

# IQBAL: TOWARDS AN ETHICAL THEORY OF POETRY

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Urdu crystallized out as a language proper during the eighteenth century and it is therefore a comparatively modern language as compared to other living languages, e.g., Italian, French, and Spanish. It was non-existent when Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*. Since it coalesced from a mixture containing primarily two ingredients, Persian and Hindi or Brij Bhasha, it was but to be expected that the norms it would adopt for critical appraisal would also derive from the two: this actually happened. The supremacy of the *ghazal* as a genre derived from the Persian heritage left to it and the emphasis on *mahawrah bandi* (or strict conformity to the idiomp was passed on to it from its Hindi component. The reforms made by Nasikh might be therefore said to correspond to Wordsworth's stress on poetry expressed as the medium of spoken language and not as a heightened stylized expression, as out-lined in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>18</sup>

And yet there perhaps the correspondence ends. Persian, the most abstract of languages, is particularly suited to apophthegms and pithy expressions, of which the *Bustan* of Sa'di, the *Mantiqat al-Tayr* (The Parliament of Birds) of Shaykh Farid al-Din Attar, *Sikandar Namah* of Nizami of Ganjah and the *Mathnawi* of Rumi should serve as the cogent examples. The *ghazal*, an offshoot of this tendency towards abstraction, became a very convenient medium for the elaboration of one idea or of a few related ideas in about eleven or twelve couplets. It could serve also as a medium for reflection upon life, with one couplet depicting one and the other another aspect of it: alternatively, it could expand the same idea through a series of analogies and images. And, as the *ghazal* began to gain ascendancy in both Persian and Urdu, the norms for literary criticism also began to follow upon the footsteps of the *ghazal*. The ghazaleer, in effect, became the poet. Aristotle the father of literary criticism in the West, similarly regarded the drama, and particularly the tragedy, as the centre-piece of all poetry, because through *catharsis* (purgation) it washes away *hubris* (insolence) generating *saphrosyne* (humility)

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<sup>18</sup> Published 1800.

instead.

With human life progressively gaining in complexity, it was found that no one literary norm could serve as a guide while Shakespeare and Schiller could be, with drastic modifications, examined from the concepts and guidelines laid down by Aristotle, could the same guide-lines be applied to Calderon or Goethe or the Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century? Norms established nearly two thousand and five hundred years ago can definitely serve as guides — for this much Aristotle's remarkable or "universal" genius deserves - but can no longer be treated as absolute. There are also certain developments such as the allegory which are definitely post-Aristotelean and could even be called modern.

It could also be contended that in order to reappraise the new bearings of Urdu poetry we shall have to remove the surcircle of the *ghazal* and to appraise a poet according to *what and how he has said rather than whether he has said so through the medium of the "ghazal" or not*. The *ghazal*, I believe, gained in ascendancy because it was not for every poet to be equally good a plot-maker. If he happened to be a good plot-maker, he being a good poet, he gravitated towards the mathnawi or the epic; if not, he confined himself to *ghazal*. For the *ghazal* offered him several vantage points: he did not have to particularize or weave a plot or even a unified theme ; he could keep it timeless as far as he was concerned (take a *ghazal* of the nineteenth century and one of today and but for stylistic nuances there is no difference whatsoever between the two so far as the age is concerned; it did not have to be long (*ghazals* of the Lucknow schools running into 29 couplets or more were exceptions than the rule); it could be discursive, polythematic, and could pour in stray thoughts; and it was easier far to recite at the *musha'irahs* (poetic gatherings). By the end of the last century its triumph was so complete that the other genres were underrated, even if not looked down upon. A typical instance of this approach is provided by the adage:

بگڑا شاعر مرثیہ گو، پکڑا گویا مرثیہ خواں

(An elegaic poet is a spoilt one and a singer of elegies is a one who has deviated from his profession)

But the *ghazal* posed one very serious limitation, at least for one who was aware of that limitation. It could not permit the specification or the

particularization of the problems of the age or even of an individual as the drama would. When a poet needs to outpour his feelings, either euphoric or gloomy, he cannot do so in a *qata' band ghazal* (a *ghazal* with a fixed rhyming arrangement), for that would generate monotony, something not very unlike the rhyming couplets of the Augustan poets of England. Such an arrangement of the iambic pentameter was particularly useful in the satire, as in the *Rape of the Lock* by Pope and the satires of Dryden (e.g., *Absalom and Achitophel* and *MacFlecknoe* in which he ridicules the poet, Shadwell; but the succeeding Romantic Age which wanted greater freedom broke through these confines of metre, rhyme, and measured contrasts so suited to the satire.

This is a point which does not have to be elaborated upon by the citation of very many examples. However, a particular event *when universalized*, for obvious reasons, exercises a far more overpowering effect than an *already universalized* experience. I shall just quote one example of this. Sayyid Muhammad Ismail Husayn Munir Shikuhahadi, a major poet of the Lucknow school, embodies his agonies suffered during incarceration in the Andamans for seven years owing to his complicity in the murder of an Englishman, H. Cockvale in 1858, in a long *qata'band ghazal*, one couplet of which is:

موت کے پنچے میں شیرانِ دلاور پھنس گئے  
صید افگن ایک دو شیرِ نیستان ہوں تو کیا

(The brave ones find themselves inexorably clutched in the fangs of Death, What if there be one or two lions in the forest that lurk to kill to face the challenge?)

Iqbal, while aware like Munir Shikuhabadi of the disintegrating world around himself, makes the fourth Counsellor of Satan in *Iblis ki Majlis-i-Shura'* (The Advisory Council of Satan) say:

خال خال اس قوم میں اب تک نظر آتے ہیں  
کرتے ہیں اشکِ سحر گاہی سے جو ظالم وضو

(I still descry within that nation (i.e., the Muslims) a few persistent ones who with the tears of the morn consummate their ablution.)

The first couplet by Munir admits of nothing else (his clichés are such as have been worn threadbare in the *ghazal*) but verbal ingenuity with a leaven of sadness while reflecting on the times gone by. He has not *universalized* his particular experience; what he has presented is an *already universalised* observation or *speculation*, howsoever we might choose to regard it. Iqbal not only adds the strength of irony but also of hope: for there are still some left who would dare. Their puissance is greater far than of the lurking lions of the forest. Note also that Iqbal conveys sublimity and a sense of direction, unlike Munir. In one there is an unmistakable strain of pessimism; in the other, a strain of faith, of meliorism; in fact, one too many. The one could pertain to any age; the other concerns a specific age, reflecting its *zeitgeist*, its altered *weltanschauungen*. The one has no *brio*, no *panache*; the other has both.

This is not to decry the value of the *ghazal* as a genre, but merely to state that changed times demand new modes of appraisal, and that therefore we cannot accept that *ghazal* should be the only form of poetry suitable for highest consideration, although of the four most major Muslim poets of the subcontinent — Amir Khusraw, Naziri, Mirza 'Abd al-Qadir Baydil, and Iqbal — Iqbal is the only exception insofar as the genre of the *ghazal* is concerned, in that he wrote very little of it — at least in its accepted form. Even sociologically the acceptability of the *ghazal* as the absolute norm would generate what Emile Durkheim calls anomie or dissociation in the collective social consciousness of the people; for the *ghazal* deals with the seething problems of the age only indirectly and cannot argue as powerfully and as cogently as the *nazm* or other genres like the *Mussadas* or poetic drama or poetic dialogue would. The *nazm* unlike the *ghazal* brings in variation in rhyme, pace, and cadence and removes thereby the monotony that the fixed rhyming pattern of the *ghazal* would generate.

None of these observations, I am afraid, are such as have not been made in one form or the other before. But perhaps from my point of view in relation to Iqbal's approach towards poetry it is essential that they should be recapitulated and formulated or even reformulated with elaboration, if needs be; for Iqbal is either thought to be primarily a "philosophical poet" (as if there could be a poet who has no framework of thought of his own), a non-lyrical poet (lyricism is the expression of the poet's thoughts which need not

be concerned with physical love at all), and a "political poet" (sad indeed would be the predicament of a poet who remains unconcerned with all but his own self). Love in Iqbal is there, but in an altogether different context.<sup>19</sup>

Iqbal, like any other major poet of the world, began to fold out the intellectual convolutions of his thought-processes gradually and from the *Bang-i-Dara* onwards tended to adopt, again like any other major poet, symbolization of thought. He discarded the flute to take to the accordion, the mere black and the mere white to take to chioroscuro. I will not say that Iqbal was the first to initiate this change in Urdu poetry. This was already visible even in what we class as the members of the Lucknow school, such as Muhsin Kakurwi, Nazm Tabataba'i, and Ahmad Ali Shawq Qidwai, let alone Shibli and Hall. Indeed, Hall himself who has written far too many ghazals compared to Iqbal, writes in the *Muqqadimah-i-Sha'ir wa Sha'iri* (Prolegomena to Versification and Poetry) rather brilliantly about the *ghazal vis-a-vis* Urdu poetry in general:

In short, the ghazal both in respect of rhyme and theme, should be, as far as possible, expanded. People do not require poetry as they require their daily pabulum. Nan can manage to subsist, day in, day out, on the same type of food, even though it be bereft of variety. He would be, however, seized by ennui if the music or the poetry does not have versatility or variableness. A musician who from morn till eve only sings the same tune would tire out his listeners. Similarly in poetry, if one keeps on listening to identical or similar themes, he would feel disinclined to hear any more:

مکرر گرچہ سحر آمیز باشد  
طبیعت را ملال انگیز باشد

(Even though repetition might be magical, yet one's spirit becomes bowed down by it.<sup>20</sup>)

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<sup>19</sup> See *Iqbal Kay Kalam mayn Jamalyati 'Unsur: Ayk Ijmali Ja'izah* (Aesthetics in Iqbal: A Brief Survey) by this writer (*Iqbal Review*, 15, 12, pp. 34-60).

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., Urdu Academy, Sind, September 1962; pp. 151-52.

He then gives the example of the collection of a famous poet in which the theme of *chak-i-giriban* (rending of the collar) has been treated in twenty-three different ways, and further proceeds:

The *divan* from which we have reproduced these patterns comprises over two hundred pages. In his is the instance of a rather short *divan*, what to speak of the others in which this theme has been tackled in different ways. If, on top of this, we include the Persian *divans* also, then, I should imagine, we could compile several thick volumes on this single theme alone, even though it is so narrowly circumscribed by its very nature that it admits of little more than one or two variations. We can well surmise the extent to which themes having a greater number of associations, such as the cruelty of the be-loved, envy of the rivals, desire for union, dishevelled tresses or hair, the bewitching eye, temptation to violate expiation, non-conformism, and drunkenness have been stretched.<sup>21</sup>

Hali's observations are entirely correct and very acute. Indeed, this exercise in seeking far-fetched and remotely removed similes made some poets not only trip but to come cut with nauseating similitudes and images

ہوا جوین فزوں خط سیہ سے روئے جانار کا  
بڑھا اس آبنوسی رحل سے حسن اور قرآن کا  
بگڑ کر اس نے چلمن سے جو ہم کو آنکھ دکھلائی  
غزال چشم پر دھوکا ہوا شیر نیستان کا

(The black down of my beloved has made his youth stand out all the more. This ebony-like bracket has adorned the Qur'an still further.

When in the flush of fury, he stared at me from behind the curtain, I thought for a moment I was looking not into his doe-like eyes but into those of a lion that roving in the cane-brake).

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-53.

These couplets by Khwajah Wazir of Lucknow show how sterile the whole exercise in poetry had become. We speak of breaking Priscian's head with bad grammar; one is at pains to know how we should treat such wanton and profligate use of simile. If both Plato and Aristotle are agreed that poetry is an "imitative art" and that it gives pleasure, then Wazir's first couplet gives neither. The Qur'an is eternal, the Word of God; the human face folds into wrinkles and disintegrates. To bring in the Qur'an in a couplet clearly reeking of pederasty is the very nadir of artistic turpitude. What was thought to be ingenuity turns out to be nothing but sacrilege.

The poetry of the Delhi school was given to less hyperbole--but only just. The following couplet by Shah Nasir is almost as hyperbolic, if not equally inane:

وہ مئے پئے گر جام بلوریں میں تو ساقی  
بن جائے حبابوں سے بھی دریا ہمہ تن چشم

(When my beloved tipples wine in the crystal (glass), the bubbles on it appear like a river to the eyes of the gazer wherever he casts his sight)

The convention of the *ghazal* had collected like patine on Urdu literature which it was very difficult to scrape away. Hali's *Mussodas* in this sense represents a unique and epoch-making achievement. It was written with a remarkable degree of sublimity; it followed no circuitous routes, no prolegomenon to justify the theme; it went direct to the heart of the reader, painting before his eyes the pristine glory of Islam and juxtaposing it with its downfall in general and in the subcontinent in particular. His *ghazals* also become coloured by introspection and get suffused by the *zeitgeist*. We might take the following three couplets as an instance:

منہ نہ دیکھیں دوست پھر میرا اگر جانیں کہ میں  
ان سے کیا کہتا رہا اور آپ کیا کرتا رہا  
تھا نہ استحقاقِ تحسین، پر سنی تحسین صدا  
حق ہے جو دو ہمتی کا وہ ادا کرتا رہا  
شہرت اپنی جس قدر بڑھتی گئی آفاق میں

کبر نفس اتنا ہی یاں نشوونما پاتا رہا

(My friends would never deign to look at me ever again should they know what I have been telling them about myself and how (unknown to them) I have been violating every utterance about myself.

This was not only so in the subcontinent but in other parts of the Muslim world also Take, for instance, *Tazyyanah-i-Ta'dib* (The Scourge of Chastisement) by 'Abd al Rauf Fitrat, of Tajkistan who very movingly wrote in 1914:

جامع به ناوِ زلفِ پرِ چہرہ گان اسیر      یادِ نگاہِ مست بتان را پیالہ گیر  
گاہ از نشاطِ صبحدمِ وصل در غریب      گاہ از بلائے نیم شبِ ہجر در نفیر  
ہر قامتی کہ دیدہ ہمہ سرو را شبیہہ      ہر چہریۂ دیدہ ہمہ ماہ را نظیر  
روئے وطن ز ناخنِ غفلت جریح دار      آنہا بیادِ روئے بتان کردہ جاں نثار

(Some (poets) are bound by the shackles of the tresses of the beloved,

Some are drunk from the languid eyes of idol-like beauties;

Now they would clamour for the dawn heralding the joy of reunion,

Now they would bewail the pain of separation's midnight;

Some ever liken all figures to a cypress,

Some even liken all faces to the moon;

The face of the Watan (homeland) is scratched by the fingernails of neglect;



(While) they bestow their lines on the face of the sweetheart

And so the revolt against the timelessness of the *ghazal* was shared by the perceptive ones in the subcontinent, Iran, and Central Asia, the homelands of the *ghazal*

And so it became impossible for the *ghazal* to remain unaffected and impervious to the changed times and thought-processes. Iqbal went further than Hali in two ways: in the first place, he demolished the citadel of the spell of pessimism or fatalism which had informed Urdu poetry up to his own time<sup>22</sup>; in the second, he accelerated this process of transformation of the emphasis from the *ghazal* to the other poetic genres. Like all thinkers with a broad perspective on the past, present, and the future, he realized that degeneration had as its corollary petrification of thought and unidirectional action, for mere adherence to convention could not dictate otherwise. Did he not do it, we would have been far off from achieving a breakthrough in our approach to literature. Urdu was still a young language. True enough, its poetry was fairly developed but had yet to — metaphorically speaking — detach itself from its umbilical cord to derive independent nourishment on its own, by fixing its own norms, standards, and evaluation.

Iqbal, in fact, for quite sometime had to defend himself on two counts. One attack was launched by the exponents of conventionalism and the so-called eloquence; the other was from those who questioned the very nature of his poetry. His *Shikwah* and *Jawab-i-Shikwah* came in for attack, because it was not considered proper that Iqbal should have said in the *Shikwah*:

اے خدا! شکوہ اربابِ وفا بھی سن لے  
خوگرِ حمد سے تھوڑا سا گلہ بھی سن لے

(Hear, O Lord, some plaint from those that have been all through faithful to Thee; hearken to the lamentation that pours out from those that have always praised and exalted Thee.)

This author had the occasion to read Mirza 'Ashiq Husayn Akharabadi's rejoinder to the *Shikwah* and the *Jawab* written in the same manner a few

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion see this author's *Iqbal and Tagore: An Essay on Two Contrasting Poetic Sensibilities*, Part II, Vision, Karachi, November 1967.

years ago. The literary viewpoint from which Iqbal was criticized is, however, too trivial to detain us. He has tackled many of these in his essay, *Urdu Panjab Mayn* (Urdu in the Panjab).<sup>23</sup>

This, however, was but to be expected. Every innovator manages, against his own wish, to find enemies who go scampering to the opposite camp in order to mount an organized attack against him. By this time Iqbal had come to attach an ethical bias to poetry and poetry for the sake of poetry had ceased to have any meaning for him. His short essay, *Janab Rislat Mab ka Adabi Tabsarab*<sup>24</sup> (The *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet with Respect to Poetry; is of central significance to his approach towards poetry, and in our understanding of his approach to it. Iqbal writes:

The views expressed by the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) from time to time upon the different aspects of poetry have the status of a line that cuts diagonally through the pages of history. But the two sayings of his especially would be of great benefit to the Muslims of India for the reason that their literature is a product of unregenerate times and they are in search of a new axle to which to fix the wheel of their literature. The revelatory experience of the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) has resolved the issue of what poetry should and should not be.' Imra' A'l Qays preceded the birth of Islam by forty years. The Tradition has that the Holy Prophet said about him: اشعر الشعراؤ اقايدهم الى النار "Leader of the poets he may be; but so shall he also command their contingent in Hell").

The question that presents itself before us, then, is what were the characteristics in the poetry of Imra' Al Qays that led the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) to formulate this view. When we read Imra' A'l Qays' poetry, we find it abounding in the passing of cups brimming with crimson wine from hand to hand, narrations of sensuous

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<sup>23</sup> *Maqalat-i-Iqbal*, ed. Savyid `Abd al-Wahid Mu`ini; Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1st ed., Lahore, May 1963, pp. 19-38; originally published in the *Sitarab-i-Subh*, Lahore, 1917.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-92.

encounters between men and women, passion-filled emotions, threnodies upon tents uprooted by desert storms, portraiture of desolate sand dunes;— and this would be the sum total of the cosmic view of the pre-Islamic Arabia. Imra' A'l Qays, instead of prodding his people by awakening within their minds the chords of striving casts a spell of inebriation and otiosity upon them. The Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) in his *hadith* has therefore pointed to the inalienable fact that it is not necessary that the *virtues of art and craft and those of life should be identical*. It is quite conceivable that a poet may turn out very good verses (sic), but his poetry may take his readers to the nethermost depths of Gehenna instead of lifting them upwards towards edification Poetry, in fact, is a spell, but woe to the poet who instead of preparing his people to defy the challenges of the times generates in their midst a feeling of fatalism and negation, thus taking them and his nation to the sure path of self-destruction. What he should do is to make the others share his discoveries of the unageing aspects of Nature, and to persuade his readers to partake in his joy in the energy and life that froth and the sparkle out of it. He should not be like a robber who appropriates even that which is his to give to the others.

Once a couplet by the famous poet, 'Antarah, of the tribe of Banu 'Ays, was recited before the Holy Prophet:

والقد بيت على الطوى و اظله  
حتى انال به كـريم الماكل

(Many a night have I expended on sedulousness and hard work so that in the end I may be capable of earning my bread by honest means.)

The Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him), whose opinion on poetry suggests he wished to make human life more edifying and more exalting and to enable man to face the ordeals and tribulations of life more equanimously, was overcome by the direct impact of these verses.

Addressing his Companions, he said: "No other Arab that has been praised before me has aroused such a desire in me to meet him. But I tell you this truly: I should like to see the writer of this verse."

God is Great! That Exponent of the Unity of the Godhead, one fleeting vision of whose beatific and noble countenance was an assurance sufficient unto all the futurity for blessings and redemption here expresses the wish to meet an idolatrous Arab. What was it that 'Antarah had said that evoked such appreciation from the Holy Prophet? The praise accorded to 'Antarah by the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) stemmed from the fact that 'Antarah's couplet epitomizes a healthy, wide-awake, and active life. The ordeals that a man has to suffer in the prosecution of an honest and clean life have been graphically condensed by the poet within the span of a couplet The Lord of the World (*Babe ant wa Ummi*), the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him), has praised the verse also for another reason which also derives from it namely, *artifact or art is not independent of but subservient to life*. Every kind of capacity that God has vouchsafed to us and all that has been endowed to us in the form of energy to the heart and the mind have as their ultimate end only one objective: that life should shine sun-like; that it should be full of energy and zeal; and therefore all art should subserve this cardinal rule. Every (object of the art) should be measured from the standard norm of how much of life-giving attributes it has. All that (art) that makes us lapse into slumber, ignoring the realities around us (life consists in overpowering) and blindfolding ourselves portends the message of decline and death. The poet should not turn himself into one of the lovers of China Baygam.

Sarah XXVI (*Al-Shura*, The Poets) from verse 224 if. distinguishes between the poets and the Prophets; the former say what they do not mean, while a prophet is one who practises what he preaches

الم تــــرأــــنهم في كــــل واد يهيمــــون ٢٢٥  
وأنهم يقولون مــــالاً يفعلون ٢٢٦

الا الذين آمنو و عملو الصلّحت و ذكر والله كثيراً و انتصروا من بعد ما ظلموا و سيعلم  
الذين ظلموا أى منقلبه ينقلبون

(As for poets, the erring follow them. Hast thou not seen how they stray in every valley, and how they say that which they do not? Save those who believe and do good works, and remember Allah much, and vindicate themselves after they have been wronged. Those who do wrong will come to know by what a (great) reverse they are overturned!)

This elaboration of the *Surah Al-Shu'ra* and the *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) is interspersed all through Iqbal's latter-day poetry. The *Asrar* and the *Rumus*, for instance, celebrated for their attacks upon Khwajah Shams al-Din Hafiz Shirazi (later withdrawn in the light of the furore which arose) and Plato had, if only for that reason, become *causes celebres*. About Plato, for example, Iqbal says:

راهبِ دیرینه افلاطون حکیم  
از گــــروه گوســــفندانِ قــــدیم  
آنچنان افسونِ نا محسوسِ خورد  
اعتبار از دست و چشم و گوش برد

(That ancient recluse, that philosopher we know as Plato, be-longed to the ancient tribe of the sheep.

He fed himself upon a spell that went unfelt, and made reliance upon the hands, eyes, and ears retire (into the limbo of oblivion)

Elsewhere also he cautions his compatriots to beware of being lulled into inertia by surrendering themselves to forces that generate it and which

slow down the quantum of the momentum of activity as in the following couplet which is ironic in its motif:

اسی قرآن میں ہے اب ترکِ جہاں کی تعلیم  
جس نے مومن کو بنایا مہ و پرویں کا امیر

(And now we are told that the selfsame Qur'an which has made the *manmin* the master of the moon and the Pleiads directs us to renounce the world!)

It is indeed my belief that, considering the influence of the Qur'an and the *Hadith* on the poet, had he even wished to evolve some other kind of theory—based on, say, hedonism, imagism, Stoicism and so on — it could not have been possible. His poetry cannot survive or sustain itself without the Qur'an and the *Hadith* which serve as the very foundations of the structure of his poetry. Nothing in Urdu poetry symbolizes this influence upon him so typically as his poem, *Taswir wa Mussawir*, which would repay a somewhat more detailed study.

تصویر

کہا تصویر نے تصویر گر سے نمائش ہے مری تیرے ہنر سے  
و لیکن کس قدر نامنصفی ہے کہ تو پوشیدہ ہے میری نظر سے

مصور

گراں ہے چشمِ بینا دیدہ ور پر جہاں بینی سے کیا گذری شر پر  
نظر سوز و غم و درد و تب و تاب تو اے نادان قناعت کر خبر پر

تصویر

خبر عقل و خرد کی ناتوانی      نظر دل کی حیات جاودانی  
نہیں ہے اس زمانے کی تگ و تاز      سزاوارِ حدیث      لترانی

مصور

تو ہے میرے کمالاتِ ہنر سے      نہ ہو نوמיד اپنے نقشِ گر سے  
مرے دیدار کی ہے اک یہی شرط      کہ تو پنہاں نہ ہو اپنی خبر سے<sup>25</sup>

### *The Portrait*

(Said the portrait to its Painter: "My manifestation attests to Thine unbounded Skill.

"And yet what a violation of justice it is that Thou shouldst remain hid from my sight!)

### *The Painter*

"(The vision endowed to those that observe find it oppressive. See for thyself how the spark burnt itself out when it saw the world! What aught is sight but sadness, gloom, feverishness, and self-torment: Rest, O thou ignorant of the mysteries), upon report.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Portrait*

(What aught is report but the impotence of ratiocination and wisdom? Vision is the eternal springtide of life.

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<sup>25</sup> The *Armughan-i-Hijaz*, pp. 2 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> Iqbal has used the word, *khabar* (report), in a purely religious connotation in the sense of narration as implied in the Qur'an and the *Hadiith*.

The hustle and the bustle of the present age does not permit one to express oneself melodiously.

*The Painter*

Thou doth exist because of the Perfections of My Art. Do not, then, feel cast out in disappointment with Him that hath drawn thee.

I only put one condition if thou wishest to see me: Never disappear from thine own sight.)

This is one of the most perfect pieces of poetry in Urdu — something like the classical verse of Sophocles. The mature Iqbal has chiselled and hammered each word into its proper niche. The distinction between what is heard and is actually seen has been underlined in the *Surah Al-Ta'Ha* (ayah 58) and the Holy Prophet himself has said:

ليس الخبر وكا لمعاينه

("What is heard is never like what is actually seen").

It is quite possible, in fact, that this *hadith* might have set the train of Iqbal's thought in this direction.

Iqbal in this poem specifically alludes to the present age. He consolidates the doubts and the affirmatives of the age into a whole and then embarks on quest for the Infinite. But the Infinity he searches for lies within himself and this leads one to suspect that he too, in the end, had come to believe that monism and panentheism or adumbration (*wahdat al-shahud*) as Shah Waliy Allah had said much earlier, are only two different semantic approaches towards an identical object: deep down they both coalesce.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the cleavage between wisdom (*Bu Labab*) and love or 'ishq (*Mustafa*) was at last brought down, and *danish* (wisdom) and ' *binish* (perception or vision) should work together for the uplift of man.<sup>28</sup>

Let us now see how Iqbal's approach towards the ethical content of poetry fits in within the overall framework of other ethical theories

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<sup>27</sup> This is rather elegantly and persuasively argued by Maykash Akbarabadi in his *Naqd-i-Iqbal*, Aina-i-Adab, Lahore, 1970, pp. 299-305, 306-08.

<sup>28</sup> In the *Hadrat-i-Insan*, his last Urdu poem.



formulated about poetry. This is too elaborate a subject to be attempted here and I am only considering one particular theory. I here propose to outline the Infection Theory of Literature as developed by one of the most creative minds of the present age, "Tolstoy. In *Vision and Design*<sup>29</sup> he says:

Art becomes more or less infectious in consequence of three conditions:

- (i) In consequence of a greater or lesser peculiarity of the sensation conveyed.
- (ii) In consequence of a greater or lesser clearness of the transmission of this condition.
- (iii) In consequence of the sincerity of the artist, that is, of the greater or lesser force with which that artist himself experiences the sensation which he is conveying.

This theory is in contradiction to his early views expressed in his *What is Art?* There he had rejected Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe as these writers did not preach the union of people, with their appeals limited to cultured and aristocratic circles. I believe when I.A. Richards says that "special" experiences are not always palatable, such as the experiences of the dyspeptics, amateurs of psycho-analysis, fishermen, and golfers, he is rather stretching the analogy too far. Iqbal personally would have agreed with Tolstoy when the latter said: "The more the sensation to be conveyed is special, the more strongly does it act upon the receiver; the more special the condition of the mind is to which the reader is transferred, the more willingly and the more power-fully does he blend with it."

Iqbal would have conceded this approach, for an already *universalized experience* is at best an *apophthegm* and at worst a *nauseating and tiring platitude*. A *peculiar* or "special" experience has the *potentiality* of being *universalized*, the *individual* becoming a part of the cosmic flux. Considered from this viewpoint, Iqbal's contribution to the bearings of Urdu criticism through his poetry, let alone his prose works, remains unique and unrivalled. He echoes Tolstoy's Infection Theory when he says:

جس سے دلِ دریا متلاطم نہیں ہوتا

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<sup>29</sup> This is partly based upon I.A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp.186-90.

اے قطرہ نیاں! وہ صدف کیا، وہ گہر کیا

(What good would, O Spring Drop, a pearl produced by thee be if it fails to generate storms in the heart of the ocean?)

This is a view not unlike Tolstoy's Theory of Infection Iqbal, unlike Dante and Shakespeare, on Tolstoy's earlier analogy, makes the grade, because in formulating his ideas about Pan-Islamism, he did try to bring about union between people separated from each other geographically, politically, and economically. For this reason his theory or approach (because he never meant it to be stated as a theory) becomes all the more important. Quite recently Professor Ahmad Ali (*Self into Action: An Examination of Iqbal's Philosophy*)<sup>30</sup> wrote that Iqbal attributed the decline of the Muslim Oecumene "to the loss of orthodox belief," and that: "It is the law of Nature that whatever has a rise must also have a fall; and destruction lies in the very nature of creation."

My personal impression about Iqbal is that he had a very sharp sense of history — indeed, one of the sharpest that a poet of this age has possessed. Among the major poets of this century, only T.S. Eliot besides him happened to have been a student of philosophy. He was aware of the flux which we know as history. He himself has said:

حکومت کا تو کیا رونا کہ وہ ایک عارضی شے تھی  
نہیں دنیا کے آئینِ مسلم سے کوئی چارا

(Let alone complaints over the hegemony gone by! What else was it but a transient phenomenon? There is no escape from the inexorable laws of the universe).

Deep down, however, he felt life should be made worth living for all human beings — be they Muslims or the Coptic Christians of Ethiopia. Nor could it be said that his approach was utilitarian, for in the later morals become subject to prudence and ethical codes are merely the expression of the most general scheme of expediency to which an individual or a race has

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<sup>30</sup> *The Sun*, Karachi, 1974.

attained. What he desired was that the individual as well as the people should not dissipate their energies. One does not cease to be a Muslim by living in the *Dar al-Harb* or by losing the reigns of governance. Moreover, a purely secular poet is a mere figment of the imagination; for his connotations belong to his particular religious heritage or to the civilization he represents. Iqbal had no panacea to offer nor any eirenicon apart from that which was offered by the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. What he believes to be the duty of poetry is that it should distil the individual experience in the light of the Qur'an and the *Hadith* to universalize that individual experience — in this case, his own experience. That even this approach should appear out of the way to some shows how far we stand dissociated from our back-ground, our past, and our real moorings.