas of the East were revived and acclaimed, and taken inspiration from (Dowden, 1913). Jauss's paper seems to refer to a similar phenomenon of reception.

"That is, the literary past can only return when a new reception has brought it into the present again-whether it be that a different aesthetic attitude has intentionally taken up the past, or that a new phase of literary evaluation has expectedly illuminated past works" (Jauss, 1970, p. 26-27).

In the preface of *Payam-i-Mashriq* and in the foreword to Goethe's *Westeastern Divan*, many of Goethe's contemporaries and how they were influenced by the Oriental Movement are mentioned, a synchronic analysis of Goethe's period in literary history. I shall not go into detail on that as my

primary focus lies elsewhere, however, it is important to note that this movement inspired by the East was seen as a “second renaissance” by Schopenhauer (as qtd by E. Dickenson), a rebirth of the Eastern classics this time around.

Goethe’s political environment was oppressive as Napoleon expanded his dictatorial military rule beyond his nation. What Goethe found lacking around him, in the dominant cultural environment he was in, he found in the East. Ikram Chughtai (2000) in his book writes that Goethe had turned to the East for a wide range of consoling “escapist reading” that dealt with “new experiences”. This exposure to a different culture, with its different beliefs and philosophical history, played a great role in expanding Goethe’s horizon of expectations and was what pushed him toward the Orient from his position in the Occident, a shift that gave him a great sense of tranquillity and solace. Goethe was fascinated by the Muslim world and by poets like Hafiz.

Goethe had made plans to write a five-act drama based on the life of Prophet Muhammad (saw), which he discusses in his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The play was never completed and very little of it remains. One song from the play however remains in its entirety, called *Mahomet’s Gesang* (“Muhammad’s Song”), which was also a source of inspiration for Iqbal, to which he wrote his own response (a free translation of the poem which is part of his *Payam-i-Mashriq*).

Goethe’s *Divan* is clearly inspired by Hafiz, as Goethe interprets his work and responds to it, and in the process also absorbs much of what impressed him about the Orient. Elizabeth Dickenson Dowden (1913), in the foreword to her husband’s translation of Goethe’s *divan*, writes

“Goethe turned to the East as to a refuge from the strife of tongues, as well as from the public strife of European swords. There the heavens were boundless, and God the one God seemed to preside over the sand-waste. There Islam submission to God's will seemed to be the very rule of life.

Before all else, the merchandise which Goethe sought to purchase in the East was wisdom and piety and peace.”

It was in the works of Hafiz that Goethe found what he was truly looking for, internal piety and peace that need not be followed by rigorous

religious practice. The spontaneous impulse that Goethe saw in Hafiz's lyrics was also something that he related to personally. Another similarity between the two was that they both saw dictatorial or tyrant rulers, and like Hafiz (who lived during the rule of Timur), Goethe was able to "give the world the joy of his Ghazels" though neither was able to express dissent much.

Jauss looks at the history of literature as a process of reception and production, and I can't help but bring in this line from his paper as we can trace the lines of reception from Hafiz to Goethe and then to Iqbal.

"History of literature is a process of aesthetic reception and production which take place in realization of literary texts on the part of the receptive reader, the reflective critic and the author in his continued creativity" (Jauss, 1970, p. 10).

We see a clear chain of reception (from Goethe to Iqbal) of the received (of Hafiz) back in the same space, but centuries afterwards, into a horizon of expectations that has residual elements of the literary works (of Hafiz). Iqbal himself was also greatly inspired by Hafiz, and writes of him in his personal diary, "In words like cut jewels Hafiz put the sweet unconscious spirituality of the nightingale." (*Stray Reflections*, 1961, p. 119). Hafiz's mystical experience was lacking from both Goethe's and Iqbal's experiences, but Goethe was attracted enough by it to draw its influences into his own *Divan*. Iqbal on the other hand consciously kept his distance from the mystic effect and we can see the difference in his response to Goethe's *Divan*. Syed Wahiduddin in his essay "Goethe, Hafiz and Iqbal" writes "there is more of Hafiz in Goethe than there is Goethe in Iqbal." Even from Rumi, Iqbal takes a Nietzschean interpretation of Rumi's works, rather than being influenced by the mystic qualities of his works. Iqbal receives even from his local literary histories in light of his personal horizon of expectation (Wahiduddin, 2000, p. 303). As Jauss says in his essay

"The "judgement of the centuries" of a literary work is more than just "the collected judgments of other readers, critics, audiences and even professors"; it is the successive development of the potential meaning which is present in a work and which is gradually realized in its historical reception by knowledgeable criticism. This judge-

ment must, however, take place in contact with tradition and thus cause a controlled fusion of the horizons” (Jauss, 1970, p. 21).

Iqbal even with his Western ideological education retains some traditional elements and we see an interesting fusion of horizons, especially in his idealization of the *mard-e-momin* and his interpretation of *Iblis*, which I will elaborate on a little further ahead.

Stray Reflections, Iqbal's Personal Diary

Iqbal maintained a personal diary which was published by his son posthumously, where he recorded his thoughts and observations about the books he read, the society he lived in, and his epiphanies from his experiences. The style of writing that Iqbal uses in his diary is very similar to Goethe's *Maximen und Reflexionen*, which was also published posthumously. A book that Iqbal was known to have an English translation of, which he read regularly. Iqbal has written concise statements, which do not conceal the deep thought that has gone into writing them (Chughtai, *Iqbal and Goethe*, 2000, p. 30).

There are many entries that Iqbal has made in the diary about Goethe. Iqbal has compared him to other philosophers and writers and written statements admiring the genius of Goethe. Iqbal has described Goethe as the great mind whose infinite imagination made him aware of the limitations of his own (“2. The Discovery”, *Stray Reflections*, 1961). In other entries in his diary, he writes how Goethe is the only one who could provide a real insight into the human mind, and how it was his and Hegel's work that led him to the “inside” of things (108 and 36, *Stray Reflections*, 1961). Iqbal places Goethe side by side with Plato and Heine too. Of Plato and Goethe, Iqbal writes

“Nature was not quite decided what to make of Plato – poet or philosopher. The same indecision she appears to have felt in the case of Goethe” (*Stray Reflections*, 1961, p. 97).

While writing of Heine and Goethe he writes in envy of the German nation

“No nation was so fortunate as the Germans. They gave birth to Heine at the time when Goethe was singing in full-throated ease. Two uninterrupted springs!” (*Stray Reflections*, 1961, p. 118).

He is also known to have told all those who sought advice from him that if they desired to pursue a deep study of any branch of learning, Germany should be their goal (*Iqbal and Goethe*, 2000, p. 27).

Apart from his reflections and observations contrasting the German philosopher with other writers and philosophers in his *Stray Reflections* (1961), he’s also placed Goethe alongside others in his poetry in other writings (like Ghalib, whom I have already addressed, and Rumi, whom I shall address ahead.)

In his personal diary, Iqbal also made many interesting comments that demonstrate how impressed he was by Goethe and his work *Faust*. Chughtai (2015) in his essay “Goethe in Urdu literature” writes that of all of Goethe’s writings, *Faust* was the one that influenced Iqbal’s poetic diction and philosophical concepts the most. The first part of *Faust* lays out the small world of inner experience while the second part describes the larger world of social institutions, ideological systems and intellectual systems.

During his time in Germany, the land of Goethe, a poet he held in reverence even before he went to the country for his research, Iqbal got help in reading and understanding Goethe’s *Faust* from Emma Wegenast. A mutual liking that lasted even after Iqbal returned back home from Germany, their conversations and discussions around *Faust* stayed fresh with Iqbal for years. About Goethe’s *Faust* Iqbal writes in his diary

“It is Goethe’s Faust ... which reveals the spiritual ideals of the German nation. And the Germans are fully conscious of it” (“44. The Spiritual Ideal of the German Nation” *Stray Reflections*, 1961).

Another entry in his diary referring to the drama reads

“Goethe picked up an ordinary legend and filled it with the whole experience of the nineteenth century – nay, the entire experience of the human race. This transformation of an ordinary legend into a systematic expression of man’s ultimate ideal is nothing short of Divine workmanship. It is as good as the creation of a beautiful universe out of the chaos of formless matter” (“48. Goethe’s Faust” *Stray Reflections*, 1961).

In comparing Goethe with Shakespeare in his *Stray Reflections*, Iqbal suggested that both had rethought divine creation but the difference between them was that the “realist Englishman rethinks the individual: the idealist German, the universal”. Iqbal also wrote about Goethe’s Faust, that he “is a seeming individual only. In reality, he is humanity individualised” (2000, p. 112).

The Faustian Ideal and Mephistopheles in Iqbal’s Conceptualisation of the “*mard-e-momin*” and “*Iblis*”

Professor Annemarie Schimmel in the foreword to Ikram Chughtai’s “Iqbal and Goethe” draws similarities between Iqbal’s *Iblis* and Goethe’s Mephistopheles and points out how the “*mard-e-momin*” seems like an embodiment of the Faustian ideal along with certain influences of the Sufi standard (2000). The characters of Goethe’s *Faust*, Faust and Mephistopheles mesmerised Iqbal so much, he fashioned his own ideology of the “*mard-e-momin*”, and what he has imagined as the devil, “*Iblis*”. Chughtai in “Goethe in Urdu Literature” analyses Goethe’s characters. Faust is a representation of all of mankind, a mirror of human existence and experience, a character that man can learn from, while Mephistopheles is a depiction of the negative elements of human personality, such as scepticism, along with a “demoniacal power” (2015). This image of the devil created by Goethe, and retained in essence by Iqbal, acts as “the necessary element of activation in life”, where man becomes a real man, developing strength and character after he experiences the clash and strife of good and evil. Chughtai also writes in the same paper

“... Iqbal, following Goethe, held that the 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 “*mard-e-momin*” is a man who has learnt to balance love and wisdom, with a well-developed ego. He believes in a higher power, that of

God and loves Him and His creation sincerely and not just for the rewards that are associated with such love. This love of a power greater than the world always keeps the “*mard-e-momin*” from getting absorbed into worldly affairs, for though he is aware of his self, his desires and his ego, he is controlled by his greater love for God (Jamal, “The Perfect Man of Iqbal”, 2003).

This particular instance of reception, one where the characters of Goethe have shaped the ideals created by Iqbal seems to be a good example of what Gadamer describes as reception – a process of *mimesis*, and of recognition. Jauss quotes Gadamer as follows

“What one actually experiences in a work of art and what one looks for is, how true it is, that is, how much it makes one know and recognise the world and one’s own self” (1970, p. 22).

Jauss believes this isn’t an accurate explanation of reception, though he agrees that it may be true in some cases. This is one such instance, in my opinion of *mimesis* of ideas, while Iqbal’s *Stray Reflections* is another such example of *mimesis* of form.

Payam-i-Mashriq, a Response to Goethe’s West-Ostlicher Divan (West-Eastern Divan)

Right after the end of the First World War, Iqbal decided to write a response to Goethe’s *Divan*, hoping to, like Goethe find respite from the cold of the West in the ideas of the East (*Iqbal and Goethe*). It was well-publicised and had been presented to the public with the intention of “warming the cold thoughts and ideas of the West”, as Iqbal put it in a private letter a while before the volume was published (*Iqbal and Goethe*, 34-35).

Iqbal’s *Payam-i-Mashriq* has been considered a true attempt at dialogue, of the East with the West. Even though there isn’t much in terms of matter that corresponds with its inspiration, there is some similarity in terms of form. Interestingly, in the second edition, there are two additional poems, of which one (“*Ju-e-Ab*”) is a free translation of Goethe’s *Mahomet’s Gesang* and the other (“*Hur-o-Sha’ir*”) is a reply to “*Huri und Dichter*”.

In the preface of his Persian volume of poetry written in response to Goethe's *Divan*, Iqbal writes

“I need not say much about A Message from the East, which has been written a hundred-odd years after the West-Oestlicher Divan. My readers will by themselves appreciate that the main purpose underlying it is to bring out moral, religious and social truths bearing on the inner development of individuals and nations.” (*Payam-i-Mashriq*, Author's Preface, Iqbal, 1923).

Even though at the time of writing their respective texts, the contemporary political situations that Goethe and Iqbal lived in were similar, the approach both of them took to writing was tremendously different. While Goethe's desire to write his *Divan* was more of an overflow of uncritical and consuming interest in the works of Hafiz and the literary heritage of the East, Iqbal's motivation to write a response to Goethe's *Divan*, was not personal in anything except his admiration for the German philosopher, and his writing remains critical and rational.

“The East, and especially the Muslim East, has opened its eyes after a centuries-long slumber. But the nations of the East should realise that life can bring about no revolution in its surroundings until a revolution takes place in its inner depths and that no new world can take shape externally until it is formed in the minds of men” (*Payam-i-Mashriq*, Author's Preface, Iqbal, 1923).

Iqbal's response to the *West-Ostlicher Divan* was written with a purpose. He wanted to address the people of the East to remind them that they had to work towards the revolution that they wanted to see. He substantiated his point with a reference to the Holy Quran as well.

“This ineluctable law, which has been stated by the Quran in the simple but eloquent words, “Verily, God does not change a nation until it changes itself” [xiii. 11] governs both the individual and the collective spheres of life; and it is the truth of this law that I have tried to keep in view in my Persian works” (*Payam-i-Mashriq*, Author's Preface, Iqbal, 1923).

Payam-i-Mashriq, like Iqbal's other works, was subtle in the emotion it presented and didn't dilute his complex philosophical style. The preface to the text was something unseen in Urdu literature, as here, Iqbal had listed out the chain of influence for his text and the text that inspired it. He also mentioned how he writes inspired by Goethe's *Divan* but writes to address social and moral issues present in his own time. Jauss in his essay describes such a phenomenon of reception too.

"It also demands the ordering of the individual work in its "literary series" so that its historical position and significance in the context of literary experience can be recognized. Literary history based on the history of reception and impact will reveal itself as a process in which the passive reception of the reader and critic changes into the active reception and new production of the author, or in which – stated differently – a subsequent work solves formal and moral problems that the last work raised and may then itself present new problems" (Jauss, 1970, p. 23).

Iqbal's handwritten draft of *Payam-i-Mashriq* has more brief poems and verses, than were published, some of which had more references to Goethe as well, like a poem that was written as a dialogue between Ghalib and Goethe, but only Ghalib's verse was published. Another poem that featured an array of poets from the Orient and the Occident (including Goethe) was also excluded from publication. A poem named "Jalal and Goethe" however remains in the published volume. This poem describes a meeting between Jalaluddin Rumi and Goethe in heaven, where Goethe tells him of his *Faust*. Rumi applauds it, and the great truths it tells but adds that Love isn't something that all can experience, as it needs to be experienced through the divine (a secret that the Devil has kept to himself, as man alone is capable of experiencing it).

The text was also meant to address the people of the West, who were "licking their wounds after the First World War" as Chughtai put it (2000). The above-mentioned poem is one instance of how Western ideas were subtly but clearly criticised by Eastern ideas in the text. As Iqbal mentions in his preface to *Payam-i-Mashriq* (1923), "Europe has seen with its own eyes the horrible consequences of its intellectual, moral and economic objectives", which leads me to reiterate the context of reception in this case

that allowed for a response that was in keeping with the times of the author and was used to put across his philosophy of the East and the West.

“The task of literary history is not completed until the literary work is not only synchronically and diachronically presented in the sequence of its systems but also seen as special history in its own unique relationship to general history. ... The social function becomes manifest only where the literary experience of the reader enters the horizon of expectations of his life, forms his interpretation of the world, and thereby has an effect on his social actions” (Jauss, 1970, p. 31).

I refer again to Jauss as the reception of Goethe’s *Divan* in Iqbal’s *Payam-i-Mashriq* is very sequential and rooted in history, and both texts take their readers into a broader horizon of expectation.

Conclusion

The detailed study of the influence that Goethe has had on the works and thoughts of Iqbal presented above, displays how the deep influence that Goethe had on the ideology and writing of Iqbal, was fuelled at least initially by a profound reverence and admiration which continued throughout his life. However, this sentiment seemed quite controlled during the publication of *Payam-i-Mashriq*, as quite a few poems and verses with references to Goethe weren’t part of the published version, though they were part of the draft.

Both Goethe and Iqbal present great cases for the study of reception, but I chose to work on the latter as the “series” quality of reception could be looked at better in this case, especially with the possibility of the study of the reception of something that was received, that produced a great change in the horizon of expectation from the texts that were produced following it. Both were inspired by philosophies and literature that came from far beyond the horizon of expectations that existed at their respective time but they were so impressed that their ideologies changed to accommodate the horizon brought by their new readings. Jauss writes that “The interpretative reception of a text always presupposes the context of the experience of aesthetic perception” (1970, pg 13), and a larger aesthetic distance makes a

work more profound as it requires a change of horizon. Something that was true for both Goethe and Iqbal in terms of what they read, and what they wrote.

Iqbal was a great admirer of Goethe and his enduring ideas, like that of “*mard-e-momin*” and his conceptualization of “*Iblis*” were directly inspired by the ideas of Goethe, from his favourite text of Goethe’s, *Faust*. The tone of his personal diary was also fashioned from Goethe’s. He, however, wasn’t mystically inspired like Goethe, and so could keep his writing more philosophical and grounded in his socio-religious reality than Goethe had.

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