

ANALYZING DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE IN
ALLAMA IQBAL'S POETRY WITH
REFERENCE TO THE DEVIL'S CABINET

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ABSTRACT

Dramatic feature of Iqbal's didactic poetry makes it equally appealing to researchers, critics, and general readers. The Devil's Cabinet is designed as a drama to disseminate Iqbal's views against Imperialists' nefarious designs. Cardullo's model of dramatic analysis has been followed to evaluate the dramatic structure of the poem. Iqbal's poetry in dramatic style has been proved to be more impressive and convincing. The Poem, The Devil's Cabinet, shows almost all elements of a complete drama. Cardullo's model, which is specified for analyzing the structure of a drama, confirms the poem's status as a drama. It has been aptly concluded that, building and resolving conflict, a dramatic technique, has been followed in Iqbal's 'dialogue poems', particularly The Devil's Cabinet.

Allama Iqbal's didactic poetry has been explored from a variety of angles. However, the poet's art of constructing dialogue has set a new direction for research scholars working on Iqbal's poetic structure. The poems composed in the form of dialogue seem to be divided into two parts. The first part encompasses 'building conflict', while the second part is focused on resolving the conflict. In this way, the dramatic structure of Iqbal's poetry appears to be the tool through which the poet tries to communicate and disseminate specific poetic theme to his readers.

The poem selected for analyzing dramatic technique in Iqbal's poetry can be emphasized for the fact that it is composed in the last few years of his life. The poet's maturity of thought based on his life-long experience is reflected in it. The dramatic style of Iqbal's didactic poetry makes it not only a perfect example of sublime poetry but also difficult for a clear majority of readers to understand or interpret it. The title of the poem "*Iblees ki Majlis-e-Shura*" has been translated as 'The Devil's Conference', 'Satan's Parliament', 'The Devil's Parliament' and 'Satan's Advisory Council' (Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi/ Asif Kidwai), and I have preferred 'The Devil's Cabinet'. All titles seem to create a picture more like that of a drama.

Existing scholarship on Iqbal's dramatic technique is much higher and beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all or even majority of those works. Mustansir Mir (2011) analyzing the dramatic feature of Iqbal's poetry claims that:

Iqbal had a fine sense of the dramatic, and in his poetry, he frequently uses dramatic techniques. Many of his poems are structured like a play, with the first half building a tension or conflict that is resolved, or raising a question that is answered, in the second half. Examples are 'Gabriel and Iblis', 'The Dew and the Stars', 'The Houris and the Poet', and 'Fatimah bint Abdullah'.¹

Mustansir Mir's claim is perhaps based on two points i.e., poetry in the form of dialogue, and the technique of building and resolving conflict. The importance of themes in 'dialogue poems' is connected to specific characters. The vigor of a character as a mouthpiece of Iqbal, determines the significance of a message Iqbal wants to convey to his readers. The poem 'Gabriel and Iblis' offers a good example of dynamism. The dynamic character of Iblis has an edge

over Gabriel who is a passive follower. The conflict is resolved and concluded by Iblis.

Iqbal's tendency to follow the dramatic technique seems to be the need of his poetry. According to Mohammad Hasan,² the greatness of art lies in its capacity of resolving conflicts or tensions at both levels i.e. internal and external. The greater art is created through resolving greater tension at higher level. Tension between philosophy and poetry is prevalent in Iqbal's poetry. The philosophy calls for exactness while the poetry demands sensitivity, and Iqbal has no choice other than resolving the tension through uttering his philosophy in poetry.

Iqbal's poetry deals with rare, uncommon and some of the most difficult concepts like extermination or annihilation of self and unrestrained declaration of self, for which he uses symbolic characters like angel and Satan as his mouthpiece, and the tension between two conflicting forces is resolved through dominance of one over the other. Jibril is supposed to have no Self while the Satan has uncontrolled Self or ego. Mohammad Hasan, referring to his poem 'Jibril and Iblis' claims that due to dynamism of his character Iqbal considers Iblis superior to Jibril:

You see from the far-off sea-coast the clash between the good and the evil,
who faces the tumult of the storm, you or I?
The prophets, Khizr and Ilyas, both are helpless,
but my storms rule the waves, the rivers and the streams.
If ever you could get chance to be alone with God Almighty, ask him,
Whose blood made Adam's tale so colourful?
It is I who pierces the divine heart like a thorn;
while you are there only to sing his praises, praises and praises.³

Satan's character controls the events of life in this world. It is almost like Milton's Satan (*Paradise Lost* -Book-1) who does not even think to surrender his ego to any power including God. Iqbal gives similar role to Satan (Iblis) in his poem *Iblees ki Majlis-e- Shura* (the Devil's Cabinet). The poem seems to be composed through following dramatic technique i.e., building and resolving conflict through dialogue. If the poem is analyzed through a model usually followed in analyzing the structure of a play, the poem can be safely declared as a drama.

To what extent the poem meets minimum criteria to be declared as a drama? To answer this question, it is highly significant to analyze it through applying a model specified for analyzing a drama. R.J. Cardullo's model seems to be appropriate for interpreting Iqbal's poem "The Devil's Cabinet". It suggests an analytical question to be

followed by dramatic analysis in three phases i.e., analysis of plot, character, and language.⁴ Key Analytical Question according to Cardullo is, “What type of dramatic structure or method does a particular play use, and how does this structure or method help to express the writer’s meaning?”⁵

The model gives basic outlines to be modified and followed according to subject matter and structure of a drama. The specific points applicable to the structure of the poem “The Devil’s Cabinet” can be summarized as follows:

i. Analysis of Plot

The plot of a drama according to Cardullo’s model is analyzed through highlighting the given circumstances, our perspective, nature of conflict, number of scenes, and resolution. These points can be discussed as follows:

1. Given Circumstances

The poem (The Devil’s Cabinet) was composed in 1936. In the background of this poem, political situation of the time can be seen. Major developments in the world seem to be based on specific ideologies (Marxism, Socialism, Communism etc.). Khurram Ali Shafique rightly observes:

The Devil had remained an interesting character in Iqbal’s poetry at least since 1923. Presented here as a flamboyant and imperious overlord of evil, he was shown consulting his five counsellors on the various possibilities for a new world order to be set up after a second world war that had now become imminent. The counsellors debated the potential threats from various revolutionary and egalitarian ideologies.⁶

Iqbal’s projection of Devil as a true representative of the West reflects the picture of East and West in 1930s, and the West’s agenda to control several social and political developments in the world. At one hand, the forces of the West were actively working to be united against their opponents, but on the other side, the Muslims were showing least interest in the social and political matters of the time. The Muslims in 1930s were seriously divided because of dogmatic differences. The Devil (West) was exploiting this situation and Iqbal was seriously concerned about it.

2. Our Perspective

The poem is designed to present Iqbal’s view of the world from religious, and political angle. Iqbal seems to be worried about Muslims’ attitude towards their religion. They regard Islam as nothing more than a practice of offering prayer (*Namaz*), observing fast (*Roz’a*), paying *zakat*, and pilgrimage (*Hajj*). Such a passive form of religion keeps them away from political affairs of the world. Their

belief in Islam as a dynamic force is either lost or curbed. The Devil is perhaps a motivating force behind loss of their conviction in Islam. Khurram Ali Shafique⁷ claims that “Since the believers were unlikely to be defeated openly, the best strategy was to lure them away from the dynamic aspects of Islam by using religious issues themselves as bait, making the believers so otherworldly that they may never put their mind to the affairs of the world”.

3. Nature of Conflict

The forces of Good and Evil conflict with each other in the poem (The Devil’s Cabinet). The Devil in the opening lines of the poem clearly asserts that the forces of the good, which were supposed to emerge triumphantly through defeating the forces of evil, have come to an end with the victory of Devil and his companions. Although he claims an end to conflict, but the opening lines of the poem clearly show the underlying conflict (Kulyat-e-Iqbal, 701):

یہ عناصر کا پرانا کھیل، یہ دنیائے دوں
ساکنان عرش اعظم کی تمناؤں کا خوں
اس کی بربادی پہ آج آمادہ ہے وہ کارساز
جس نے اس کا نام رکھا تھا جہان کاف و نوں⁸

The old game of elements, this lowly world,
Graveyard of hopes of the dwellers of ninth heaven.
Towards its destruction the Lord, today, is inclined,
Who had called it the world of Be, and it is.⁹

Apparently, the defeat of one force is supposed to be an end to its existence, but the ultimate end or total extermination does not seem to be achieved till the end of conflict at any level. According to Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi¹⁰ the evil spirits of the world have been shown in the poem to be gathering together to contemplate and examine the nature of new developments that may create any hurdle on the way of their ambitions and evil designs. The conflict of both forces continues till the final declaration by the Devil in the closing lines of the poem.

4. Number of scenes

The poem is composed in the style of a dram with Nine Scenes. The opening scene shows Iblees (Devil) introducing the basic objectives of meeting or advisory council. In the second scene, the first counsellor talks about stability of the satanic system. In the third scene, the second counsellor comments on the views of first

counsellor. In the fourth scene, first counsellor responds to the question of second counsellor. Fifth scene opens with third counsellor talking about human ambitions and expressing his sense of satisfaction. In the sixth scene, fourth counsellor appears with a comment to the views of third counsellor. In the seventh scene, third counsellor responds to the comments of fourth counsellor. In the Eighth scene, fifth counsellor appears to address the Devil (Iblees). He expresses higher opinion about the power and position of the Devil but ends his speech with a concern that the world of Devil is going to be collapsed. In the ninth and the last scene, the Devil provides solution to their problem and suggests some appropriate actions against Islam and its followers.

5. Resolution

The conflict built at the beginning of drama is resolved with a commitment among evil forces to curb the forces of good (Islam).

ii. Analysis of Character

Second phase of Cardullo's model of analyzing drama is focused on character analysis. It provides necessary outlines to examine the nature and function of a character in the structure of a drama. The study of a character is focused on the following points:

1. Each character is necessary to the plot

The poem (The Devil's Cabinet) is composed with six characters. One of them is their head i.e., Devil (Iblees) and remaining five characters are the counsellors. All characters are genius and the Devil has chosen wise advisors who equally contribute and make necessary part of the plot.

2. Similarity of characters

All characters in the poem represent evil. The subject matter and the language used by all characters is almost similar. Their physical appearance and mental caliber are also equal. According to Nadwi¹¹ "the disciples of Satan put forward their views and suggestions which he examines and, then, gives his own verdict based on a vast experience of men and matters. The benchmen of Satan are deeply impressed by what their leader tells, and his assessment of the situation finds a ready acceptance with them". All characters are similar because their age, colour, and gender is not known.

3. Character's individual role

Although all characters are similar by their collective role in the poem, yet their role as an individual character is also maintained. The devil speaks opening and closing lines and, in this way, builds and resolves the conflict. First and second counsellors contest each

other's views. Similarly, the views of third and fourth counsellor are slightly different. Fifth counsellor maintains his individuality by addressing only to his leader.

Each character as an individual voice in the poem's overall tension and contributes individually to promote or disseminate the poem's main theme.

4. Behavioral change in character

The change in behavior is a natural part of drama. The overall behavior at the time of building conflict or tension is supposed to be different from the behavior of a character at the time of resolving the conflict. In the opening speech the Devil behaves like an autocratic ruler who senses some threat to his absolute power and needs some solution to this issue, but in the second speech his behavior is more like that of a teacher who advises his students to follow his instructions to overcome the worries.

iii. Analysis of Language

The use of language in a play is made through dialogue. Two basic functions of dialogue in a play seem to be more significant i.e., to suggest the total makeup of its imaginative world and describe the characters' overall behavior. In this way, dialogue serves as a criterion to determine the nature of a specific character i.e., hero, villain, serious or comedian etc. Cardullo's model suggests some guidelines to ask relevant questions to yourself while analyzing the language of a play:

1. What do the main character's words reflect?

The words uttered from the Devil's lips give a clear picture of the world of evil he is representing. The poem portrays the Devil's world with Devil's towering personality having control over the affairs of human life. His declaration of triumph shows that the forces of evil have successfully defeated their opponents. His words also represent his egoistic character. He appears to be an autocratic figure. He talks in first person with a self-centered claim, and frequently uses the words 'I' میں 'میرے', 'my' میری 'my' and 'I' میں نے. The examples from the text of the poem are as follows:

جانتا ہوں میں یہ امت حامل قرآن نہیں
میں نے دکھلایا فرنگی کو ملوکیت کا خواب
ہے مرے دست تصرف میں جہان رنگ و بو
سب کو دیوانہ بنا سکتی ہے میری ایک ہو^{۱۲}

I know its congregation is the Law's upholder now no more
I it was who drew in Europe's brain the fantasy of empire
All realms of matter, lie in the hollow of my hand
With one incantation I know how to drive (all) mad¹³

The Devil's words describe two different aspects of his character. At one hand, he is proud, selfish and dominating figure, who cares for none but himself, on the other hand, he is realistic, prudent, and sensitive, who realizes the seriousness of severe challenges. He knows much about his opponents' strengths and weaknesses. He can foresee the real threat to his system in future and suggests pre-emptive measures to curb and restrict the menace for a longer period as much as possible.

2. What do the statements (dialogues) reveal about inner life of each character?

There are six characters in the poem. Each character expresses his opinion which indicates his individual motives. These motives seem to be the outcome of conflict in their inner life. First counsellor expresses his conviction in the strength of Satanic system. His words give an impression that it does not matter if the Muslim keeps on performing hajj, what matters is nothing but to keep him away from the way of fighting in God's name. He says: "To whose despair stands witness that new-fangled Canon: anathema, the Muslim who in this age draws his sword in holy war."¹⁴

The second counsellor is looking for other threats to Satan's kingdom. He considers 'government by the people' a fresh mischief of the world. Iqbal does not seem to be a supporter of modern electoral democracy. Using second counsellor, as his mouth piece, Iqbal expresses his own concern about a system in which people's number is more important than their worth. The words help to understand inner life of second counsellor. He says:

خیر ہے سلطانی جمہور کا غوغا کہ شر
تو جہاں کے تازہ فتنوں سے نہیں ہے باخبر¹⁵

The many-headed beast bellows for power; Is this our bane, or boon?
You have not learned what new-hatched mischiefs are about the earth¹⁶

Third counsellor seems to be inspired by the impact of communist ideology. He compares it to the power of imperialism. His concern is perhaps based on his natural shrewdness and practical wisdom. Communist ideology has paved the way for the workers of middle and lower middle class to raise their voice against their exploitation by landlords, capitalists and industrialists. Such voices

have seriously threatened the Imperial designs of Satanic forces. He exclaims:

اس سے بڑھ کر اور کیا ہو گا طبیعت کا فساد
توڑ دی بندوں نے آقاؤں کے خیموں کی طناب^{۱۷}

What dire pestilence could outgo this!

The slaves have cut the ropes that held their lords' pavilions¹⁸

Fourth counsellor appears to be moved by the success of Satanic powers in Italy. He appreciates the descendants of Caesar (Mussolini) for reviving the spirit of imperialism in Italian people. He proudly claims that despite their failure in few areas, their collective performance is admirable. He expresses his sense of entire satisfaction over the work done by Satan's disciples. Caesar's children have perhaps abetted the Devil through promoting and disseminating the satanic ideology and recovered his loss in other areas. He rejoices:

In the halls of mighty Rome behold the antidote,

We have revealed once more the dream of Caesar to Caesar's offspring¹⁹

Fifth counsellor's statements encompass more than one aspect of Satan's world. At one hand, he expresses his satisfaction with effective system created by his leader and appreciates his leader's ability to understand human nature more than even the Creator of mankind, change a fool to seer. On the other hand, he is seriously concerned about the emerging power of opponent forces challenging the system of his leader. He wails:

میرے آقا وہ جہاں زیر و زبر ہونے کو ہے
جس جہاں کا ہے فقط تیری سیادت پر مدار^{۲۰}

Oh Master! On the brink of chaos lies

This earth whose sole reliance is your scepter²¹

Sixth and the most important character of the poem is Devil (Iblis). His inner life is visible through different statements he utters. He is an embodiment of pride, astuteness, ambition, evil, and discernment. His apparent declarations are in contrast with his inner life. He realizes the power of Islam as a genuine threat to his kingdom. His suggestions for his disciples (counsellors) reveal the intensity of his concern. The fear of Muslim community's awakening can be easily noticed when abruptly utters:

مست رکھو ذکر و فکر صبحگاہی میں اسے
پختہ تر کر دو مزاج خانقاہی میں اسے^{۲۲}

Keep its wits bemused with dawn potations of its dregs of thought and prayer;
And tighten round its soul the monkish bonds!²³

3. What do statements (dialogues) reveal about the relationships of the characters to each other?

All characters show some sort of affinity for each other. Their statements confirm their relationship. For example, first counsellor shows full confidence in his leader's system and supports it through categorically declaring that "the Satanic Order is, surely, supreme."²⁴ The second counsellor tries to help his companion as well as his leader through asking question about the first counsellor's ability to interpret the system of universe. Similarly, third and fourth counsellor show similar attitude in showing solidarity with their leader. Fifth counsellor at one hand endorses the views of his companions but on the other hand tries to alert his leader, "the world, my Lord! is about to crumble, the world that depends upon your leadership alone."²⁵

Similarly, the Devil who is leader of his team shows unbreakable relationship with his followers. He portrays Islam as a common threat to their supremacy. He advises them: "beware of the Law of the Prophet! A hundred times beware! the safe guarder of women's honor, tester of men, maker of men. The voice of death for all forms of slavery, there is no distinction of the ruler and the ruled in its domain."²⁶ All characters are embodiments of evil and their common cause seems to be nothing but to rule over the world.

4. What are the statements that build a conflict?

The opening lines of the poem reflect hidden conflict between the forces of good (God) and the forces of evil (Devil). Although the Devil announces his triumph over his opponents, yet the purpose of meeting seems apparently, to find out a way to curb the challenges to Devil's supremacy. The opening words give a clear picture of conflict in Devil's mind, "The elements weave their ancient dance. Behold this vile world, dust and ashes of the hopes of Heaven's exalted dwellers! The Creator whose *let there be* made all things, today stands ready to annihilate them."²⁷

The conflict appears between the Devil's kingdom and his adversaries i.e., the followers of God's religion, Islam. Once it is confirmed that Islam only, has potential to challenge the Devil's supremacy, the conflict naturally prevails. In this way, the Devil's cabinet determines the nature of imminent challenge. And "Wisdom, therefore, demands that all their resources and energies should be directed against this chief adversary, and, if he cannot be annihilated

he should, at least, be lulled into a state of complacency and self-satisfaction.”²⁸

5. What are the most notable statements which represent Resolution?

The closing lines of the poem reflect resolution. After a long session of consultation with his disciples, the Devil finds out a way to curb the challenge to Devil’s kingdom. To defuse the power of his opponent forces, he suggests some measures which may either eliminate or neutralize the contesting forces. Before he suggests necessary actions he clearly declares that, nothing but Islam is real menace. In this way, his proposed measures are focused on Islam and its followers (Muslims). His tension or inner conflict is resolved by proposing that:

خیر اسی میں ہے، قیامت تک رہے مومن غلام
چھوڑ کر اوروں کی خاطر یہ جہان بے ثبات
ہے وہی شعر و تصوف اس کے حق میں خوب تر
جو چھپا دے اس کی آنکھوں سے تماشائے حیات²⁹

Good, if he Lie down in slavery till the day of doom,
Relinquishing to others what he calls a transient globe,
and hugging such belief, Such minstrelsy,
as serve to keep his eyes well bandaged from the theatre of life³⁰

The Devil’s words rightly represent his nature. The only point of his agenda seems to be nothing but to rule solely over the whole world. A true Muslim is perhaps a genuine hurdle on the way of satanic supremacy and all satanic forces are directed against him. Iqbal seems to believe that the end of threat to satanic forces lies in the slavish attitude of Muslims. Their interest in poetry and mysticism appears to be a source of contentment for the Devil and his followers. The Devil wants to keep true Muslims away from the dynamic way of life. The whole tension at this stage seems to be resolved.

Conclusion

Iqbal’s dramatic technique i.e., building and resolving conflict through dialogue can be observed in several poems. But the poems ‘Gabriel and Iblis’, ‘The Dew and the Stars’, and ‘The Houris and the Poet’ and ‘the Devil’s Cabinet’ are perhaps the best examples of dramatic technique. Such poems are usually designed to be divided into two sections, first part of the poem is used to build a conflict or tension and the second part resolves it. It shows that Iqbal’s

didactic poetry is composed in a dramatic style to communicate his message to his readers through the words uttered from the lips of his characters. In this way, Iqbal's dialogue-poems lend themselves to any model of dramatic analysis.

To examine Iqbal's dramatic technique in his dialogue-poems, his poem 'the Devil's Cabinet' composed in Armaghan-e-Hijaz (1936) has been selected. To examine the structure of the poem, Cardullo's theoretical model designed to study the structure of a drama has been followed. Thematically the poem builds and resolves conflict between two opposing forces. Structurally, the poem shares all elements usually found in the body of a drama. The poem's interpretation in line with a dramatic model gave necessary information to make formal judgement and safely conclude the status of the poem.

Keeping in view the essence of Cardullo's model, the poem has been examined from three different angles i.e., the analysis of plot, the analysis of characters, and the analysis of language. The effective application of Cardullo's model shows that the poem lends itself to this model so admirably well. In this way, Iqbal's dialogue-poems can be aptly regarded as dramas in general and the Devil's Cabinet in particular. It shows almost all elements of a modern drama, i.e., beginning with an announcement, plot, character, thematic conflict, dialogue, resolution etc.

Through analyzing the structure of the poem its status as a dialogical drama has been confirmed. The stage is set for presenting this play in a heavenly world. The characters are the members of the Devil's cabinet. The time of this dramatic composition is 1936, and naturally it can be assumed that the picture of early thirties has been depicted. The Devil and his counsellors have met to discuss the status of Devil's system and its efficacy in a rapidly changing global scenario. One of the most important item on its agenda is perhaps to examine the performance of Devil's counsellors both in the East and the West.

Through dialogues of different characters Iqbal has put forward an assertion that behind all devastation and upheaval there is no one other than the Devil. The forces who serve the Devil's purpose are united against their common enemy, the true Muslims. The Devil's proclamation that the Creator of this world is about to destroy it, categorically confirms that a conflict between the forces of God and the Devil exists. Convincing conclusion at the end of serious debate seems to be a form of resolution. Hence, the opening lines build a conflict and closing lines resolve it.

Notes And Reference

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