

Book Review

The Book of Fate to See the Revolution of Time – A Trendsetter

(Translated from Urdu into English by Amina Yar Khan).

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Poetry does not become great unless it inspires the investigation of the fundamental issues related to human existence and the universe. Great poetry is the poetry of great questions. This leads to hunger. Hunger is of two kinds; one kind is related to the stomach while the other one, a more severe one, is the hunger of the search for meaning. The hunger for meaning is a very intense experience as it strikes the very core of our bones. Without this hunger, no human can reach the fulfilment of self. The search for meaning is the primary objective of poetry, literature in general, all the religions and all the philosophy.

Shahab comes from a renowned and illustrious family but we had never met before I discovered him in 2012 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was going through a crucial (intellectual) phase at that time. Shakespeare was familiar to me since the days of my MA studies. However, it was in Shahab that I found the personified image of these studies. I have had the opportunity of meeting many people of grand stature in my life. One among them is Dr. Martin Lings. I often quote one of his sentences, 'intellect has its own right'. I had the bliss of enjoying the company of Dr Lings and discussing with him '*Secrets of Shakespeare*', the most challenging book in Shakespearean studies. It was similar to the way when I was taken aback after going through Kumara Swami's discourses on Plato's writings. Wondering if this is Plato, what I had been taught during

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my studies of MA philosophy! Either that was not Plato or Kumara Swami had been discussing someone else, also called Plato. Exactly, what I had read earlier through A. C. Bradley and C. S. Lewis was not Shakespeare or Dr. Lings was talking about some other playwright. Besides, Mohammad Iqbal's famous poem, *Shakespeare*, was also in the background playing its role.

I believe that the real culprit (for this mental agony) was the post-Renaissance criticism, especially the one dealing with Shakespeare. It was the same question striking again, if Shakespeare is the one described by Martin Lings, what I was going through in my MA studies! I figured out that mainstream academia had been missing the main point in the works of Shakespeare due to the grand conceptual shift which defines post-Renaissance wisdom. The triangle of God-universe and mankind, always helping us to relocate and define our place in the scheme of existence, was brought to disruption. Martin Lings' argument made sense to me that Shakespeare's concept of this triangle had seeds elsewhere, not in the Renaissance.

This was the state of mind when I first met Shahab. We talked constantly on the issue and now when he finally penned down his thoughts, I saw with clarity for the first time what Martin Lings was trying to explore in *Secret of Shakespeare*. In Ling's case, the entire traditional world of academia stood opposed to him. His beloved teacher, C. S. Lewis was disappointed in him. He was a victim of the conspiracy of silence that English academia adopts against challenges posed to the established theories. In conversation with Shahab, this entire confusion was in my mind and I must say that I felt some kind of embarrassment as well during the course of our conversation; listening to him, I felt dwarfed. Good Lord! This was the way Shakespeare needed to be read, needed to be taught and needed to be enacted. Shahab's clear approach and his sound research are trendsetters. He proves that Shakespeare's concept of the triangle of God-universe-mankind did not come from the Renaissance; it has its origin in the Orient (not in the Occident). Rene Guenon once said, 'Contrary to the accepted notion of Renaissance, in reality, it was not the rebirth of many things but rather a death of many things'. Shahab dares to vocalize the thought which was considered a madman's cry. Many, perhaps, think of him as a lunatic as well but what he has done is inspirational. His work is the chain of continuity of an illustrious tradition.

Shahab has removed the rust of the Renaissance from Shakespeare's concept of God-universe-mankind. It was something that we were subjected to go through time and time again. He liberates us from it (Renaissance) and leaps forward from traditional thinking.

This book is the first step; there are three more volumes in preparation which will determine the true value of the works of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is the most celebrated writer in the world, no doubt, but that appreciation is due to some other qualities not due to the true spiritual worth of his works. In bringing out the hidden treasures of Shakespeare to the limelight and liberating Shakespeare from stereotypes, Shahab's book must be valued very highly.

I hope that the remaining three volumes appear soon. This project is going to be a milestone and a turning point in Shakespearean studies.