

# IQBAL AS THE POET OF TIME

A Literary Study

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## I

It has been affirmed, with probably some justification, that, while prose exercises domination over the mind, poetry envelops the sense. The equivalent, therefore, of the rhetoric in prose is the lyrical in poetry, so to speak in a rather general way. Poetry should, for this reason, convey thoughts about life more deeply, intensely, and effectively than prose, even though prose as a genre is far more eclectic than poetry.

The greater degree of intensity resident in poetry must per se make it more subjective than prose, and the poet through the vehicle of rhyme or any other non-prosaic device conveys, one way or the other, his reactions to life. Whether it is a purely meta-physical work like Lucretius' *De Natura Rerum* ("On the Nature of Things") or the *Manẓiqat al-Tair* by the great and noble Shaikh Farīd al-Din 'Aṭṭār, or a drama heralding the return of the West to its Greek past like the second part of *Faust* of Goethe, the subjective element, which is the very warp and woof of poetry, is bound to be there. But the crux of the problem of subjectivity is as to how much of it is to be found in the poetical works of a poet.

This strand of subjectivity has made fatalism run through the innermost fibres of Urdu poetry and, therefore, a great body of Urdu poetry is informed by fatalism. For instance, Mirzā Sawdā would say:

ملائک جو لوح و قلم دیکھتے ہیں	مٹاتے ہیں رو رو نوشتے کو میرے
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[The angels, on seeing the Writ of the destiny allotted to me, weeping the while,

go on erasing the inscription of the Moving Pen on the Tablet.]

And Ghālib in a superb verse calls life a day:

بے صرفہ ہی گزرتی ہے ہو گرچہ عمرِ خضر  
حضرت بھی کل کہیں گے کہ ہم کیا کیا کیے

[Even a long, long life like that of Khidr is an expanse of waste.

What substantial acts would he brag of on the morrow?]

In Fānī we arrive at the very pinnacle of fatalism:

تیرے دیوانے پہ اتمامِ کرم ہو یا رب!  
یہ در و دیوار دیے اب انہیں ویرانی دے

[Crown, O Lord, Thy Compassion upon this humble slave of Thee.

Thou gayest him a home and a hearth; make both desolate.]

I need not quote more examples, as any number of verses could be produced to show how prominent is the strain of fatal-ism in Urdu literature, undoubtedly a heritage from its Persian poetical tradition. With such a *Weltanschauung* it is but natural that life and the verities of life should be considered through a dioptré of vision which is coloured by pessimism. Transience rather than eternity; death instead of immortality; the bodily, the tangible at the cost of the soul — these become the very fabric of Urdu poetry.

It is consequently quite obvious that no major Urdu poet before Iqbal could, for reasons outlined in the briefest possible manner, consider time as a concept, or consider the things-in themselves or, call it, if you will, the metaphysical entities of life and the external world, so profoundly. A difficult concept like that of time can be poetised only when the poet has shed off a substantial measure of subjectivity. And all this adds up to a unique aspect of Iqbal: he is as much a poet of time as he is of khudī (ego).

Indeed, in the annals of world poetry, Iqbal occupies a singular *piet-a-terre* insofar as the concept of time is concerned, the more so because, with the eye of a trained philosopher, he brings in a measure of objectivity, which I, from my own study of poetry, find exceptional. It is not as if other poets have not composed verses about time; it is the way in which he writes about time that he is *sui generis*. Shakespeare, for instance, has written two wonderful sonnets upon time ("When I have seen by Time's fell hand defac'd... " and "Since brass nor stone nor earth nor bound-less sea"... ) and in the end anticipates "eternality" (a word rather convenient to use for eternity within eternity and coined by A.N. Whitehead) of his poetic message. But by and large the concept is subjective as in:

" ... How with this rage shall Beauty hold a plea  
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?  
Oh, how shall summer's honey-breath hold  
out Against the wreckful siege of batt'ring days,  
When rocks impregnable are not so stout  
Nor gates of steel so strong but time decays?  
Oh, none unless this miracle have might  
That in black ink my love may still shine bright!"

One might of course aver — and with considerable justification — that a poet like Shakespeare who has studied the areas of experience with greater depth than any other poet with the exception of Sophocles is great precisely because he is not a poet of specialisation but of eclecticism. And by and large Shakespeare is rarely mystical, the mysticism of *The Phoenix and the Turtle* and that of the sonnet on the soul ("Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth...") being exceptions than rules.

In Andrew Marvell, who is classed as a metaphysical poet and is nearer the Age of Reason in time, time has lost much of its terror, and is accepted as the template of life, something that must be accepted than feared. And thus, in *To His Coy Mistress* he says:

"But at my back I always hear  
Time's winged chariot hurrying near:

And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast Eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found;  
Nor in thy marble vault shall sound  
My echoing song: then worms shall try  
That long preserved virginity:  
And your quaint honour turn to dust;  
And into ashes all my lust.  
The grave's a fine and private place,  
But none I think do there embrace."

This satirical view of time is evident in a major modern English poet like T.S. Eliot, who, in *Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service*, regards the emergence of the early Christian leader, Origen, as the product of the menstrual turn of time, which bore him "enervate". The concept of eternity in relation to time is exemplified, besides Shakespeare, by several modern poets. A very germane instance would be that of the late W.H. Auden's elegy upon W.B. Yeats:

"... But time that is intolerant  
Of the brave and innocent,  
And indifferent in a week  
To a beautiful physique,  
"Worships language and forgives  
Everyone by whom it lives,  
Pardons cowardice, conceit,  
Lays its honours at their feet.  
"Time, that with this strange excuse,  
Pardon'd Kipling and his views,  
And will pardon Paul Claudel,

Pardons him for writing well."

Time, according to Auden, would put a moratorium upon mortality if the product is well finished. The residue of greatness survives, although it may be restructured and replicated through imagination, as, for instance, our studies into the origin of the Attic tragedy or the historical sources which went into the making of the great tragedies of Shakespeare.

Among the twentieth-century poets of this subcontinent, who besides Iqbal have written something on time and related verities are Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. *Sesh Saptak* (No.21) presents Tagore's approach to time through the astronomical, historical, and momentary aspects of time.

(1)

"The largest of the fields is  
measured in terms of billions of years...  
From the hiding places in the unmanifest  
all things rushed into the  
manifest to dance a death-dance."

(2)

"Within the larger boundary  
smaller circles of time  
are being drawn and erased  
Moenjodaro rose like a soap-bubble,  
silently vanishing in the sea-sands of the desert."

(3)

"Tonight, sitting in my grove,  
beneath the steady light of the stars,  
I salute the Lord of Time.  
Let all schemes of immortality  
fall on the ground and scatter in the winds

like playthings held loosely  
in the hands of a child.

'Ever and anon have I my  
moments filled with bliss,  
who shall fix their measure?

The immeasurable truth is that in them  
is not contained in the circumference of the stars."

Sisirkumar Ghose observes that the poet here has "struck a typical balance in terms of the inspired moment," and further: "It is the balance of the artist who can find great in the small, the infinite in the finite; it is the moment made eternity."<sup>405</sup> For Tagore Amrita of freedom from death and erasure is contained in the here and now, and not in any other moment. What the black ink was to Shakespeare in relation to time is for Tagore the bliss of the moment. Here, unlike in Marvell and even in Shakespeare, time is not visualised as a template, but something that is moulded by the human mind, by the truth claimed to have been unveiled by it, but there is not the least tenuous logical connection as to why this should have been so.

As a piece of lyrical flight or perhaps as a far-fetched conceit, these verses might have some value, but Tagore does not instil into his concept of time any definite philosophical viewpoint. Indeed, if anything, Tagore is more of a *dilettante* than a trained philosopher, and, therefore, his poetic wherewithal is his poetic fancy, not the development of motifs, from which poetic thought could take over. Against this, Iqbal believes that the ego can break through the barriers of time and space for specific reasons, the *a priori* suppositions being of course religious to the non-Muslim and representing the ultimate truths to the Muslim. Tagore, in keeping with the lyrical and subjective nature of his poetry, is at times self-contradictory and at others ambivalent with regard to time. In the *Letter*, after the manner of the Romantic poets, he posits a view of circular time:

"I sigh that I had lived in Kalidasa's golden age,  
and that you had been — ah, but what is the use

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<sup>405</sup> *The Later Poems of Tagore* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961).

of wild and idle wishing?

I am born hopelessly in the  
age of the printing press,—a

belated Kalidasa,

and you, my love, are utterly modern."<sup>406</sup>

The meaningless hustle and bustle of today, then, are the evils of the age which the poetic mind of Tagore would like to dismiss *in limine*. He desires Kalidasa's age, not the characteristics of that age. What Greece is to Goethe, Shelley, and Herder — even perhaps to Keats — the India of Kalidasa's time is to Tagore. This view of time is not uncommon in the modern-day Western poetry and philosophy. The concept of circular time is to be found in Byron and Spencer (rather vaguely) but more pronouncedly in Heinrich Heine, Hoelderlin, Louis Blanqui, and Guyau. Schopenhauer also observes:

"Throughout and everywhere the true symbol of Nature is the circle, because it is the scheme or type of recurrence. This is, in fact, the most universal form in Nature, which it carries out in everything, from the course of the stars down to the death and the genesis of organised beings, and by which alone, is the ceaseless stream of time, and its contents, a permanent existence, i.e. Nature becomes possible."<sup>407</sup>

In Virgil it is even more self-evident: "There will also be other wars; and great Achilles will again be sent to Troy.

"Nietzsche's doctrine of "eternal recurrence of the same" is a

near return to the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrosis* (cosmic conflagration) which also finds its sympathetic exponents in Shelley and Goethe, especially in the latter's symbolisation of Euphorion as unrestrained energy and Helen, symbolising the ideal of beauty and the aesthetic direction of Western Europe, to speak nothing of symbols like Homunculus, Seismos (Earthquake), Troglodytes, Fates, etc. Even as major a thinker as Whitehead betrays the Stoic influence of time, according to S. Sambursky.<sup>408</sup> *In Process*

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<sup>406</sup> Translation by Sisikumar Ghose in *ibid*.

<sup>407</sup> *The World As Will and Idea*, Tr. T. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1883: 9<sup>th</sup> imp.), III, 267.

<sup>408</sup> *Physics of the Stoics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 100-08.

and Reality, for instance, Whitehead says:<sup>409</sup>

"There is no such thing (as instantaneous present) to be found in nature. As an ultimate fact, it is a nonentity. What is immediate for sense-awareness is a duration. Now a duration has within itself a past and a future; and the temporal breadths of the immediate durations of sense-awareness are very indeterminate and dependent on the individual percipient....The passage of nature leaves nothing between the past and the future. What we perceive as present is the vivid fringe of memory tinged with anticipation.,.. The past and the future meet and mingle in the ill-defined present."

### III

A rather interesting point to note about Iqbal's concern with time is that, although in the *Asrār-i Khudī* ("Secrets of the Self") which was published in 1915, the concept of time has come in for poetisation, it is nowhere in evidence as an integrated concept in the *Bāng-i Darā*, which was published seven years later. One possible answer could be that he did not regard the *Bāng-i Darā* as a sufficiently philosophical and mystical work, and that the theme could be better attempted in the *Bāl-i Jibrīl* and the *Payām-i Mashriq*. In fact, up to 1908 the poet was a pantheist and a Platonist. His limning of the emergence of love out of chaos as the operating force of the universe in the poem, *Mohabbat*, is almost cent per cent Platonic: only in this case it is love and not time as in Plato's *Timaeus*. The topics covered in the *Bāng-i Darā* emphasise the reaction of the poet to the physical world, and this includes the world of Islam. The *Asrār*, *Rumūz*, *Payām-i Mashriq*, *Bāl-i Jibrīl*, and indeed almost all the later works of the poet are introspective in nature. Thus, in the *Asrār*, while describing how the system of the world originates in the self, the poet observes:

آسماں موجے ز گردِ راہِ او	وسعتِ ایامِ جولانِ گاہِ او
شب ز خوابش، روز از بیداریش <sup>410</sup>	گلِ بجیبِ آفاقِ از گلکاریش

<sup>409</sup> Chapter 2.

<sup>410</sup> P. 13.



"The spaciousness of Time is its arena,  
 Heaven is a billow of the dust on the road.  
 From its rose-planting the world abounds in roses;  
 Night is born of its sleep, day springs from its waking."<sup>411</sup>

In the *Payām-i Mashriq* ("The Message of the East") which was first published in 1923, the *Nawā'-i Waqt* ("The Song of Time") is the first full-blooded poem by Iqbal on the theme of time. It is proposed to compare the poet's concept of time in this poem with his subsequent poems which are either time-oriented or devoted to time.

#### نوائے وقت<sup>412</sup>

خورشید	به	دامانم،	انجم	به	گریبانم
در من	نگری	پیچم،	در خود	نگری	جانم
در شهر	و	بیابانم	در کاخ	و	شبستانم
من دردم	و	درمانم،	من عیش		فراوانم
من	تیغ	جهان	سوزم،	من	چشمه
چنگیزی	و	تیموری،	مشته	ز	غبار
پنگامه	افرنگی،	یک	جسته	شرار	من
انسان	و	جهان	او،	از	نقش
خون	جگر	مردان،	سامان	بهار	من

<sup>411</sup> R.A. Nicholson, Tr. (Iqbal: *Asrār-i Khudī*), Secrets of the Self (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1972), p. 19.

<sup>412</sup> *Payām-i Mashriq*, pp. 102-03.

من آتشِ سوزانم، من روضہ رضوانم

آسودہ و سیارم، این طرفہ تماشا ہیں  
در بادۂ امروزم، کیفیتِ فردا ہیں  
پنہاں بہ ضمیرِ من، صد عالمِ رعنا ہیں  
صد کوکبِ غلطان ہیں، صد گنبدِ خضرا ہیں

من کسوتِ السانم، پیراہنِ بزدانم

تقدیرِ فسونِ من، تدبیرِ فسونِ تو  
تو عاشقِ لیلائے، من دشتِ جنونِ تو  
چوں روحِ رواں پا کم، از چند و چگونِ تو  
تو رازِ درونِ من، من رازِ درونِ تو

از جانِ تو پیداہم، در جانِ تو پنہانم

من رپرو و تو منزل، من مزرع و تو حاصل  
تو سازِ صد آہنگے، تو گرمیِ این محفل  
آوارۂ آب و گل! دریاہ مقامِ دل  
گنجیدہ بہ جامے ہیں این قلمِ بے ساحل

از موجِ بلندِ تو سر بر زده طوفانم

"Sun and stars in my bosom I hold:  
By me, who am nothing, thou art ensouled.  
In light and in darkness, in city and wood,  
I am pain, I am life, I am manifold.  
Destroyer and quickener, I from of old.  
"Chingiz, Timur, specks of my dust they came,  
And Europe's turmoil is a spark of my flame,  
Man and his world I fashion and frame,  
Blood of his heart my spring-flowers claim.  
Hell, fire, Paradise, I be it told.  
"I rest still, I move — wondrous sight for thine eyes!  
In the glass of 'Today see 'Tomorrow arise,  
See a thousand fair worlds where my thought deep lies,  
See a thousand swift stars, a thousand blue skies!  
Man's garment am I, God I behold.  
"Fate is my spell, free will is thy chant.  
O lover of Laila, thy frenzy I haunt ;  
As the spirit pure, I transcend thy vaunt.  
Thou and I are each other's innermost want.  
Thou showest me forth, bid'est me too in thy mould.

"Thou art my journey's end, thou my harvest-grain,  
The assembly's glow and the music's strain,  
O wanderer, home to thy heart again!  
Behold in a cup the shoreless main!  
For thy lofty wave my ocean rolled."<sup>413</sup>

The latter-day Iqbal divides time into two kinds: that of what Bergson denotes as Pure Duration and which is Divine Time, and phenomenal or serial time. The first kind of time is expressed through a ḥadīth of the Holy Prophet: 'Do not speak ill of time for God says He is Time.' Since here Time is made to speak of its being the raiment of man and the beholder of God, the clear-cut division of time as Divine Time and serial or phenomenal time has not yet ensconced itself into the poet's mind. As I shall shortly show, the poet regards the ego as that potential capability which would obliterate space, which, to quote Schopenhauer, makes geometry possible, and time, which renders arithmetic possible. I have discussed this point in considerable detail in my work *Iqbal: His Poetic Thought, Diction, and Imagery*, which is nearing completion. However, for the present, we would content ourselves with a quotation from the poet's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*:

"We are now, I hope, in a position to see the meaning of the (Qur'ānic) verse — 'And it is He Who hath ordained the night and the day to succeed one another for those who desire to think on God or desire to be thankful.' A critical interpretation of the sequence of time as revealed in ourselves has led us to a notion of the ultimate Reality as pure duration *in which thought, life, and purpose interpenetrate to form an organic unity*. We cannot conceive this unity except as the unity of the self — an all-embracing concrete self — the ultimate source of all individual life and thought. I venture to think that the error of Bergson consists in *regarding time as prior to self, to which alone pure duration is predicable*. Neither pure space nor pure time can hold together the multiplicity of objects and events. It is the appreciative act of an enduring self only which can seize

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<sup>413</sup> Translation by R. A. Nicholson [?].

the multiplicity of duration — broken up into an infinity of instants--and transfrom it to the organic wholeness of a synthesis."<sup>414</sup>

This is not the place to discuss the ideas of the early Muslim philosophers on time. But S. Alam Khundmiri is not being very correct when he observes that the Muslim philosopher, al-Kindī (d. after A.D. 870), believed, after the Greeks, in the eternity of the universe.<sup>415</sup> In fact, at least insofar as the eternity of the world was concerned, the "Philosopher of the Arabs" abandoned it at one place. Richard Walzer in this context says:

"The highest sphere had been created from nothing in a single moment of time by the omnipotent will of God, and would not last a moment longer once God had decided on its end."<sup>416</sup>

And so it would not be correct to hold that even a Mu'tazilite like al-Kindī "found in time nothing but the relations of posterior and prior".<sup>417</sup>

Iqbal's thesis on time, simply stated, is this: Since the cosmos is the product of the Mind of God, Divine Time and phenomenal or serial time are bound to be different, just as there is Divine Space and dimensional space. The highest scale which the ego has negotiated is the Mī'rāj of the Holy Prophet, during which this distinction between the two kinds of space and time was suspended, but it is possible through mystical experience to interpenetrate a little into Divine Time.

Although a mystical poet — and perhaps the only truly mystical poet in Urdu literature — Iqbal does not dismiss time as unreal which Bertrand Russell holds out to be a "cardinal doctrine of many metaphysical systems".<sup>418</sup> On the other hand, he feels rather intensely about time which he regards as a matter of life and death for the Muslim world, and the introspective nature of his latter-day poetry has made it time-oriented. There is no question of the unreality of time; it is just the question of how we react to it.

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<sup>414</sup> Chapter II : "The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience," pp. 55-56. Italics mine.

<sup>415</sup> "Conception of Time," in Hafeez Malik, Ed., Iqbal : *Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan* (New York and London : Columbia Univ. Press, 1971), p. 247.

<sup>416</sup> *Greek into Arabic* (Oxford : Brune Cassirer, 1962), p. 13.

<sup>417</sup> Khundmiri, "Conception of Time," in Hafeez Malik, Ed., op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>418</sup> "Mysticism and Logic," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1954), p. 26.

While all mystical poets are metaphysical, not all metaphysical poets need be mystical. Lucretius, for example, is preponderantly metaphysical, despite the poignancy of his feeling. A mystical verse is one that would comprise multi-layered symbolism, or would defy analysis, such as Wordsworth's *Lucy* poems. This would become clearer as we proceed further.

In the *Bāng-i Darā* the poet is more concerned with the fashioning of poetic vignettes, images, and pithy rhetorics, the finest example of which, as Uslūb Aḥmad Anṣārī has rightly pointed out, is the *Ṭulū-i Islām* ("the Dawn of Islam"). In the *Bāl-i Jibril* there is a remarkable change in the diction and imagery of the poet. Arabic idioms and images, unknown in the earlier Iqbal, are flashed in quick succession in the *Masjid-i Qurṭubah* and *Dhawq-o Shawq*, to speak nothing of the overwhelming influence of Jālāl al-Din Rūmī at the time the work was composed. Iqbal's concept of time consequently bears the stamp of Rūmī's impact.

Let us compare two poetic pieces by Rūmī and Iqbal. In the *Divanī Shamsi Tabrizī*, in one of the greatest masterpieces of mystical poetry, Rūmī says:

چه تدبیر اے مسلمان کہ من خود را نمی دانم

نه ترسا نه يهودم من نه گبرم نه مسلمانم

نه شرقيم نه غريم نه یريم نه بحریم

نه از کانِ طبعیم، نه از افلاک گردانم

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نه از ہندم، نه از چینم، نه از بلغار و سقسینم

نه از ملکِ عراقیم، نه از کاکب خراسانم

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مکانم لا مکان باشد نشانم بی نشان باشد

نه من باشد نه جاں باشد که من از جاںِ جانانم  
دوئی از خود بدر کردم یکی دیدم دو عالم را  
یکی جویم، یکی دانم، یکی بینم، یکی خوانم

"What is to be done, O Moslems? for I do not recognise myself.

I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem.

I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea;

I am not of Nature's mint, nor of the circling heavens...

I am not of India, nor of China, nor Bulgaria, nor of Saqsin;

I am not of the kingdom of Iraqain, nor of the country of Khurasan...

My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless;

'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.

I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one;

One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call."<sup>419</sup>

Here there is no unreality of time which the rationalistic Russell sees in mystical poetry. On the other hand, what Rūmī means is that his mystical insight has seen a vision that is devoid of all sensate attributes. Dimensional time becomes Pure Duration, wherein all the sensate attributes have been sloughed off, since the self has overcome the state of diremption, and moved on to the other self. Rūmī, like Iqbal, subscribed to panentheism instead of pantheism, which is generally the warp and woof of mystical poetry. We are not in Him but from Him, and unto Him we return. Duality is, for Rūmī as for Iqbal, endogenous to the intellect, which its data on the feed provided by the senses. The intellect analyses; intuition synthesises: the latter is the firmly held view of both Rūmī and Iqbal. Analyse light, for example, and it is no longer light but a spectrum of seven colours. View the whole, and it is light.

Although the theme of Iqbal's ghazal (No. 14 in Part I of the *Bāl-i Jibrīl*, pp. 29-30) is his own spiritual evolution, he is none the less permeated

<sup>419</sup> R.A. Nicholson, *Selected Poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabrizi* (Cambridge, 1898), pp. 125-27.

through and through by Rūmī's thought and in the six-verse ghazal attains a height of mystical insight and loftiness of thought equal to the highest in world poetry.

اپنی جولان گاہ زیرِ آسماں سمجھا تھا میں  
آب و گل کے کھیل کو اپنا جہاں سمجھا تھا میں  
یہ حجابی سے تری ٹوٹا نگاہوں کا طلسم  
اک ردائے نیلگوں کو آسماں سمجھا تھا میں  
کارواں تھ کر فضا کے پیچ و خم میں رہ گیا  
مہر و ماہ و مشتری کوہم عنان سمجھا تھا میں!  
عشق کی اک جست نے طے کر دیا قصہ تمام  
اس زمین و آسماں کو بیکراں سمجھا تھا میں  
کہ گئیں رازِ محبت پردہ دار پہائے شوق!  
تھی فغاں وہ بھی جسے ضبطِ فغاں سمجھا تھا میں  
تھی کسی در ماندہ رہرو کی صدائے درد ناک  
جس کو آوازِ رحیلِ کارواں سمجھا تھا میں!

"(Hitherto) I had thought my champs-de-mar to have been underneath  
the vault of heaven,

and the dalliance of the elements the wherewithal of my very existence,

(But) Thy Vision, O Lord, shattered this spell had charmed my senses,

What! I had taken only an azure layer to have been Heaven!

The caravan, wearied of the toil and moil of the (endless) journey,

found itself waylaid in the labyrinths of space,



and I (a fool that I was) had thought the planets to have been my partners (in the journey of life).

A bound by Love, and the barrier is crossed,

when hitherto I had entertained the idea that this earth and the sky were infinite.

The secret of love has been betrayed by the very dormancy of (my) ardour!

Even that which I had erewhile thought to have been a stifled wail was a plaint!

What I believed was the call for the caravan's departure

was the agonised cry of a lonesome traveller who had trudged and trudged and wearied of the way.

The first couplet limns an earlier Iqbal who regarded the dalliance of the elements, i.e. the sensate experience to have constituted the very texture of his thought and life. This was the stage when the portals of the inner sight were barred to him. On a more universal plane, we might say that the weaving of the dance of the elements is tantamount to sensate and materialistic *Weltanschauung*.

In the next verse, rather ironically couched, the poet contemptuously dismisses the apparent infinity of space as a mere play-thing. Once the Attributes of God are revealed and flash upon the template of the inner receptacle of the sight, geometrical space and mathematical time pale into insignificance. *Ridā'-i nilqīm* (azure layer) could denote both night and the sky, as *ridā'-i nil* is employed metaphorically in Persian for night. And so we get symbolism that is double-edged. The earlier sensate life of the poet was one of darkness, and it is only the inner sight that has revealed to him his real self which is part of the Traceless, the Spaceless, as Rūmī would say.

Caravan, in the third couplet, is employed as a synecdoche, i.e. part denoting whole. Caravan here symbolises the journey of man or life. It has become lost, because it does not know what path it should take. How can the planets, themselves subject to vicissitudes of time and fortune, determine the life of man? And the poet too was a member of the caravan before, and looked with expectation upon the planets. Nicolas Berdyaev imparts

expression to this spiritual quest as follows:

"Man is a free, supernatural spirit, a microcosm. Spiritualism, like materialism, can see in man only a natural, although a spiritual, being and then subjects him to a spiritual determinism, just as materialism subjects to the material. Freedom is only the production of spiritual phenomena out of preceding spiritual phenomena in the same being. Freedom is a positive creative force, unconditioned by anything else and based upon nothing else, flowing up from a spring of boundless depth. Freedom is the power to create out of nothing, the power of the spirit to *create out of itself and not out of the world of nature*. Freedom is one's positive expression and assertion is creativity. Free energy, i.e. creative energy, is substantially inherent in man. But man's substantiality is not a closed circle of energy within which everything is spiritually determined. In man's very substantiality there are bottomless well-springs. Creative energy is increasing energy, not energy which merely rearranges itself. *The mystery of freedom denies everything finite and all limitations.*"<sup>420</sup>

In other words, both Iqbal the Muslim and Berdyaev the Russian of the Orthodox faith subscribe to the belief that the world of the spirit, being infinite, or, putting it more cautiously, non-finite, cannot be contained within finite space and time. Spiritual freedom leads to the diremption of the spirit from both.

*‘Ishq* for Iqbal is the motivating or operating force within the cosmic framework. Life *sans* *‘ishq* would pass into entropy, into energy that is unusable. The highest exponent of *‘ishq* is Muṣṭafā, the Holy Prophet, and his Ascension to the Highest Empyrean re-presents the very ultimate in *‘ishq*. The Ascension of the Holy Prophet, says Iqbal in the fourth couplet, should set at rest the controversy that space and time are circumscribed by finitude. The Holy Prophet's vision of Paradise and Hell, his hearing of the sound of the Moving Pen, and his journey to a region where even the Angel Gabriel could not go, make time recede, and it is measurable not even in light years. This is the highest possible state of spiritualism possible. How foolish and inane of the poet to have believed that the sky and the earth could not be traversed! But such spiritual postulates predicate total acceptance. And this acceptance will well up only from the heart, not the mind, which is basically

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<sup>420</sup> *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 136. Italics mine.

rationalising: the noetic and the spiritual or the intuitive are by and large antithetical to each other.

In the penultimate verse the poet suggests that each man has the spiritual dormant in him. His acts betray his spiritual make-up, although on surface he might dedicate himself to all that is sensate, material, and non-spiritual. In the last verse, in the opinion of this author, the Angel Gabriel might also have been implied, but, even if this is not so, the verse refers to those that are spiritually less blessed. Here also we get a *double entendre*.

The word *khudī* (self or the ego), in the Urdu poetry of Iqbal, occurs for the first time in the poet's *qasīdah* dedicated to Sanā'i of Ghaznah (*Bāl-i Jibrīl*, p. 37):

خودی سے اس طلسمِ رنگ و بو کو توڑ سکتے ہیں  
یہی توحید تھی جس کو نہ تُو سمجھا نہ میں سمجھا!

"This spell of the senses can be vanquished by the self alone.

This precisely is the Unity (of the Godhead) which neither thou nor I had understood."

This self- or ego-oriented concept is logically tied to time, as Iqbal says in one of his finest *ghazals* in the *Bāl-i Jibrīl* (p. 44):

عجب مزا ہے مجھے لذتِ خودی دے کر  
وہ چاہتے ہیں کہ میں اپنے آپ میں نہ رہوں  
ضمیرِ پاک و نگاہِ بلند و مستیِ شوق  
نہ مال و دولتِ قاروں نہ فکرِ افلاطون!  
سبق ملا ہے یہ معراجِ مصطفیٰ سے مجھے

کہ	عالمِ بشریت	کی	زد	میں	ہے	گردوں!
یہ	کائنات	ابھی	نا	تمام	ہے	شاید
کہ	آرہی	ہے	دما دم	صدائے	کن	فیکون

"What a piquant situation! Having vouchsafed upon me the delectableness of the ego,

He wants me to be dispossessed of my own self!

(All that I wish for) is a pure heart, a lofty vision, and ecstasy of the ardour, not the wealth and pelf of Korah nor the flight of Plato's thought.

The lesson I have learnt from the Ascension of Muṣṭafā is that the Highest Empyrean is within the access of man.

Mayhap, this cosmos is not yet complete,

for the Command "Be, and it is" is making its echo felt all the time."

In both the *Masjid-i Qurṭubah* and the *Sāqī Nāmāh* (*Bāl-i Jibrīl*, pp. 126-36 and 166-74, respectively) the treatment of time is at cosmic level. While in the former poem it is regarded as the final and sure assayer of what is gold and dross in history, in the *Sāqī Nāmāh* time is presented as space-time continuum and as a force antagonistic to the emergence of the self and of that of which it is the essence, life. This means that phenomenal time and Pure Duration belong to different realms: phenomenal time to the realm of the senses, Pure Duration, to God.

Having described both phenomenal time and Pure Duration in the *Masjid-i Qurṭubah* (Stanza I), the poet proceeds:

اول و آخر فنا باطن و ظاہر فنا	نقشِ کہن ہو کہ نو منزلِ آخر فنا!
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"The beginning and the end (of the world) is death. What is apparent is destined to fade into nothingness, as also that which is hidden.

The ultimate goal is annihilation, be it the relic of past or the product of the coeval time."

There is, however, one single exception:

ہے مگر اُس نقش میں رنگِ ثباتِ دوام
جس کو کیا ہو کسی مردِ خدا نے تمام

"But the picture that has been limned to completion by a man of God is one that has had its ground filled with the hue of immortality."

In the earlier verses the poet has said that Pure Duration is that which goes into the Attributes of God, while non-Divine time is that through which God shows to man the cadence of possibilities, of becoming or passing into a state of realisation, and ceasing-to-be. Since 'ishq or love is the motivating force of the universe, it transcends mortality. Because immortality within immortality is not possible, 'ishq is from God. Quoting the Qur'ānic verse: "We verily created a man and We know what his soul whispereth to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (v. 16), Iqbal observes:

"Divine life is in touch with the whole universe on the analogy of the soul's contact with the body. The soul is neither inside nor outside the body; neither proximate to nor separate from it. Yet its contact with every atom of the body is real, and it is impossible to conceive this contact except by positing some kind of space which befits the subtleness of the soul."<sup>421</sup>

Further, the poet compares 'ishq to a flood that would stanch the flood of time—in other words, life or 'ishq acts as mirror-time or anti-time. And since phenomenal time represents the senses, this mirror time ought to represent Pure Duration, from which it flows. This idea of mirror-time is further elaborated in the *Sāqī Nāmāh*. Thus in Stanza V the poet says about life:

سفرِ زندگی کے لیے برگ و ساز	سفر ہے حقیقتِ حاضر ہے مجاز
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<sup>421</sup> *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 135.

"Journey is the melody of life.

Journey is the reality ; it is stagnation which is illusive."

And then in Stanza VI the poet proceeds in a language which is in the highest degree mystical about the nature of the ego:

اندھیرے اُجالے میں تابناک!  
من و تو میں پیدا من و تو سے پاک!  
ازل اس کے پیچھے ابد سامنے!  
نہ حد اس کے پیچھے نہ حد سامنے!  
زمانے کے دریا میں بہتی ہوئی  
ستم اس کی موجوں کے سہتے ہوئی  
تجسس کی راہیں بدلتی ہوئی  
دمادم نگاہیں بدلتی ہوئی  
سبک اس کے ہاتھوں میں سنگِ گراں!  
پہاڑ اس کی ضربوں سے ریگِ رواں!  
سفر اس کا انجام و آغاز ہے  
یہی اس کی تقویم کا راز ہے!

"Refulgent in darkness and light alike, though born out of I and Thou,  
it is free from this I-Thou duality.

An unending expanse of time before it, and immortality at its back,  
it is not circumscribed by boundaries before or behind.

Flowing in the ocean of time, braving the buffeting of its waves,  
Changing its *point d'appui*, each moment turning its sight in never  
and fresher directions,

Light (like) a feather is the boulder In its hands and the mountain is  
pulverised into grains of sand by its strokes.

Journey is its beginning; it is also its end; it is journey that has shaped it."

Thus it is the ego which does away with this diremption of I and Thou, that is. the self and the other-than-self. In the Western existential philosophy "I" stands for the consciousness of the self and "Thou" for God. This is what Iqbal implies here. Once the self moves out of its own self, it naturally passes into the other self. And this idea has been expressed by the poet beautifully. We are born shackled to the senses.

Time is not presented in the poem as a mere template but as something that casts barriers in the path of the ego. The ego alters its *point d'appui* and perspectives on different occasions, although the goal is set and is never lost sight of. This goal has God as the Limit. In the *Navā'-i Waqt (Payām-i Mashriq*, pp. 102-03), on the other hand, time is pain, life, manifold. But with a clearer and more emphatic concept of the ego, the poet's view of time has undergone a change. Phenomenal time is tied to the senses, while the essence of the human soul has in some members of the human kind fuller and in others — indeed, the vast majority — a dimmer realisation of this merger with Pure Duration.

An Urdu poem devoted to time and belonging to the later period of Iqbal is *Zamānah* ("The Age" or "Time") in the *Bāl-i Jibril* (p. 175). The tenor of the poem clearly shows that what the poet has in mind is phenomenal time, and here it is the in-exorable nature of phenomenal time that has been presented. Three couplets of the poem being reproduced here are remarkable for their beauty of expression (the long metre adds to the degree of emphasis and to the building up of the thesis and antithesis):

سری صراحی سے قطرہ قطرہ نئے حوادث ٹپک رہے ہیں

میں اپنی تسبیح روز و شب کا شمار کرتا ہوں دانہ دانہ!  
ہر ایک سے آشنا ہوں لیکن جدا جدا رسم و راہ میری  
کسی کاراکب کسی کا مرکب کسی کو عبرت کا تازیانہ!  
نہ تھا اگر تو شریکِ محفل، قصور میرا ہے یا کہ تیرا؟  
مرا طریقہ نہیں کہ رکھ لوں کسی کی خاطر مئے شبانہ!

"New events are pouring dropwise from my cup ;

and I swirl my rosary beads to count the passing of each day and night.

Knowing everyone, I keep my relationship with each one of those on a different plane.

On some I ride, some have me as their dromedary, to some I am the whiplash of reprimand.

If thou participated not in the deliberations of the assembly, whose fault is it--mine or thine?

Knowest thou not it is not my wont to keep the wine overnight for tipplers?"

Time is visualised here as representing three characteristics. Those who allow time to ride over them pass into the bylanes of history, virtually leaving no trace. Such individuals or nations

possess no sense or notion of time. In *Sūrah Yūnus* (x. Jonah) God has said:

"Lo ! in the difference of day and night and all that Allah hath created in the heavens and the earth are portents, verily, for folk who ward off (evil)" (v. 6).

Those who ride on time are those who have taken the initiative. Such individuals or nations have outbid time, as the "Mosque of Cordova" has outbidden time. The third category of individuals or nations is that which is ready or is prepared to accept their follies in the past and to redress them in the future. The allusion is obviously to the present-day Muslim world.



What sources, besides the Qur'an, that went to fashion Iqbal's concept of time, how this concept fares vis-a-vis modern views of time, whether the poet was deeply influenced by J.M.E. Mc-Taggart, his tutor at Cambridge, and German philosophers, how his concept of time gradually crystallised, and, last but not least, whether he has something original to offer to us — are rather intriguing questions requiring intensive study. One drawback with Iqbal is that he does not subject time to such a searching analysis as that of Bergson in *Creative Evolution and Matter and Memory* or McTaggart's *Nature of Existence*. The way in which Bergson demolishes the intellect from its throne through the full force of logic and *argumentum ad hominem* leaves one gasping for breath. Iqbal, rather sadly, has left us no such work. So all we can do is to depend upon his stray statements and *Reconstruction*, which, though a major contribution to philosophy, cannot be called a comprehensive work by any means.

It must, however, be appreciated that Iqbal would survive as a philosopher only because he happens to be one of the world's great poets. Even those who might tend to dismiss him as a poet too narrow to be of interest to the non-Muslim reader cannot gloss over his concern with the deepest philosophical questions confronting man, e.g. time, ego, the ultimate meaning of life, appearance and reality, good and evil, and so on. His opposition to the concept of the circularity of time, for instance, is, by any standard, remarkable, since the doctrine of eternal recurrence ends up in the cul-de-sac of repetition, not creativity. This point, as well as others of equal interest, cannot be discussed in an essay like this, and this author proposes to highlight these in a larger work upon a poet whom he personally considers to have been greatest among Muslim poets since Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī.