

GLIMPSES OF IQBAL'S GENIUS IN THE JAVID NAMAH

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‘Allamah Iqbal’s *Jāvid Nāmāh*, first published in 1932, is an unprecedented book in eloquent Persian verse. The book contains about two thousand couplets. In this book, generally remarked as the poet-philosopher’s *magnum opus*, Iqbal’s vision has made a vivid conquest of the space. By scaling the heights and transversing the planets, the poet surpasses the spheres. Endeavouring hard to resolve the major problems confronting the Muslims and the people at large, the poet is seen seeking interviews with the great Muslim and non-Muslim spirits of many times on all the firmaments of his eternal pilgrimage. The profoundness as well as the variety of thought-content and literary artistry of the book is noteworthy. Late Muhammad Aslam Jairājpurī, a scholar of repute, had once remarked⁴²² that *Jāvid Nāmāh* ranks with the most splendid works in Persian — Firdawsi’s *Shah Nāmāh*, Rūmī’s *Mathnavī*, Sa’dī’s *Gulistān* and Ḥāfiz’s *Dīvān*. It is, no doubt, a big credit of a non-Persian poet to produce such a masterpiece. The book has been rendered in many important languages of the world, both in prose and poetry. It, however, still deserves more attention from scholars so interested in Iqbal’s art and thought.

Impact of the Mi’rāj Traditions. *Jāvid Nāmāh* comes within the purview of those works which have been written under the influence of the famous traditions of *Isrā’* and Mi’rāj the Holy Prophet Muḥammad’s (peace be upon him) nocturnal journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and later ascension to the heavens. The Truthful Prophet’s Ascension was a unique happening in world history, and had an immense impact on human thought. The Ascension has been referred to in the Holy Qur’ān⁴²³ and its details are available in the orthodox collections of the Prophet’s traditions⁴²⁴ and biographies.⁴²⁵ The event had miraculously taken place, according to the belief of the general

⁴²² *Navādirāt* (Urdu), Karachi : Idārah-i Tulū’-i Islām, 1951.

⁴²³ The Holy Qur’ān, xvii. I (and to many also liii. 5-13).

⁴²⁴ In *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, etc.

⁴²⁵ In Ibn Hishām, *al-Sirat al-Nabawīyyah*, for example.

orthodox Muslims, in the twelfth year of the Prophet's mission, in the physical form while the Prophet (peace of Allah be upon him) was awake.⁴²⁶ Numerous Muslim thinkers and theologians have been widely elaborating the Ascension's event. Iqbal's position as a reputed Muslim thinker is quite established. He has interpreted various Islamic topics in the perspective of modern thought; likewise *Mi'r-aj's* interpretations in lucid style are envisageable in almost all his works. *Jāvid Nāmāh*, however, reflects deep influence of *Mi'rāj* traditions — both direct and indirect. Late Chaudhari Muhammad Hussain (d. 1950), the poet's comrade, in his detailed article on *Jāvid Nāmāh*, has stated⁴²⁷ that Iqbal planned to versify a *Mi'rāj Nāmāh Jadīd* after the pattern of his *Gulshan-i Rāz Jadīd* (a part of the *Zabūr-i 'Ajām*) in response to Shaikh Muḥmūd Shabistārī Tabrizī's (d. 720 A.H.) famous *Gulshan-i Rāz*. Later on, he changed his mind and created *Jāvid Nāmāh* instead — a long celestial *mathnavī* in the literary form, not confined to any particular topic.

As cited above, the traditions of the Prophet's Ascension have been a source of inspiration for many mystics and others. Many works have been created under direct or indirect impact of these traditions. No doubt, people of different creeds have been longing to see the upper spheres from time immemorial. Many have recorded their dreams or visionary journeys, both mystic and literary, but as the late Spanish Professor Miguel Asia Palacios in his valuable research book entitled *Islam and the Divine Comedy*,⁴²⁸ has also remarked, all the visionary journeys preceding the Prophet's Ascension have little significance. Referring to the Hebrew, Persian and Christian legends of the Ascension of Moses, Enoch, Baruch, Isaiah, Ardaviraf, Jesus Christ, Saint Paul, and others, the researcher confesses that such legends are no match to the Prophet of Islam's traditions of *Mi'rāj* so widely spread among both learned and illiterate, "seeing that it was accepted as an article of faith".⁴²⁹ To make Asin's remarks clear, it seems necessary here to refer to some works written under the impact of *Mi'rāj* traditions.

(1) *Ardaviraf Nāmāh*, in Pahlavi and Persian languages, relating to the

⁴²⁶ T. P. Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam* (London, 1885), p. 351.

⁴²⁷ Šibghatullāh Bakhtiyārī, *Sharḥ-i āvid Nāmāh* (Lahore, n d.), p. 69.

⁴²⁸ Original text in Spanish appeared in 1919 in Madrid, and the rendering in English in 1926 (London).

⁴²⁹ P. 76.

visionary celestial pilgrimage by Ardaviraf, a Zoroastrian religious personality. Ardaviraf's dream was compiled some-time between the third and eighth century A.H.⁴³⁰

(2) Shaikh Taifūr Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī's (third century A.H.) dream concerning pilgrimage to the upper firmaments. This mystic vision reflects⁴³¹ his desire for communion with God—*Waḥdat al-Shubūd*. Bayazid was perhaps the first sufi to be influenced by the traditions of *Mi'rāj*.

(3) Abu'l-ʿĀmir Aḥmad (Ibn Shahid) Andalusī's (d. 426 A.H.) *Risālat al-Tawābi' wa'l-Zawābi'* in Arabic⁴³² which reflects the author's visionary ascension to the heavens in the literary style.

(4) Abu'i-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's (d...49 A.H.) *Risālat al-Ghufrān*. In this marvellous literary epistle,⁴³³ the blind poet had replied a letter of criticism written to him by his contemporary, Muḥaddith Ābu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī of Aleppo, known as Ibn ul-Qariḥ. He has praised al-Ma'arrī's genius but indirectly criticised his impiety. Al-Ma'arrī in this epistle refers to God's infinite forgiveness and defends the men of letters in an interesting literary style. Ibn al-Qariḥ is narrated in the treatise to have ascended to the celestial spheres in his dream where he witnessed the affairs of Hell and Paradise. Many impious and heretic persons are shown by the poet in Paradise, whereas proud men of piety are placed in Hell.

(5) Sīnā'ī Ghaznavī's (d. 535 A.H.) *mathnavī* *Sair al-'Ibād ila'l-Ma'ād* in Persian.⁴³⁴ The poem indicates the spiritual journey of the mystics leading to their perfection. The outward narration symbolises the pilgrimage to nine firmaments and reflects the impact of *Mi'rāj* traditions.

(6) Shaikh 'Aṭṭār Nishāpūrī's (d. 618 A.R.) famous *mathnavī* *Mantāqat al-Ṭair*. It is also a symbolic narration of spiritual ascension in which the "birds" (spirits) try to accede to Sīmurgh — a state of communion with God (*Waḥdat*

⁴³⁰ *Majallab-i Danishkadeb-i Adbiyat-i Meshbed*, Spring 1344 H. Shamsi, p.4.

⁴³¹ For text, see *The Muslim World of April 1973*, pp. 100-04. See also Dr. Muhammad Abdur Rabb's article in *Iqbal Review* (Karachi), of October 1975.

⁴³² Beirut: Maktabatul Sadir, 1951.

⁴³³ A portion of the book has been translated into Persian and published in Tehran (1341 Shamsi) by Akbar Dana Sirisht.

⁴³⁴ Edited and published by Professor M.T. Modarris Razavi in Tehran (1341 Shamsi).

al-Shubūh). The poet has symbolised “seven stages” (*haft maqāmāt*) of the mystics. Earlier Avicenna (d. 428 A.H.) had also referred to the spirits’ journey in his Arabic treatise entitled *Risālat al-Ṭair*.

(7) Muḥyuddīn ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 638 A.H.) *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkeyyah* (Meccan Revelation) and other epistles which are so often quoted. Ibn ‘Arabī’s vision has performed a nocturnal journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and then an ascension to the upper spheres. Perhaps no other allegory has recorded more impact of *Mi’rāj* traditions than Ibn ‘Arabī’s works. The writer has advocated here, just as in his other works, the idea of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* which implies self-annihilation in God.

(8) Alighieri Dante’s (d. 1321 A.C.) famous *Divine Comedy* is also written under the impact of *Mi’rāj* traditions. Professor Asin, whom Iqbal had also seen during his visit to Spain in 1932, has proved at length that Dante was influenced by the *Mi’rāj* traditions through the works of al-Ma’arrī, Ibn ‘Arabī and others. Besides these mystic and literary works, *Mi’rāj* traditions have been widely verified and narrated in almost all the languages which the Muslims speak and write. In Persian poetry for example, Niẓāmī Ganjavī’s (d. 610 A.H.) five *mathnavīs* are note-worthy. The lovers of Niẓāmī’s style like Amir Khusraw (d. 725 A.H.), ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898 A.H.), Shaikh Muhammad Ya’qūb Sarfī Kashmīrī (d. 1003 A.H.), and others have also followed him suit in their respective five *mathnavīs* and described the event of *Mi’rāj*.

The *Jāvid Nāmāh*. It is an allegory representing the poet’s ascension to six spheres (not to seven or nine generally adopted by others) and also beyond the heavens. This lucid Persian *mathnavī* is unique in many respects. The supernatural phenomenon is rare. The book has no complex meanings. It is devoid of religious prejudice — the poet rather condemns such mentality and advocates for the love of humanity. Non-Muslims are mentioned here with particular reverence.

Jāvid Nāmāh provides an epitome of Iqbal’s thought on almost all the topics of his interest — self, love, intellect, ascension, comparative religion, immortality of the Muslims based on *Tauḥīd*, philosophy, history, martyrdom, predestination and free will, women’s status in the Muslim polity, the Orientalists’ biased interest in archaeology, good and evil, art and literature for life, blessings of freedom, Islam versus Western civilisation, Islamic

universalism, patriotism and so on and so forth. A detailed appraisal of the book cannot be presented in such a short article. A short narration of the poet's celestial journey, however, will help in appraising the genius of the Poet of the East.

Contents in Brief. The book opens with a novel invocation. It is followed by a prologue in heaven between the sky and the earth. The poet gives convincing arguments in favour of the earthlings' superiority. The actual pilgrimage of eternity of the poet, with Maulānā Muḥammad Jalāluddīn Rūmī (d. 672 A.H.), his guide, starts from the hill of a riverside — a scene common in Ibn 'Arabī and Dante's works, too. The poet was lost in pensive mood, beside the edge of a river during an evening busy in reciting one of the loveliest lyrics of Rūmī, when his vision being invocated, Rūmī's spirit appears before him. A dialogue begins between Iqbal and Rūmī in which the guide enlightens the poet-philosopher with the meanings of self-realisation, rebirth, good and evil, ascension and proceeding to God's Presence. The essence of an ascension, according to Rūmī, is a revolution in senses which makes the soul soar high and the body doesn't come in the way. At this, the poet's soul is stirred deeply for being ascended and thus his ascension starts. Zarvān, the spirit of the time and space, takes them to the upper spheres. The moon is their first stopover. Here, they encounter and talk to an Indian ascetic, Vishvamitra. He was a teacher and friend of Rama. Iqbal names him "the friend of the world" (*Jabāndosī*) On the valley of Yarghamīd on the moon, they witness "the testaments" reflecting the basic teachings of Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muḥammad. Next they move on to Mercury where they join prayers with Sayyid Jamaluddīn Afghānī (d. 1897) and Prince Muḥammad Sa'īd Ḥalīm Pasha (d. 1921). They talk to these "best men of the East" about the past, present and future of the world of Islam. Rūmī here names Iqbal "Zindah Rūd" (living stream), Next they move to the firmament of Venus. Here the poet presents a comic scene — like the one in the *Divine Comedy*. A rejoicing assembly of gods of the ancient nations is displayed here. The chief of gods is overjoyed to witness the present scepticism and irreligious conditions in the world. Pharaoh, contemporary of Moses, and Field Marshal Kitchner of Khartoum (d. 1916), who had been tyrant towards Muḥammad Aḥmad "Mahdī" of the Sudan (d. 1882) and his followers, are seen suffering on this very firmament. Next there is the sphere of Mars where things are seen quite opposite to those of the earth. The poet's

imagination creates here a splendid city named Marghadīn. The people of this city are free from all bonds and enjoy an ideal social order. A Westernised damsel is seen advocating to the women for remaining unmarried. “Zindah Rūd,” however, decries so much love for being “bondless”. In an earlier scene, a Martian astronomer pleads the idea of free will. He claims that the people of earth can also become the masters of their fates like the Martians, provided they abandon wrong notions. Here “Zindah Rūd” (Iqbal) argues that man has no predestination and the Almighty God has gifted him with as many destinies. Man’s destiny changes with his changing attitude. Let us quote here a few convincing lines from the *Jāvd Nāmāh* (p. 123):

خواه از حق حکمِ تقدیرِ دگر	گر ز یک تقدیرِ خونِ گردد جگر
زانکه تقدیراتِ حق لا انتهاست	تو اگر تقدیرِ نو خواهی رواست
نکتۀ تقدیر را نشناختند	ارضیانِ تقدِ خودی در باختند
تو اگر دیگر شوی او دیگر است!	رمزِ باریکش بحرفی مضمَر است
سنگ شو بر شیشه اندازد ترا!	خاک شو نذرِ هوا سازد ترا
قلزمی؟ پابندگی تقدیر تست!	شبِ نمی؟ افتدگی تقدیر تست

“If your heart bleeds on account of one destiny,

Petition God to decree another destiny;

If you pray for a new destiny, that is lawful—

Seeing that God’s destinies are infinite.

Earthlings have gambled away the coin of self hood,

Not comprehending the subtle meaning of destiny;

Its subtlety is contained in a single phrase

‘If you transform yourself, it too will be transformed.’

Be dust, and fate will give you the winds;

Be a stone, and it will hurl you against glass.

Are you a dew-drop? Your destiny is to perish;

Are you an ocean? Your destiny is to endure.”⁴³⁵

Mars is followed by Jupiter. Here “Zindah Rūd” and Rūmī encounter three spirits known for their courage — Ḥusain b. Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (d. 309 A.H.), Qurrat al-’Ain Ṭāhirah (d. 1852) and Mīrzā Asadullāh Khān Ghālib (d. 1869). There is also a passing scene of Satan whom “Zindah Rūd” entitles “leader of the people of separation” (*Khawājah-i Abl-i Firāq*).

Thereafter comes the sphere of Saturn. Rūmī and “Zindah Rūd” pass by the well and see a dreadful sea of blood. It was the abode of non-patriot wretched people so hate-worthy that the Hell didn’t accept them. The poet here displays two notorious persons of the subcontinent: Mir Ja’far of Bengal and Mir Ṣādiq of Mysore. The former’s treachery resulted in Sirājuddaulah’s failure in Plassey’s War of 1757 and the latter’s perfidy caused Sulṭān Faṭḥ ‘Alī Ṭippū’s martyrdom in the war of 1799. The spirit of India appears here and condemns the traitors, following the foot-steps of Ja’far and ādiq, who strengthen the usurpers’ hands.

With Saturn, the spheres end and the travellers reach beyond the heavens. They witness the station of Neitzsche and later proceed to Paradise. Here they see the palace of Sharfun Nisā’ Begum (d. 1745 A.C) of Lahore – a pious and courageous lady. Her father and grandfather Zakariyā Khān and ‘Abduṣ Ṣamad Khān, respectively, had remained the governors of the Punjab. Rūmī and “Zindah Rūd’s next visitation is to Ḥaḍrat Mir Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī, Shāh-i Hamadān (d. 786/1385). Shāh-i Hamadān was celebrated mystic, writer, poet and reformer and his services in the valley of Jammu and Kashmir and areas adjacent are particularly noteworthy. During “Zindah Rūd’s dialogue with the saint, Muḥīṭā Muhammad Ṭābir Ghanī Kashmīrī (d. 1079 A.H.) was also present. The poet here hints towards the glorious but

⁴³⁵ 14. English tr. by A.J. Arberry.

sad history of Kashmir and inspires the Kashmīrīs for enhancing their freedom movement. Beyond the heavens, there are glimpses of Sanskrit’s poet Bhartari Hari (seventh century A.C.) and Nāṣir Khusraw ‘Alavī (d. 481 A H.). The poet next sees three Eastern monarchs in their palaces in Paradise. They are Sulṭān Faṭḥ ‘Alī Tippū, Nadir Shah Afshar and Bābā Aḥmad Shah Abdālī. While conversing with the monarchs, the poet laud’s Raḍā’ Shah the Great’s efforts to enhance Iran’s progress.

Rūmī and “Zindah Rūd” had hardly taken leave of the houris to descend to the earth, when the poet is granted an epithany of the Divine Presence and gets the honour of listening to the voice of Beauty. Here he has been enlightened about immortality, blessings of union and exaltation of love, etc. In the radiance of Glory, the celestial poem ends with a lyric, originally from the poet’s *Zabur-i ‘Ajām*. The first three couplets are as under:

بگذر از خاور و افسونئِ افرنگِ مشو

که نیرزد بجوئِ این همه دیرینه و نو

زندگی انجمنِ آرا و نگهدارِ خود است

ای که در قافله، بی همه شو با همه رو!

تو فروزنده تر از مهرِ منیر آمده

آنچنان زی که به پر ذره رسائی پرتو!

“Be not enchanted by the West

Nor on the East thou needest dote,

For both this ancient and this new
 Together are not worth an oat...
 Full jealously life guards itself
 Although it doth in company dwell;
 And ever in a caravan,
 Alone like thou, with all tread well.
 Than radiant sun that illumines
 The ancient sky thou art more bright,
 So live that every grain of sand
 May borrow brilliance from thy light.”⁴³⁶

The last part of the book —”Address to Jāvīd” (Talking to the New Generation), is an appendix, though beautifully connected with the preceding chapters. It is notable that both Shaikh Mahmud Ahmad and Arthur John Arberry have not included this part in their respective English renderings.⁴³⁷

The first edition of *Jāvīd Nāmāh* had a preface of two coup-lets which make a part of one lyric in *Zabūr-i ‘A jam*:

خیالِ من بتماشای آسمان بود است
 بدوش ماه و باغوش کهکشانشان بود است
 گمان مبرکه همیں خاکدان نشیمنِ ماست
 که پر ستاره جهان است یا جهان بود است

“My vision once surveyed the sky and rode

⁴³⁶ English tr., by Sh. Mahmud Ahmad.

⁴³⁷ B.A. Dar’s translation of this portion came out in Karachi in 1972.

The moon and in the Pleiades' lap did rest,
 Regard not this earth as our only nest,
 Each star's a world or was one life's abode.”⁴³⁸

From the second edition of the book, however, the said verses have been omitted. It is interesting to note that Iqbal planned to mention the services of Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī Mujaddid Alf-i nī (d. 1034 A.H.) and Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1898) on some suitable place of this celestial journey in a revised edition of the book, but he didn't get time to do so.

A Few Salient Features. *Jāvid Nāmāh* apparently resembles Dante Alighieri's *Comedia (Divine Comedy)*. but the differences of technique and presentation are significant. *Divine Comedy* has three parts — Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso (i.e. Hell, Purgatory and Paradise). *Jāvid Nāmāh* has six to seven parts, consisting of some of the popular spheres and also beyond the spheres. These coincide to some extent with the journey of Ibn 'Arabī, as already quoted. Iqbal, however, didn't describe the Hell; he just passed by it. He didn't enter purgatory even. The flight towards Beyond the Spheres is a new idea and this portion is particularly full of unprecedented thoughts and meanings.

Ibn 'Arabī had two guides during his celestial journey — a heavenly youth and a mystic. Dante's guide in Inferno and Purgatorio was Virgil. In Paradise, his beloved Beatrice guides him. Iqbal has only one guide from the beginning of his journey to the last scene in Paradise. In the Divine presence, however, he is seen alone and this is quite significant. Ibn 'Arabī's journey aimed at his doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujūd* — annihilation of the self in God's infinity. Iqbal, as evident from almost all his works, aimed at self-affirmation. He wished to preserve self at every cost. The following couplets from *Jāvid Nāmāh* (pp. 13-14) explain the poet's outlook:

از سه شاهد کن شهادت را طلب	زنده یا مرده یا جان بلب
خویش را دیدن بنور خویشتن	شاهد اول شعور خویشتن

⁴³⁸ Tr. by Sh. Mahmud Ahmad, p. xxvii.

خویش را دیدن بنورِ دیگری	شاهدِ ثانیِ شعورِ دیگری
خویش را دیدن بنورِ ذاتِ حق	شاهدِ ثالثِ شعورِ ذاتِ حق
حی و قائم چون خدا خود را شمارا!	پیش این نور اربمانی استوار

ور بماند هست او کامل عیار	در حضورش کس نماند استوار
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“Art thou in the stage of ‘life’, ‘death’, or ‘death-in-life’?”

Invoke the aid of three witnesses to verify thy ‘Station’.

The first witness is thine own consciousness—

See thyself, then, with thine own light.

The second witness is the consciousness of another ego—

See thy self, then, with the light of an ego than thee,

The third witness is God’s consciousness—

See thyself, then, with God’s light.

If thou standest unshaken in front of this light,

Consider thyself living and eternal as Hel...

No one can stand unshaken in His Presence:

And he who can, verily he is pure gold.”⁴³⁹

Dante’s purpose on the journey seems to see his beloved, Beatrice. Iqbal had no such limited purpose. He has shown an immense interest dealing with

⁴³⁹ Tr. by Iqbal: see his Reconstruction, p. 198.

problems confronting humanity at large. Though demonstrably an impossible task, Iqbal dared to give his ideas on a number of problems and luckily his views have been convincing to many people.

Iqbal has created much suitable and interesting mini-characters on all the spheres of his journey. Besides men and women, the poet's vision has presented a number of angels and houris, etc., to make the scenes of his celestial drama more fascinating. In Persian poetry, lyrics are seldom seen in a *mathnavi*. In *Jāvid Nāmāh*, there are several lyrics at intervals. The poet has included his new lyrics and a few from his *Payām-i Masbriq* and *Zabūr-i 'Ajām*. Also there are lyrics of Nāṣir Khusraw, Ṭāhirah, Ghālib and others.

It may be added that, notwithstanding an extraordinary profoundness of Iqbal's thought, his poetry also displays an amazing perfection. In *Jāvid Nāmāh*, he creates wonderful scenery. For example, see the following five couplets (p. 106), describing the Sea of Blood on the sphere of Venus:

یا ہوا بود و چو آبی وانمود	بحر بر ما سینہ خود را کشود
وادی تاریکی او تو بتو	قعر او یک وادی بی رنگ و بو
زیر دریا ماہتاب آمد فرود!	پیر رومی سؤۃ طہ سرود
اندران سر گشته و حیران دو مرد!	کوه ہای شسته و عریان و سرد
باز سوی یک دگر نگریستند	سوی رومی یک نظر نگریستند

“The sea opened to us its breast

Or was it air, that appeared as a water?

Its depths were a valley without colour and scent,

A valley whose darkness was fold on fold.

The sage of Rum chanted the Sura of Taha,
Under the sea streamed down moonshine.
Mountains washed naked and cold,
And amid them two bewildered men
Who first cast a glance on Rumi,
Then gazed one upon the other.”⁴⁴⁰

The foregoing lines make an epitome of some of the contents and features of *Jāvid Nāmāh*. About this very book S A. Vahid has written: “In every line, the poet makes us feel that he has some thing to say that is not only worth saying, but is also fitted to give us pleasure. Thus as regards style as well as theme, the poem is a masterpiece.”⁴⁴¹

To sum up, the *Jāvid Nāmāh* of Iqbal is a unique Persian poem, from the viewpoints of art and thought both.

⁴⁴⁰ 19. English tr. by A.J. Arberry.

⁴⁴¹ *Iqbal's Art and Thought* (London: John Murray, 1959), Preface,