

A BANG-I DARA POEM STUDIED: "MUHABBAT" (LOVE)*

Kamal M. Habib

If there are things that are not what they seem, Iqbal's "*Muḥabbat*" (Love) is certainly one. It is — in an age when the art of myth-making is dead — a bold experiment, a real tour de force, and represents a marked departure from the conventional symbolism and form which had hitherto prevailed in Urdu.

"*Muḥabbat*" was written during the poet's sojourn in Europe. It is written in *bīḥar-i basīṭ*, which is the most characteristic verse-metre of Iqbal. It reflects all sorts of Western influences — Platonism, Pantheism, Romanticism, German philosophy, Imagism, and so on. But in a sense this period is the most formative so far as Iqbal is concerned. It was then that the poet moved from nationalism towards Pan-Islamism. His' *Ṣiqḥiyah*," "*Sulāymah*," and "*ʿAbd al-Qādir Kay Nām*" ("To 'Abd al-Qādir") clearly bespeak the changed perspective of the poet. It is also rather crucially important in that many of the symbols employed in the poem, e.g. *ladḥbat-i-ram* (love for movement), which emerges as dynamism manifested by *khudī* (the ego) later on; *dāgh-i lālah* (the spotted tulip); *luṭf-i khwāb* (inertia), etc., occur with a greater degree of crystalline clarity in his latter-day poems. Iqbal here rejects, as he rejects in the "*ʿAshiq-i Harjāʿi*" ("The Inconstant or Ubiquitous Lover"), love as a physical entity of Urdu and Persian poetry. It is not regarded as an apothecic attribute as in conventional Urdu ghazaleering. It is held to be nothing short of being the operating force which makes the amorphous crystalline, the chaotic ordered, the disparate harmonised; it is the very force of attraction that is at the base of the Cosmos. The stigmata of the tulip are there because of love; the moon is the satellite of the earth because of love; the gravitational force is energised by love. Love is thus the operating cosmic force.

The poem is patently Romantic in the style of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*

* This article is based upon the author's analysis of the poem in a larger work, Iqbal: A Study of His Poetic Thought, Diction and Imagery, which is under preparation.

and Edger Allen Poe's *Haunted Palace*. It is presented to the reader as a legend with its attendant "suspension of disbelief" (to quote Coleridge's expression). The cavern, in *Kubla Khan*, for instance, is "a symbol not only of the hope of restoring the true sun, but, in its own nature, of the material world."⁸⁶ The river and the caverns, according to Beer, "may be taken together as symbolising the elements of dialectic creativity, but in a fallen world." Iqbal's symbolism, on the other hand, does not visualise a dialectic process. The "Alchemist" (*Kimiyāgar*) represents life-force which was present in an amorphous form when the Cosmos was created. This is where Plato's influence is visible, particularly of the *Timaeus*. Life-force has been asserting itself as life and mankind have evolved. The symbolism of *Muhabbat* was explained decades later when Iqbal said:

"Thus we see that the Quranic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being."⁸⁷

Western poets, since the decline of the Classical Age, Romantic or Classical, believe, by and large, that since the Fall nothing has been right with the world. They tend to invest the state of the world before the Original Sin with idealism and idyllic surroundings. Iqbal's belief, on the other hand, is that the Cosmos before the Fall was a bundle of inertia, and it is this consciousness that is more precious than the *ism-i a'zam* (the Name Most High). For how would the Name Most High be grasped without consciousness? This idea has been differently expressed in the '*Ashiq-i Harjā'i*':

مجھ کو پیدا کر کے اپنا نکتہ چیں پیدا کیا

⁸⁶ J.B. Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary* (Collier Books, New York, 1962), p. 221.

⁸⁷ *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1960), p. 85.

نقش ہوں، اپنے مصوّر سے گلار کہتا ہوں میں

He Who created me brought into the world His Own critic;

A portrait (by my Painter), 1 harbour complaint against Him Who drew me.]

The Alchemist knew that knowledge about a thing is of far greater import than the thing-in-itself. And thus once we understand that the Alchemist *represents* life-force and that love is the operating force which works at the behest of life-force, the symbolism of the poem loses much of its obscurity.

The poem can be divided into four parts: (i) the amorphous nature of life before the appearance of love, when life is amorphous and meaningless in that it is non-active and inertial; (ii) struggle for the attainment of love; (iii) components which have gone into the making of love; and (iv) a universe made conscious of the operating force of love. Only when the operating force has asserted itself would the like embrace the like.

Let us now study the poem:

عروسِ شب کی زلفیں تھیں ابھی نا آشنا خم سے
ستارے آسمان کے بے خبر تھے لذتِ رم سے
قمر اپنے لباس نو میں بیگانہ سا لگتا تھا
نہ تھا واقف ابھی گردش کے آئینِ مسلم سے
ابھی امکان کی ظلمت خانے سے ابھری ہی تھی دنیا
مذاقِ زندگی پوشیدہ تھا پہنائے عالم سے
کمالِ نظمِ ہستی کی ابھی تھی ابتدا گویا
ہویدات ہی نگینے کی تمنا چشمِ خاتم سے

[The tresses of the bride of night were yet innocent of curls. The stars of the ' Heaven knew not the pleasure of movement.

Luna looked strange in its new garb, and was unaware of the laws of planetary motion.

The world had only emerged from the darkness of the possibility (of becoming); the joy of life was still dormant in the interstices of the Cosmos.

The perfection of life just had had its beginnings; the eye of the ring had just begun to be gnawed by urge for the centre-piece of the gem]

The last couplet evokes through a beautiful image what love is; it is a concentric urge, a centripetal force. The charm of the moon lies in its appearance and disappearance. Were it to be gazed at all the time, there would be no novelty about it. It is full, gibbous, crescent-shaped: and thus in its changing form captivates the imagination of man. And yet this was not so in the pre-Love aeons: there was no vision to discover beauty. The poet, in short, has depicted a loveless universe. This was so, because life-force had not asserted itself through its helpmate, love, the operating force. The symbol of the moon could have been evoked through Goethe's *Luna*. Goethe addresses the moon thus:

Sister of the earliest light,
Type of loveliness in sorrow,
Silver mists thy radiance borrow,
Even as they cross thy sight.
When thou comest to the sky,
In their dusky hollows waken,
Spirits that are sad, forsaken,
Birds that shun the sky, and I.

In the "*Kīmiyāgar*" we have the beginnings of the idea of *khudī* (the ego) which becomes so central to the poetry of Iqbal later on. Besides the Platonic influence, the influence of German philosophy is quite apparent here. Thus we have Schopenhauer say:

"...Intelligence and Matter are correlates, i.e., one exists for the other, both stand and fall together. Matter is the idea of the intelligence; the intelligence is that in whose idea alone matter exists."⁸⁸

Life-force, in order to assert itself, had to break through the obstacles. But it could bulldoze through them only by means of love. This idea emerges more clearly in the "*Sāqī Nāmāh*" (Urdu), "*Maḥāvrah ma bayn Khudā wa Insān*" ("A Dialogue between God and Man") and other poems. "*Muḥabbat*" also reflects the musical outlook upon life which is so typically German. Says Paul von Feuerbach:

"Immortal life is the life which exists for its own sake, and contains its own aim and purpose in itself — immortal life is the full life, rich in contents. . . . Every moment of life is of infinite importance and significance. for its own sake, posited by itself and fulfilled in itself, an unlimited affirmation of its own self; every moment of life is like a draught which empties completely the cup of infinity, which like the cup of Oberon miraculously fills itself again and again... . Life is music, and every moment is a melody, or a sound full of deep feeling . . . the sounds of music pass away, but each sound has a meaning as a sound, and before this inner significance, the 'soul' of the sound, transitoriness recedes as something unimportant and inconsequential."⁸⁹

The power of music in Feuerbach is the power of love in Iqbal. If life is to be infinitely important and significant, its affirmation must follow through

⁸⁸ *The World as Will and Idea*, II, 400.

⁸⁹ *Saemmiliche Werke*, X, 88.

love, for without the latter the world is all chaos bereft of all vision.

The poet has laid the basic groundwork in the context of which e must appreciate the true meaning of love. The tresses of the bride f night were without curls, because vision to appreciate both beauty d beatitude was lacking. The bridal procession had no spectators. he stars of the Heaven were stationary, because movement could not be felt or appreciated. The newly-born moon looked strange, because it was so devoid of the mystery it has exercised upon man. The world led just emerged out of possibility but had not become entelechy roper. Life-force was in quest of a concentric vision like the ring that devoid of the gem in its socket. That socket was to be filled with love. Love is the entelechy of Aristotle, the will of Schopenhauer, the *Uebermensch* of Nietzsche — all that and much more besides. It is also faith vouchsafed by God to determine the direction of life-force which d had its birth in *Logos*, the Word.

Then follows the second part of the poem. Here the poet depicts the struggle of life-force which penetrates into the secret recesses of space and time to seek out love, and so out of the darkness which pervaded the universe hitherto emerges the lambent flame of love.

سنا ہے عالمِ بلا میں کوئی کیمیا گر تھا
صفا تھی جس کی خاکِ پا میں بڑھ کر ساغرِ جم سے
لکھاتے ہا عرش کے پائے پہ اک اکیسر کا نسخہ
چھپاتے تھے فرشتے جس کو چشمِ روحِ آدم سے
نگاہیں تاک میں رہتی تھیں لیکن کیمیا گر کی
وہ اس نسخے کو بڑھ کر جانتا تھا اسمِ اعظم سے
بڑھا تسبیحِ خوانی کے بہانے عرش کی جانب
تمنائے دلی آخر بر آئی سعیِ پیہم سے
پھرایا فکرِ اجزا نے اسے میدانِ امکاں میں
چھپے گی کا کوئی شے بارگاہِ حق کے محرم سے

[It is said that in the world above lived an Alchemist, the dust of whose feet possessed greater purity than the Cup of Jamshīd.

At the foot of the Heaven was kept the recipe for an elixir which the angels hid from the eye of the soul of Adam.

But the eyes of the Alchemist were hitched all the time to this secret recipe which he knew to be precious far than the Name Most High.

And so, under the pretence of worship, he advanced towards Heaven and his heart's desire he obtained through ceaseless striving.

He then roved through the expanse of possibility, but shall any object hide itself from the sight of one who is in search of Truth?]

Modern age, as I have said earlier, is hardly conducive to myths or myth-making. The place of elaborate plot has been taken by poetic thought, diction, imagery and symbolism. Now this Alchemist possessed greater power to see the universe than Jamshīd through his cup. Why so? Because Jamshīd is concerned with his own self and his own kingship. The Alchemist's concern is with the discovery of an object that would change the cosmic order altogether. The elixir incorporated ingredients that had to be sought; nothing was ready-made. "Strive and acquire," that was the message to life-force. The elixir was not only hidden by the Angels from the sight of Adam but also from the farthest flight of his imagination. The latter idea is conveyed by *chashm-i ruh-i Adam*. But what Adam — a part of life-force—did not know, life-force did, and the Alchemist knew the recipe for the elixir to be more precious than the *Ism-i A'zam*, because only through its possession would the consciousness of the Godhead be gained. No consciousness, and *Ism-i A'zam* remains a thing-in-itself in visionless surroundings— Was, then, the Alchemist being both cunning and sacrilegious in trying to obtain the recipe by all means at his command, fair or foul. Three alternative explanations are possible:

(1) The end justified the means. The Alchemist knew that he was trying his stratagem upon the Angels because the endpoint of his efforts would take life-force to the highest pinnacle of faith.

(2) Life-force is compounded of both good and evil. There was more good latent in the effort than evil.

(3) God Himself had set this task for life-force, and by His Grace the Alchemist succeeded.

Keeping in view the undertones of the poem, the last explanation seems to fit well, although one must confess that here Iqbal's words have not been able to catch up with the myth.

The composite nature of love is described in the third part. It is not merely the love of a man for a woman, of a father for his child, or the love we might have for an object, etc. It is the *motivating* or *operating* force in the cosmic order. It is not merely domestic; it is cosmic, and can move from the cosmic to the domestic and *vice versa*, And so we have:

چمک تارے سے مانگی، چاند سے داغِ جگر مانگا
اڑائی تیرگی تھوڑی سی شب کی زلفِ بریم سے
تڑپ بجلی سے پائی، حور سے پاکیزگی پائی
حرارت لی نفسہائے مسیح ابن مریم سے
ذرا سی پھر ربوبیت سے شانِ بے نیازی لی
ملک سے عاجزی، افتادگی تقدیرِ شبنم سے
پھر ان اجزا کو گھولا چشمہ حیواں کے پانی میں
مرکب نے محبت نام پایا عرشِ اعظم سے
مہوس نے یہ پانی ہستیِ نوخیز پر چھڑکا
گرہ کھولی ہنر نے اس کے گویا کارِ عالم سے

[He took luminiscence from the stars, sadness from the moon, a little of darkness from the dishevelled tresses of the Night,

Fervour from lightning, purity from the hourie, and warmth from the breath of Masīḥ, he that was the son of Mary.

He then measured out a little of the Independence of the Deity, obedience of the Angel, and humility of the dew.

These ingredients he dissolved in the water of eternal life, and the compound was given the name of Love from the Highest Seat in Heaven.

The liquid so made was sprinkled upon the new life, and from his universal act artifice had had its birth.]

There are two points here, however, which are to be noted. The water of eternal life (*āb-i-ḥayawān*) was already there, confirming thereby that the act of the Alchemist released the operating force of life or life-force — love. The other point occurs in the last couplet- Art, artifice, artifact — they all had their birth after love. Life before the appearance of love was a blind and unconscious stream of turbidity; with the birth of love it moved nearer realisation. Life-force hitherto was wandering in the dark without any objective or aim. Direction or motivation was provided by the discovery of love.

Love is thus the noblest of life's attributes. Iqbal's approach is definitely Pantheistic here. Love is made to comprise divine, angelic and earthly attributes. Thus Independence (*Shān-i binīyāz*) is a divine attribute borrowed from God, while all the remaining attributes that go to make love—the luminosity of the stars, colour of the moon, tenebrousness of the night, the fervour of lightning, the purity of the hourie of Paradise, warmth from the breath of the Prophet 'Īsā, humility of the dew, and the unquestioning submissiveness of the Angels — are either non-divine or created.

We now come to the fourth — and the last part — of the poem. The poet describes the aftermath of the Alchemist's sprinkling:

ہوئی جنبش عیاں، ذروں نے لطفِ خواب کو چھوڑا
گلے ملنے لگے اٹھ اٹھ کے اپنے اپنے ہمدم سے
خرامِ ناز پایا آفتابوں نے، ستاروں نے

چٹک غنچوں نے پائی، داغ پائے لالہ زاروں نے

[Everything began to be on the move. The particles shed off the pleasure of dreams.

Every being leapt up from its appointed place to embrace its mate.

The stars and the suns (at last) found motion:

the buds began to blossom and the tulip fields had scar-ridden flowers.]

And so the meaning of life made itself evident. It lies enshrined in brotherhood, empathy, sympathy and harmony. Conjugation of the similar and activity also mirror love Thus love is a many-faceted force; and in the end life-force had the guiding hand of love.

The approach of the poem is breathtakingly original. Here Love is not on the downward path; if anything, it is in the ascendant, ever on the path of evolution. *Paradise Lost*, *Divine Comedy*, *Ancient Mariner*, *The Waste Land*, in fact, most of the major poems of Western literature, are permeated by the dogma of Original Sin Coleridge particularly reflects this. Iqbal is a dynamic millenarian. He refuses to look back on events and incidents *manqué*. We might posit the dynamism of "*Muhabbat*" against the backdrop of *The Haunted Palace* by Edgar Allen Poe. This "Palace" which stood in the "monarch Thought's dominion" has had its original residents who cherished beauty and harmony supplanted. Proceeds the poet:

Travellers in that happy valley

Through two luminous windows saw

Spirits moving musically

To the lute's well-tuned law,

Round about a throne, where sitting (Porphyro gene!)

In state his glory well-befitting
The ruler of the realm was seen.
And travellers, now within that valley
Through the red-litten windows see,
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody,
While, like a ghastly rapid river,
A hideous laugh goes out for ever,
And smile — but laugh no more.

The influences that have shaped "*Muhabbat*" can, at best, be guessed at. It is rather regrettable that as major a poem as *Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel* and *Hyperion* can be analysed only in a general way. We do not have evidence, as we have in the prose material left by Coleridge and Keats, to see what influences and factors shaped the poem. The value of such material stands out all the more when we consider monumental efforts like J.L. Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu*, E. Schneider's *Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan*, A.H Nethercot's *The Road to Tryermaine* or C.F.E. Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery*. Nevertheless, despite the paucity of the auxiliary material, did we not analyse "*Muhabbat*," it would be difficult to understand the latter-day symbolism of Iqbal.

Muhammad Iqbal

MUSLIM DEMOCRACY*

The Democracy of Europe — overshadowed by socialistic agitation and anarchical fear — originated mainly in the economic regeneration of European societies. Nietzsche, however, abhors this "rule of the herd," and, hopeless of the plebeian, he bases all higher culture on the cultivation and growth of an Aristocracy of Superman. But is the plebeian so absolutely hopeless? The Democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity; it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a centre of latent power the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character. Out of the plebeian material Islam has formed men of the noblest type of life and power. Is not, then, the Democracy of early Islam an experimental refutation of the ideas of Nietzsche ?

* From "Stray Thoughts," New Era, 28 July 1917.