

## MYSTICISM IN IQBAL'S POETRY

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The mystical aspect is definitely the most significant aspect of Iqbal's poetry. In fact we should consider him a mystic poet and in this respect he is not different from other mystic poets of Iran and Pakistan. The great mystics of Iran and Pakistan, during the past 950 years, adopted the Persian language to propagate their ideas among the people at large. More than any other sect of Islam, the mystics paid attention to the common people and made efforts to give them proper guidance, but they did not attach much importance to those in power and high places and in their congregation assemblies of *sima'* they offered higher places to the poorer as against the wealthier people. In their eyes the Zoroastrians, the Christians and the Jews were all equal. They regarded every being as a symbol of God. The only differentiation acceptable to them was the one preached by the holy *Shari'at* of Islam, namely, "the most virtuous among you is the most esteemed in God's eyes" and the saying of the Prophet that "I am commissioned to bring perfection to man's moral conduct".

The ultimate goal and object of mysticism is to achieve the highest perfection possible for man. The great mystics of Iran and Pakistan have not attached any unusual importance to expansion of religion and have limited their teachings to the spirit of religion. That is why *tawhid*—Oneness of God—and *wahdat-ul-wujud*—oneness of the existence—are more important objectives for them, and they have carried the philosophy of 'monism' (as opposed to the philosophy of Dualism) to its highest stage. The highest perfection, according to them, was to lose one's existence in that of God. They have given many fine and beautiful interpretations to the Qur'anic Verse "God is the Light of heavens and earth."

One of the great mystics says, "Man should reach where he should see nothing but God." Our sufis, thus, have believed in a kind of annihilation (*fanu'*) which some of them have termed as

'absorption into God'. This is not very much different from the 'Nirvana' of the Hindus.

Sina'i has said: "Die before death O, friend! if you want eternal life." According to the sufis, these stages cannot be achieved except through revelation (*kashf*) and perception (*shuhud*).

And the genuine traveller is he who achieves the various stages one by one and finally acquires the perfection of the soul. This interesting and valuable conception, which constituted the highest and noblest human thought, has been termed by Iqbal as the 'Philosophy of Self'. His first masterpiece of philosophic poetry, *Asrar-i-khudi*, deals with this extremely fine and subtle conception.

Iqbal has put the following questions:

"Who am I ? What are you? and Whither the universe? Why there exists distance between us? Why am I put in chains of Destiny (Predestination)? Why do I die while you don't?"

And in *Javed Namah*, he replies:

"Do you want Life? Then bring forth your 'self'—

Absorb all the four directions (dimensions) within yourself.

Then you will realise who you are and who am I—

And also how you died and how you lived in the world."

Iqbal, like other great mystics of Iran and Pakistan, believes that the realisation of the self has to be followed by "resignation of the self." This is the same as the philosophy of 'separation and annihilation' propounded by the sufis. The first step is 'Self' and the last "resignation of the Self".

This idea is one of the most beautiful poetic conceptions that have led to the creation of numerous great literary masterpieces. The famous *Ardaye Virafnamak* is a Zoroastrian religious poem in which the soul from the lower world moves upwards through the skies until it attains perfection. The Iranian mystics have drawn upon this idea and have propounded the philosophy of gradual evolution (ascension) of the soul until it loses itself in God. Sina'i has followed the same line in *Sairul Ibadi Ilal ma'aad*. In *Masnavi Mantiquttair* Fariduddin 'Attar has chosen a particular bird as representing a certain attribute of man and in their journey towards perfection the birds lag behind in various stages and at the end achieve perfection.

His *Mantiqut-tair* is an expression of the same mystic idea.

Fuzuli Baghdadi, a well-known poet of Iran of the fifteenth century, has described the same in his beautiful prose work "Soul's Journey". Ibn Tufail, in his *Tale of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, and Abul 'Ula al-Ma'arri, in his *Risalat ul-Ghufran*, have carried this subject to the highest poetical level.

In European languages the finest expression of the same idea is seen in the *Divine Comedy* of the great Italian poet Dante. After this could be named Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the *Sentimental Journey* of Swift.

*Javed Namah*, Iqbal's last masterpiece, offers the most beautiful and delicate example of the poetic treatment of the theme—Man's Ascension. Iqbal, in his onward journey, comes in contact with the great personalities of the human world like Zartasht, the Holy Prophet of Islam, Jalaluddin Rumi, an Indian ascetic 'Jehan Doost', Sayyid Jamaluddin Afghani, Sa'id Haleem Pasha, Mehdi Sudani, Husain bin Hallaj, Qurrat ul 'Ain, Shah Hamadan, Ghani Kashmiri, Abdali and even the ancient gods.

In the course of his conversations with the great minds, Iqbal, apart from discussing the fine points and intricacies of philosophic thought and agnosticism, brings in the social and political issues. *Javed Namah*, therefore, is to be regarded as the latest treatise on mysticism, and Iqbal has to be accepted not only as one of the topmost exponents of mysticism, but also as the last great exponent of Irano-Pakistani mystic thought.

A study of Iqbal's poetry shows that he has closely studied the writings of the great sufis, in particular the *Masnavi* of Rumi, *Gulshan-i-Raz* of Shaikh Mahmud Shabistari, a number of books by Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani and the works of Fakhruddin Iraqi.

*Asrar-i-Khudi*, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, *Javed Namah* and even his last *Masnavi Pas Cheh Bayad Kard ai Aqwam-i-Sharq* should be regarded as the greatest epics of the twentieth century.

Iqbal, as is borne out by his four *Masnavis*, has not limited his philosophy of Perfection only to the individual (like the old masters) but he has extended it to the nations and peoples of the East as well, and thereby he has changed the traditional "Individualism" of

older sufis into a dynamic 'collectivism'. This has yielded a very important result —self-reliance and self-confidence for the people of the East.

And there is no doubt that it is his teachings that have brought into being the independent state of Pakistan. Pakistan, in my view, is one of the miracles of Iqbal's mystic thought.

The Europeans have named *Tasawwuf* as mysticism and sometime as 'esoterism'. I do not agree with them. For there is nothing secret or hidden in *Tasawwuf*. The sufis have always, and sometimes even at the cost of their lives, preached their moral principles most boldly and candidly. They were not scared of being excommunicated by the jurists.

And in certain cases the jurists, who opposed *tasawwuf*, realised the truth of their teachings through the methods of revelation and perception of Reality. Imam Muhammad Ghazali is a very good example in this respect, for in his later life he repented for having opposed the sufis.

I believe that it would be more proper to describe *Tasawwuf* by the term sufism and one should not accept that it has anything secret or mystical about it. Iqbal's is an eloquent and open expression which belies any such epithet.

From the purely literary point of view Iqbal is one of the greatest poets of *tasawwuf*. The sufi poets, from the very beginning of sufi poetry in the Persian language, introduced symbolism so as to make their ideas more easily understood by the common people. And this style of poetic expression which began with the first sufi poet, Abu Sa'id Abul Khair, in the 11th Century, continued at a great height till the end of the 16th century, and Jami may be regarded as the last great poet of this school.

One of the great poets of this school, Shamsuddin Hafiz, has at times made use of the cult of "impressionism" in his verses, which, in course of time, found favour with the poets of India and Pakistan, and this style is known in Iran as the Hindi School of Poetry.

In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent poets like Fughani, 'Urfi, Faizi, Zuhuri, Naziri, Talib Amuli, Ghani, Kalim, Sa'ib, Bedil and Ghalib contributed to the development and progress of 'impres-

sionism'. The result was that poetry lost its easy fluency and simplicity that is so necessary for the expression and description of fine mystic thought. Bedil's poetry, in particular, became a speciality only for those who were very well versed in all the various aspects and intricacies of the poetic art.

Iqbal, better than anybody else, realised this drawback of this style and once again brought back to poetry the form, simplicity and flow of the symbolic school. For Iqbal was now addressing his message to the people of the East and the Muslims—old and young, educated and uneducated. That is why Iqbal's poetry in the first instance awakened the people of the sub-continent and then gave a new thrill to the Iranians. And now its influence is gradually growing even among those people who do not understand the Persian language.

The world has seen innumerable poets, but out of them only those could be regarded great and worthy of admiration who have played the role of a prophet or divine messenger in their respective ages. Not only do they express the wishes of the people but they also show the way to realise their wishes.

Iqbal, certainly, is one of such eminent men and we can rightly call him the prophet of poets—a poet with a prophetic mission.

In order to realise the greatness of such poets we should study them in the background of their own time and their own country, for then alone shall we find what a world their country and their people have gained from them.

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