

MUNSHI FAZAL ELAHI MARGOOB RAQAM:
THE FIRST CALLIGRAPHER OF
IQBAL'S POETRY

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta

ABSTRACT

In the 20th century Lahore was the nucleus of Islamic calligraphy. A number of calligraphers of Punjab contributed for the development of art of calligraphy in Lahore. During the same era, Allama Iqbal earned a title: “Poet of the East”. He was in search of a skilled calligrapher for scribing his poetry for publication. Finally he selected Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam for the Calligraphy of his book *Asrar-e-Khudi*, the first edition of which was published in 1915. It is preserved in the collection of Allama Iqbal Museum, Lahore. In the present study, the contribution of Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam is being highlighted with the special reference of the Calligraphy of the Allama Iqbal’s poetic works published by Margoob Agency Lahore.

Allama Iqbal himself appears to have acquired the expertise in Calligraphy. He certainly had a good sense of calligraphy. Very few people know that Allama Iqbal, apart from being a great poet, was also a great connoisseur of the art of Calligraphy and was indeed himself a competent calligrapher of *Shikasta Script*.¹ His talent as a calligrapher has so far remained hidden because of his pre-eminence as a poet not only at national level but also of international repute. It was a normal practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the Punjab,² particularly in the Sialkot and Gujranwala Districts to emphasize on learning the art of calligraphy by young children during the early days of their schooling. The best example of Iqbal's Calligraphy is in the form of three letters written to Abdul Majeed Perveen Raqam, another renowned calligrapher of the time. In these letters he gave Parveen Raqam, instructions with regard to the calligraphy of his other book: *Bal-i-Jibril*.³

Allama Iqbal was very serious about the selection of calligraphers for composing his poetry for publication. It speaks for his taste of calligraphy. All of the calligraphers selected by him were highly experienced persons. Allama Iqbal, himself was a prominent figure for his writing in Shikasta style of calligraphy. All the manuscripts of his books were written in his own handwriting in Shikasta Script. Examples of his calligraphy in Shikasta script are, available in Allama Iqbal Museum, Javed Manzil, Lahore.⁴

Lahore has always been an important centre of calligraphy during 20th century. But the city instead, could not develop a style of its own, it corroborated with the imperial style that originated in Dehli. After the decline of Mughal rule in India, Lahore turned to be the capital of Sikh regime. The court of Raja Ranjeet Singh was again a centre of artists and artisans. For a list of calligraphers of Sikh period one may turn to the pages of *Tarikh-e-Lahore* by Kanahyalal.⁵ In Lahore, there were a number of reputed calligraphers around the Iqbal's residence inside Bhati Gate. Among them were two calligraphers named Abdul Majeed Perveen Raqam who had his seat in Chowk Masti inside Lahori Gate and Tajjuddin Zareen Raqam having his working places (*baitbaks*) in *Bathek-e-Katiban* inside Lahori Gate. Another prominent calligrapher named Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam, established Margoob Printing Agency in the same

area. As a matter of fact, various experiments were made in the field of calligraphy after Imam Verdi who died in Lahore in 1880. These three masters of Islamic calligraphy in Lahore followed Imam Verdi and also developed their own individual styles. Their styles are reflected in the books of Iqbal's poetry scribed by them.⁶ We may divide the calligraphy of poetic works of Allama Iqbal in three different periods:

- i. Calligraphy of Iqbal's poetry in his own supervision
- ii. Calligraphy of Iqbal's poetry after his death
- iii. Calligraphy of Iqbal's poetry after 1947 to date

The following calligraphers have been noticed through primary sources displayed in Allama Iqbal Museum, who scribed Iqbal's poetry during his life time.⁷ Among them Munshi Fazal Elahi Margooob Raqam calligraphed Iqbal's book *Asrar-e-Khuddi* in 1915. Secondly Munshi Abdul Qudus used to scribe Iqbal's poetry on front page of daily newspapers before 1947. Whereas Munshi Abdul Majeed Perveen Raqam⁸ calligraphed most of the poetic works of Allama Iqbal and Haji Din Muhammad Lahori designed several posters of Iqbal's election campaign in the year 1926. Munshi Tajuddin Zareen Raqam was also contemporary calligrapher of the same period who scribed Iqbal's *Shikwa and Jawab Shikwa*. Muhammad Siddique Almas Raqam also calligraphed poetic work of Iqbal titled as *Zaboore-e-Ajam*.⁹ Maulvi Abdullah Warsi of Kot Waris calligraphed the famous poem of Allama Iqbal, *Walida Marboma Ke Yad Mein*.¹⁰ The above said calligraphers were very close to Allama Iqbal.

The calligraphers who scribed Iqbal's poetry after his death are mostly the disciples of above prominent calligraphers. Among them are Muhammad Iqbal Ibne Parveen Raqam, son of Abdul Majeed Parveen Raqam a famous calligrapher of Iqbal's poetry, Mehmood Ullah Siddiqui a disciple of Parveen Raqam who calligraphed Iqbal's poetry published by Sheikh Ghulam Ali & Sons and Jamil Ahmed Tanveer Raqam who was nephew of Muhammad Siddique Almas Raqam. Jamil Ahmed Tanveer Raqam calligraphed *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* in Irani Style of Nastaliq published by Iqbal Academy, Pakistan.

After 1947 to date following calligraphers have been reported, who calligraphed in the Nastaliq style:

Hafiz Muhammad Yousaf Siddeedi, Syed Anwar Hussain Nafees Raqam, Sufi Khurshid Alam Khurshid Raqam, Muhammad Ikram ul Haq, Khurshid Alam Gohar Qalam, Muhammad Jamil Hassan, M. Shafi Anwar Sialvi, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta, Ahmad Ali Bhutta, Abdul Rehman and Abdul Raheem. All of them contributed a number of Iqbal's verses in Nastaliq Style in Lahore whereas Kahlid

Javed Yousafi and Rashid Butt did the same in Islamabad. Aslam Kamal has introduced his new style which is close to Kufic style of calligraphy. His artistic work has been displayed in the galleries of Aiwan e Iqbal.

The above said calligraphers have contributed a fair number of verses of Iqbal's poetry in their own styles on canvas, paper and stone which now form of collection of master pieces of calligraphy.

Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam belonged to *Sabanke*, two miles away from Papnakha Village near Qila Deedar Singh, District Gujranwala. He was the meternal grandfather of Professor Karamat Ullah ex-Principal M.A.O. College, Lahore. He always used the title of "Margoob Raqam". He was so popular with this pen name that the very few people knew his full name. His *Batbek* was in Chowk Masti, where a good number of calligraphers used to calligraph the poetry of renowned poets of Lahore in the Walled City such as Maulana Hali, Mirza Arshad Gorgani, Meher Naz Hussain, Nazar Lakhnawi, Khan Ahmed Hussain Khan, Agha Hasher Kashmiri, Ghulam Bheekh Narang, Kahwaja Dil Muhammad and several other prominent poets of Lahore. The works of some of these were calligraphed by Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqm.

Another contemporary calligrapher named Maulvi Abdul Majeed of Adil Garhi used the same title in his contemporary works of Quranic calligraphy. He died in 1948. Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam was also the owner of Margoob Agency and successfully competed with another renowned publisher - M/S J.S. Sant Singh in Lahore.

Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam has established an institution at *Chonk Masti Bazar Dogran* for the training of his pupils in the Nastaliq Style of Calligraphy. He was owner of trader machine for printing purpose. Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam has written lessons for trainees and got printed through his own agency. A number of calligraphers learned the art of calligraphy from him, among them were Abdul Gani, Noor Ahmed, Muhammad Latif, Sanaullah and Haji Muhammad Azam. After the death of Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam in 1916, his agency competed to the printing of commercial works. The first and the last book of the Allama Iqbal he calligraphed was *Asrar-e-kehudi*.¹¹ It was published by Margoob Agency in 1916 and his name appeared as:

بقلم مرغوب رقم ۱۹۱۵ء

Munshi Fazal Elahi Margoob Raqam had a close relation with Allama Iqbal. Whenever Allama Muhammad Iqbal recited his poetry in the meetings of Anjuman Hamayat Islam, Lahore, the same was

printed in pocket size pamphlet by the Margooob Agency and all the copies were sold out on the spot. He was the first calligrapher of Iqbal's poetry. The manuscript of *Asrare Khudi* now, placed in the preserved collection of Allama Iqbal Museum was calligraphed by him and published by Hakim Faqir Muhammad Cheshti Nizami¹² from Union Steam Press. After the publication of this book other reputed calligraphers also attained Iqbal's attention for the calligraphy of his other books like *Bal-e-Jibreel*, *Bang-e-Dara*, and *Zarba-e-Keleem*. The selection of the Calligraphers of his poetic works shows Iqbal's skillful expertise in the field of Calligraphy.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- ² Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta, *Muslim Calligraphy in the Sub-Continent* Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan. Vol-xxxvi, No.21999, p. 61.
- ³ The letter No. ACC No. AIM 1977,417/1-3 written to Abdul Majeed Perveen Raqam by Allama Iqbal are exhibited in Allama Iqbal Museum, Lahore.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Kanaiya Lal, *Tehreke-Lahore*, Majlis Taraqiye Adab-1996. p. 93.
- ⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *Kalam-e-Iqbal Ki Kitabat*, M.Phil thesis, Allama Iqbal University, Islamabad.
- ⁷ Malik Ali Muhammad, *Lahore ke Khush Navees*, Naqoosh Lahore, Vol-II, Idara Farogh Urdu p. 1065, 1992.
- ⁸ Professor Muhammad Aslam, *Khustgani Khak-e-Lahore*, Research Society of Pakistan, Punjab University, Lahore. March-1993.
- ⁹ Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta, *Lahore our Fann-e-Khatati*, Ilm-o-Irfan, Publishers, Dec. 2007, p. 179.
- ¹⁰ Ibid p. 248.
- ¹¹ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrar-e-khudi*, Union Steam Press, 1915.
- ¹² Hakim Faqir Muhammad Chishti was a famous personality of Lahore who contributed a lot in the Art of Calligraphy. He did efforts to introduce Lahori style of Nastaliq which are developed by Abdul Majeed Parveen Raqam.