

Iqbal's *Javid Nameh* The Intertextual Context

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Javid Nameh, in certain ways, occupies the most outstanding place in the entire corpus of Iqbal's writings. There is no doubt that the whole of Iqbal is relevant to our situation in one way or the other. *Mathnavi Asrar-u-Rumuz* is a comprehensive programme for individual and collective revival. *Payam-i Mashriq*, inspired by Goethe's *West-Oeslicher Divan*, is a potent source of inspiration and revivification of the soul. For the West it constitutes an excellent poetic extension of the cryptic theme contained in four short lines from *Zarb-i Kaleem*:

وہے کہ جس سے روشن ہو ادراک	رکھتا ہے اب تک میخانہ شرق
ان امتوں کے باطن نہیں پاک ¹	اہل نظر ہیں یورپ سے نومید

About *Zubur-i 'Ajam*, Iqbal himself remarked:

فغانِ نیم شبی بے نواسے راز نہیں ²	اگر ہو ذوق تو خلوت میں پڑھ زبورِ عجم
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Mathnavi Pas chi Bayed Kard is a heart-piercing address to the suffering East, a recipe to cure its ills. *Bang-i Dira* is an account of the evolution of his thought and art, containing such masterpieces as *Tul'u-i Islam*, *Khidhr-i Rah* and *Shikwah* and *Jawab-i Shikwah*. *Bal-i Jibreel*, the maturest fruit of his poetic thought and art in Urdu brings to us such valuable gifts as the *Masjid-i Qurtaba*, *Zouq-u Shouq* and *Saqi Nameh* in addition to its inimitable ghazals. *Zarb-i Kaleem* which he significantly subtitled as:

اعلانِ جنگِ دورِ حاضر کے خلاف (A Declaration of War on the Present Age), pricks with a doctor's lancet the diseased body of modern civilization, pronouncing at every prick 'thou ailest here and here.' *Armughan-i Hijaz* is his will, his last testament in four divisions, each division as heart-penetrating as the other. Its Urdu part contains in it, among other things, *Iblis ki Majlis-i Shura* (The Advisory Council of the Devil), a scintillating dramatic masterpiece in Urdu.

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Even so, if one were to choose one single work of Iqbal, it will certainly be *Javid Nameh*. Apart from its being an exquisite blend of lyricism, fiction, epic, drama and poetry, its greatest virtues are that i) it is immediately relevant to our conditions and ii) it surveys man and universe and the panorama of human history from a vantage point beyond which human imagination cannot go – the vantage point afforded by a M'iraj-like experience. Objectivity and balance characterise the whole work and yet it is the usual, authentic Iqbal supplying us with an exquisite exemplification of the coalescence of the subject and the object. In consequence wisdom and poetry are indistinguishably merged together here. This is great poetry. T.S. Eliot remarked:

Poetic inspiration is none too common, but the true sage is rarer than the true poet; and when the two gifts, that of wisdom and that of poetic speech, are found in the same man, you have the great poet. It is poets of this kind who belong, not merely to their own people, but to the world.³

Iqbal himself had a very high opinion of *Javid Nameh* which he described as his life-work. In a letter of 14 August 1929 to Mr Jameel of Bangalore who had been Iqbal's host when he visited South India on the invitation of Madras Muslim Association to deliver his *Reconstruction* lectures, Iqbal wrote: "The poem on Sultan Shaheed will form a portion of a longer work which I have to make my life work."⁴

When he was writing the poem, he wrote in a letter (in the beginning of 1931) to Khawja M.F. Shuja':

آخری نظم، جاوید نامہ، جسکے دو ہزار شعر ہو گئے ابھی ختم نہیں ہوئی۔ ممکن ہے مارچ تک ختم ہو جائے۔ یہ ایک قسم کی ڈیوائن کامیڈی ہے اور مثنوی مولانا روم کے طرز پر لکھی گئی ہے۔⁵

The last poem, *Javid Nameh*, which would consist of two thousand couplets, is not yet complete. This is a sort of *Divine Comedy*, composed in the poetic style of Mawlana Rum.

In another context, he introduces the work in the following words:

میری تازہ تصنیف، جاوید نامہ،۔۔۔ حقیقت میں ایشیاء کی ڈیوائن کامیڈی ہے۔ اس کا اسلوب یہ ہے کہ شاعر مختلف سیاروں کی سیر کرتا ہوا مختلف مشاہیر کی روحوں سے باتیں کرتا ہے۔ پھر جنت میں جاتا ہے اور آخر میں خدا کے سامنے پہنچتا ہے۔ اس تصنیف میں دور حاضر کے تمام جماعتی، اقتصادی، سیاسی، اخلاقی اور اصلاحی مسائل زیر بحث آگئے ہیں۔⁶

My new work, *Javid Nameh*... is in effect the *Divine Comedy* of Asia. In it the poet is shown as journeying through different planets where he

meets the spirits of history's luminaries. In the end he reaches God's own presence. This work comprehends most of the present-day collective issues – economic, political, religious, moral and those relating to reform. Iqbal's reference to *Javid Nameh* as a sort of Asian Divine Comedy immediately determines its genealogical status. In history its antecedents are those works of literature which make use of the technique originating from M'iraj – the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Before M'iraj and the treatises describing the event and its details, this technique was not in existence because such an elaborate and vivid experience beyond time, beyond space as the M'iraj was unknown. In ancient Iranian legends, mention has been made of a person, named Veeraf who is said to have lived during the reign of Ard Sher Babkan. The legend relates that Veeraf once fell unconscious by swallowing an intoxicating potion prepared from hemp. In that state he dreamed of journeying through heavenly spheres. A similar experience is reported to have happened to Zoroaster in a conscious state. Both these legends are, however, inauthentic and seem to have been fabricated much later. Besides this they are so dreamy, hazy and elusively sketchy that they cannot inspire a literary work, much less can they serve as a source for a literary technique. M'iraj on the other hand is so vivid and clear-as-daylight an account of a heavenly journey that it inspired not only a whole series of M'irajnamas but also gave rise to a new and hitherto unknown technique which can justifiably be designated as the M'iraj technique. Although heavenly journey as a motif underlies all M'irajnamas and minor literary works like Abul A'la M'arri's *Risalat-ul-Ghufran*, its first significant literary use occurs in Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*. One part of this great encyclopaedic work of fourteen volumes is devoted to the description of a mysterious heavenly journey. The second great literary work built on M'iraj technique is Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Iqbal's *Javid Nameh* marks the third great milestone in the progress of this genre.

In Europe it was believed for a time that Dante was the originator of the technique. Genuine research has now cleared all confusion about this. The most remarkable work in this area is the profoundly significant and painstakingly done research work of Miguel Asin Palacios entitled *Le Escatalogia Musalmana en la Divina Commedia*, translated into English as *Islam and the Divine Comedy*. Professor Asin (a church father and

Professor of Arabic by profession) has conclusively established the thesis that Dante was not the originator of the technique but had borrowed it from Ibn Arabi's *Futuhāt al-Makkiyyah*. The resemblances, down to the minutest details, between the relevant part of the *Futuhāt* and the *Divine Comedy* are so striking that nothing can explain them except borrowing. Palacios believes that no phenomenon of coincidence can explain that Dante has copied most of the details from *Futuhāt* word for word and map for map:

The share due to Ibn 'Arabi, a Spaniard although a Muslim, in the literary glory achieved by Dante Alighieri in his immortal poem can no longer be ignored.⁷

In effect then, the literary phenomenon built on the technique of M'iraj has so far given us three eminent masterworks – Ibn 'Arabi's *Futuhāt-ul-Makkiyyah* (the relevant part), Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Iqbal's *Javid Nameh*.

In *Futuhāt* two pilgrims, one of them a philosopher and the other a mystic steeped in gnosis, undertake a heavenly journey. The philosopher rides *Buraq* whereas the mystic flies on *Rafraf*. *Buraq* is the name of the heavenly animal which Gabriel brings for the Prophet (SAW) to ride on the occasion of M'iraj. Derived from the root, *barq* (lightening) it signifies a vehicle as quick in speed as the light. *Rafraf* literally means a cushion. In the Qur'ān (55:76) 'green cushions' (*rafrafīn khudrin*) are counted among the blessings of Allah on the dwellers of Paradise. When the two pilgrims of Ibn 'Arabi reach the gates of Paradise the mystic is received by God's prophets (Allah's peace be upon them) whereas the philosopher is received by ten intellects (*'uqul-i 'asharah*). The mystic later also meets various prophets in different heavenly spheres (the Moon, the Mercury, the Venus, the Sun, the Mars and the Saturn). Thereafter he ascends to *Sidrat-ul-Muntaha* (the lote tree on the furthest bound) at the foot of which he sees four rivers flowing: the Torah, the Psalms (*zabur*), the *Injeel* (gospels) and the Qur'ān.

Dante's *Commedia* to which his admirers later appended the epithet *Divina* is divided into three broad divisions – *Inferno* (34 cantos), *Purgatorio* (33 cantos) and *Paradiso* (33 cantos). Dante's cosmology is partly Ptolemaic, consisting of seven spheres to which he adds three more, making it ten and

his tenth sphere is the Empyrean. It is in the description of *Paradiso* that Dante, according to Palacois, copies Ibn 'Arabi verbatim.

Iqbal's *Javid Nameh* consists of six heavenly spheres – the Moon, the Mercury, the Venus, the Mars, the Jupiter and the Saturn. After traversing these spheres he proceeds to what he calls *Ansu-i Aflak* (Towards the Heavens): the Sanctum of Holiness, *Jannat-ul-Firdaus* and then the Presence of God Himself, *hazeerat-ul-Qudus*. Iqbal is guided in his heavenly journey by Rumi, who combines in his person reason, love and spiritual enlightenment, unlike Dante whose first guide is Virgil, the symbol of reason. But since he cannot enter the holy regions, Beatrice – the symbol of love – appears as his second guide. In the last sphere, even Beatrice departs and St. Bernard, representing Beatitude, appears as the final guide. In between he is also guided briefly by Matilda. This reflects the essential split in the vision of Dante as against the organic vision of Iqbal.

Noteworthy in *Divine Comedy* is Dante's obsession with Trinity. He has deliberately chosen the three-line stanza pattern for the poem. Both *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* consist of 33 cantos each and 33 is a multiple of three. Only the *Inferno* consists of 34 cantos which again seems deliberate as, after all, it is Hell.

Dante's inveterate prejudice against all that is non-Christian is also obvious from his aversion to all great achievers outside the Christian fold. He does not spare even his master and his idol – Virgil – and debars him from approaching the precincts of Paradise. The Way he has presented Muhammad, history's greatest figure (and acknowledged so even by his avowed enemies), and his fourth Caliph and son-in-law, Ali, in *Divine Comedy* is an abiding insult to history and humanity alike. Iqbal's broad humanitarian vision accommodates all great sons of mankind – religious teachers, thinkers, reformers, conquerors, poets, all. The panorama includes Vishwamitra, Bhartrhari, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus Christ, Muhammad (SAW), Rumi, Afghani, Said Halim Pasha, Shah Hamadan, Tipu Sultan, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Ghalib, Hallaj, Qurrat-ul-'Ain Tahira and even freebooters like Nadir Shah and Abdali; all mentioned with respect, all accorded places of honour except the Pharaohs of history and traitors like the J'afar of Bengal and Sadiq of Deccan.

The refreshing panorama of intertextuality which we come across in the three literary masterpieces woven around the technique of M'iraj serves two

important purposes. First it draws our attention to many such aspects of the three great works which would otherwise escape our notice – aspects which only comparison and contrast can illuminate. It brings into relief Ibn 'Arabi uncommon mystical depths even as it highlights Dante's Christian interpretation of life and universe and Iqbal's broad sweep encompassing religion, philosophy, poetry and civilisation. Above all it gifts to us perceptive insights into the nature of religion, philosophy and art.

Secondly and more importantly it serves to establish the greatness and originality of the three works. Had Dante acknowledged his indebtedness to Ibn 'Arabi, it would not have taken away a bit from the greatness of his work; indeed it would have raised its stature still higher. He borrows his theology from Thomas Aquinas and Aquinas in turn borrows the Aristotelian framework of his theology from Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Dante refers to Ibn Rushd in his work, why shy away from Ibn Rushd's illustrious contemporary Ibn 'Arabi?

References and Notes

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- ¹ Muhammad Iqbal, *Zarb-i Kaleem in Kulliyat-i Iqbal:Urdu* (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1975), P.575-76.
- ² Ibid., *Bal-i Jibreel*, P.331.
- ³ T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), P.207.
- ⁴ B.A. Dar ed. *Letters of Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1978), P.119.
- ⁵ Shaikh 'Ata-ul-lah, *IqbalNama* vol. II (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951), P.377.
- ⁶ Dr Muhammad Rafiq Afzal, *Guftar-i Iqbal* (Lahore, 1969).P.233.
- ⁷ James Sunderland, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, English translation of Miguel AsinPalacios's *Le EscatalogiaMusalmana en la Divina Commedia* (London, 1926), P.227.