

Gita Dharampal-Frick, Ali Usman Qasmi, Katia Rostetter, Axel Monte.
Revisioning Iqbal as a poet and Muslim political thinker. Heidelberg: Draupadi Verlag, 2010. 231 S. paper, ISBN 978-3-937603-43-8.



Reviewed by Dietmar Rothermund

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (March, 2011)

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) was a creative poet who harboured deep internal contradictions. He is claimed to be the „Father of Pakistan“, but he rejected territorial nationalism and favoured Pan-Islamic ideas, praising the solidarity of the community of believers (ummah). He was influenced by Persian culture and wrote many of his poems in Persian. His doctoral thesis at Munich university was devoted to Persian metaphysics, but he criticized Persian mysticism and admired the strong will of the Arabs of the desert. He wanted to reconcile Islam with the modern thought of the West, but he was also proud of the ancient glory of Islamic realms. As Abdul Wahab Suri states in his contribution to this volume: „The pre-understanding of the orthodox Islamist reveals a hawkish, vibrant, anti-imperialist Iqbal... the pre-understanding of the secularist reveals a modern, progressive, secular, individualistic Iqbal...“

The essays in the present volume portray the full spectrum of Iqbal's life and thought. Altogether eleven authors have contributed to this volume, but only some contributions will be reviewed here. The first part of the book is devoted

to Iqbal's poetry, the second to his politics and the third to his philosophy. Christina Oesterheld begins the poetic section with a comparison of Iqbal's poem on a night on the bank of the Neckar with Goethe's „Wanderers Nachtlied“ to which she adds perceptive remarks on Iqbal's interest in Goethe. Stephan Popp discusses Iqbal's poetic affinity to Nietzsche's thought and tells us, that „Iqbal's poetry places cuckoo's eggs into the reader's mind, with a well-known Persianate shell but with content that is not at all traditional.“ Qazi Jamal Husain highlights Iqbal's admiration of Muslim Spain. Iqbal visited Spain in 1932. In his famous poem „Tariq's Prayer“ he celebrated the Muslim conqueror of Andalusia. He also devoted another of his great poems to the Mosque of Cordoba.

In the section on politics, Inayatullah Baloch's essay on „Islamic Universalism, the Caliphate and Muhammad Iqbal“ is of special interest. With his Pan-Islamist views, Iqbal should have been a defender of the Caliphate when it was threatened by the British. The Ottoman Caliph had issued a fatwa declaring jihad against the British at the be-

ginning of the First World War. This greatly stirred Indian Muslims, but Iqbal remained silent, he also did not join the Khilafat movement led by Gandhi and his Muslim associates in 1920. Those whose hearts had been touched by Iqbal's Pan-Islamic poetry were shocked when he accepted a knighthood from the British in 1923. Baloch proposes a socio-economic explanation for Iqbal's behaviour. He stresses that Iqbal had to look after a large family and could not afford to displease the British. This could explain his silence, but does not account for his actively soliciting the grant of a knighthood. There seems to be no doubt that Iqbal was a loyalist in spite of his utterances as a „warrior of words“ – as Iqbal called himself. He also supported Ata Türk when he abolished the office of the Caliph and endorsed Turkish nationalism although he otherwise rejected territorial nationalism.

The section on Iqbal's philosophy begins with the essay by Hans Harder on „Hazy Aryan Mysticism and the Semitic Desert Sun' Iqbal on Arabs and Persians, Semites and Aryans“. Harder quotes Iqbal who admonishes his reader in 1917: „Come, then, out of the fogs of Persianism and walk into the brilliant desert sunshine of Arabia“. The „fog“ to which Iqbal referred was mysticism and the „Arabian sunshine“ was the strong monotheism which Iqbal preferred to his earlier fascination with Persian metaphysics. In striving to „modernize“ Islam, Iqbal relies more on the realism and voluntarism which he sees embodied in the Arabs as against the otherworldly piety of the Persian and Indian mystics. Iqbal felt that this mysticism had led to degeneration. Harder does not say so, but it seems that Iqbal's hero-worship of the Arabs would go well with the „hawkish“ tendencies which attracted his orthodox readers as pointed out by Abdul Wahab Suri in the last essay of this book. Iqbal's „hawkish“ voluntarism was probably inspired by Nietzsche's thought. Qasmi refers briefly to Nietzsche in his introductory essay, Popp shows the reflection of Nietzsche's ideas in a ghazal by Iqbal, but there is more to the rela-

tion between Nietzsche and Iqbal. A detailed essay on the two thinkers would have been welcome.

Gita Dharampal-Frick deserves to be congratulated for getting this group of authors together in a conference held at Heidelberg in November 2007 and publishing this volume in good time together with Ali Usman Qasmi and Katia Rostetter.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Dietmar Rothermund. Review of Dharampal-Frick, Gita; Usman Qasmi, Ali; Rostetter, Katia; Monte, Axel. *Revisioning Iqbal as a poet and Muslim political thinker*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. March, 2011.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32750>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.