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Given a small twist of inflection, the question may very easily be understood to mean: How *can* one read Iqbal? The implication would be that he is such an uninteresting poet, how could one read him by choice? It is true that such a question would not be asked by someone who has the slightest feel for the Urdu language and the rhythms of its poetry. For even the dullest of Iqbal's poems rings and reverberates not just in the outer ear but deep in one's psyche and sets up vibrations of pleasure in one's soul. But the problem arises when one is made to read Iqbal not for pleasure, but for profit. For Iqbal is also a politician's poet, a religious thinker's poet, and a philosopher's poet and much more besides. Iqbal has earned a lot of praise and not a little blame as well, for being one or other of the things mentioned by me above.

It is an interesting, though sad fact of literary criticism that politics seems never to have left poetry to its own devices. Politicians love to make use of poetry, but are wise enough to leave alone poets like Shakespeare and Goethe whom they can't exploit for their own purposes. Literary critics are less wise. They try to read politics in poets like Shakespeare and Keats even who did their best not to profess any political creed and who made their poems apparently incapable of yielding interpretations that could be converted into political currency.

That Iqbal should have aroused interest and even devotion among politicians and political and religious thinkers all over the Muslim world, and particularly in those Muslim countries

that were trying to come to terms with the modern age and had been under colonial domination for many long years, is quite natural. For Iqbal's poetry has strong overtones of modernity and makes serious efforts to find ways of fruitfully negotiating the postcolonial landscape in society and politics without losing what he regarded as fundamental elements of Islamic religious thought and sociopolitical identity. He was also passionately concerned with the historic reality of Islam and how its lost effects could be revived and perpetuated in the modern world. Such a project was bound to appeal to, and have uses for the Muslim politician as well as the Muslim social political reformer and activist.

In the Urdu world, Iqbal was and even now is often known by two appellatives: *sha'ir-e mashriq* (Poet of the East), and *hakimul ummat* (Sage of the [Muslim] People, or, Philosopher of the [Muslim] People.) It might be interesting to note here that the later appellative (*hakimul ummat*) used to be and still is also applied for Maulana Shah Ashraf Ali Thanavi (1863/4-1943) one of the two most influential Sufis and religious reformers and mentors of the Muslim community in South Asia during the first half of the twentieth century. Thanavi was not much interested in politics (though he favoured Jinnah and the Muslim League) but his influence can be seen and felt in the social and religious life of South Asian Muslims even today. Even the political life of Muslims especially in Pakistan, shows Thanavi's influence through the ulema of that country, particularly those of the Deobandi School who have a strong presence in Pakistan today.

A few more points are worth noting here about these appellatives:

Iqbal, the philosopher-activist, political and religious thinker, active in politics though not a full-time politician, was seen by the Muslim community of South Asia as performing an ongoing, meliorist role in the Muslim society of his time which was qualitatively the same role that was being

discharged by Ashraf Ali Thanavi, practicing Sufi-intellectual, and religious and social reformer. That is to say, his status as poet notwithstanding, Iqbal had another niche, or many other niches, in the political life and society of the subcontinent. But what was lost in this assessment was the fact that whatever other status Iqbal enjoyed had been conferred on him because of his status as poet. So any literary consideration of Iqbal could ignore, so far as such a proceeding was possible, the philosophical or political content of his poetry but could not ignore its literary content.

To be sure, both *sha'ir-e mashriq* and *hakimul ummat* are now falling into desuetude, more in India than in Pakistan. That is, literary and even nonexpert circles do not now use these appellatives freely. But the reason for this seems to be Iqbal criticism perhaps believes itself to have grown in sophistication and subtlety, and these appellatives do seem simplistic if not naïve. But a reason for their declining popularity with the common reader could be that he is not all that excited with Iqbal's role as *hakim*, and *mashriq* also has grown now in common perception to mean more than what it did five or six decades ago.

The "East" in *sha'ir-e mashriq* (Poet of the East) was not seen as subsuming anything more than the subcontinent and maybe Afghanistan and Iran. Similarly, the "Poet" here didn't mean something like a "Poet *par excellence*". It rather signified a poet whose poetry presented and represented the political, intellectual and maybe even spiritual aspirations of the "East". Yet, in some sense Iqbal was also seen as the Poet of the Greater East, that is Asia. Perhaps Iqbal also saw himself as the Poet of the East and seemed to see in Goethe the Poet of the West (*sha'ir-e maghrib*), that is, Europe. It was for this latter reason that Iqbal composed *Payam-e Mashriq* (Message From the East, 1923) just as Goethe had sent his greetings to the East (Iran, in this case) through his *West-östlicher Divan* (Divan of the East and West, 1819). Iqbal described his book

on its title page as "Response to the German Poet Goethe" and wrote in the Preface:

> The purpose of *Payam-e Mashriq* is... to present before the [people's] eyes those moral, religious and religio-national truths which relate to the inner education of the individuals and peoples.[1]

Thus Iqbal gave advance intimation of his poetic intention to the reader and desired the poems of *Payam-e Mashriq* to be read principally if not solely as didactic-philosophical documents. This did not help the cause of Iqbal the poet and led the uninitiated student to believe that the poems were something like Sana'i Ghaznavi's *Hadiqah*, which Browne characterized (wrongly, in my opinion) as the dullest poem ever written. Thus the title "Poet of the East" easily flowed into "Sage/Philosopher of the [Muslim] People". It would be wrong to say that Iqbal connived at this result, but it is quite right to say that Iqbal often professed a lack of interest in his poetry *qua* poetry and this encouraged misreadings of his poetry inasmuch as attention was concentrated on Iqbal's philosophical and religio-political message so as to result in a near exclusion by literary critics of his poetic content and practical suppression of his claim to be treated as poet, a claim, one might say that is embedded almost everywhere in his poetry.

The detrimental effects of this suppression on Iqbal the poet can be demonstrated by quoting from two important works of literary criticism on Iqbal, both written from nearly opposing points of view. A period of a little more than four decades separates the two. The following is from Majnun Gorakhpuri (1904-1988), a leading Progressive critic of his time who was also well known for his expertise in Classical Urdu and Persian poetry:

> Iqbal, despite his occasional reactionariness, ancestor-worship, and occasionally taking a turn in the wrong direction, seems to be to be a poet of Life, Revolution and Progress.[2]

Salim Ahmad (1927-1983) whom I hold in the greatest respect and affection was a major modern poet and critic noted as much for erudition as his brilliant wit. He wrote his book on Iqbal with the avowed purpose of rehabilitating the status of Iqbal as a poet. He summed up Iqbal the poet in the following words:

> The central problem in Iqbal is nor Self-hood (*khudi*), nor love (*'ishq*), nor Action (*'amal*), nor yet Power and Dynamism (*quvvat o harakat*), but rather as opposed to all these, Death is Iqbal's central problem. This is the problem that acquaints his being with a tremor and upheaval that shakes his whole being. Here lies the foundation of that poetic experience which generates the poetic world that is peculiar to Iqbal.[3]

Needless to say, neither critic does justice to Iqbal but the main point is that both critics judge Iqbal in nonliterary terms. Poets of an earlier age are almost always at risk from misreading. This is true particularly in the case of Urdu whose history suffered a major literary cultural discontinuity in the middle of the nineteenth century. Contemporary or near contemporary poets are rarely misread. More often than not they provoke bafflement if not resentment. The great Progressive critic Ehtesham Husain (1912-1972) once described Iqbal as "a baffling figure" because he found unrecocilable differences in the philosophical or political positions taken by Iqbal. But Ehtesham Husain's bafflement is nothing compared to the systematic misreadings of Iqbal that have resulted from his "art" being studied separately, if at all, from his "thought". Majnun Gorakhpuri made no pretence of judging Iqbal on literary merits. He sat in judgment on Iqbal as a fellow dialectician and a politically committed student of life and literature. In the space of the ten or twelve short pages that he devotes to studying western influences on Iqbal, Majnun Gorakhpuri mentions Goethe, Nietzsche, Hegel, Bergson, Wordsworth, Heine, Browning, Emerson, Idealism, Voluntarism, Activism, Leibnitz, Theory of monads, Dialectics, Marx, Life-force, Rudolf Eichen

(I couldn't identify him, but Majnun Gorakhpuri describes as "the famous *hakim* (philosopher) of Europe") in that order.

Salim Ahmad has no such pretensions. He is by his declared intention out on a demolition mission. He wants to read Iqbal as poet. He says:

> Ninety per cent of all that has been written about Iqbal so far consists of commentary on and explication of his thought and his theories. Such writings have two fundamental faults: They do not, as a general rule, address Iqbal's poetry. Their other fault is that they present Iqbal's thought as things that are already there, ready to use. This latter points needs a bit of elucidation. Iqbal's thought (if his thought is at all something separate from his poetic personality) is a part of his being....We cannot view his thought as having existence outside his being, and as if Iqbal has used them in the same way as we can use merchandise that we buy in the market.[4]

Apart from the fact that here Salim Ahmad flies dangerously close to T. S. Eliot's false theory of "felt thought" (which I think he repudiated later), the point to be noted is in spite of his good intentions Salim Ahmad can't do more than indulge in flights of impressionistic-phenomenological fancy in trying to tell us why he thinks Iqbal's *Masjid-e Qurtuba* is a great poem:

> Gradually, we find ourselves being submerged in Iqbal's experience....Now it is not Iqbal's thought that we gain acquaintance with: we go down into Iqbal's heart, and in its depths we now experience a vitality of life that we had never felt before. In the depths of our being we become more capable of feeling, more disturbed, more alive. Now the poem's rhythms become the rhythms of our blood. And the poem, percolating down from our head softens and melts our whole being and reverberates even in the soles of our feet.[5]

Well, a little of such writing can go a long way, but we are not nearer to any demonstrable reason why *Masjid-e Qurtuba* is

a great poem. If, in determining "death" to be Iqbal's central concern and the reason for his greatness (which he denies is the case with *Masjid-e Qurtuba*), Salim Ahmad was being non-literary, his raptures over *Masjid-e Qurtuba* leave us a little uncomfortable and puzzled for here he is being literary in a superficially belles altruistic and not in any kind of critical mode.

Salim Ahmad is not alone in his failure to tackle Iqbal's greatness as a poet. In a somewhat uncharacteristic access of malice, or pique, or both, Salim Ahmad wrote in the beginning of his book that "most of those who wrote on Iqbal have been persons whom Urdu literature doesn't recognize with much honour or respect."[6] This is not quite true, for Al-e Ahmad Surur (1911-2002) one of the greatest of Urdu critics, wrote extensively about Iqbal and he was mostly concerned with Iqbal the poet. Yet his problem was his inability or unwillingness to make sustained and focused texts of literary criticism. His eclecticism obliged to him to look at all possible aspects of a poem, however briefly. Thus the reader was left with a multiplicity of impressions. One reason for his not casting a searching analytical eye on Iqbal's poetry was that he regarded the notion of Iqbal's high poetic station as a given, as something need not be elaborated too much. This of course was not the case, especially not in the post-1947 world when in the young people's eyes many truths had turned out to be illusions, much gold of science and philosophy had been shown to have been the basest dross, and the sensibility of the "third world" was undergoing a serious change in the face of serious challenges and inroads by the postcolonial cultural and economic imperialism.

At such a time in our history, many of us found it difficult to accept the lofty self-assured tone of Iqbal's political and philosophical voice. It was, after all, the voice of a person who for all his wisdom and sagacity and uncanny ability to predict the moral and cultural decline of the West, hadn't actually seen the second world war, didn't know about the

atomic bomb and Hiroshima, couldn't even have conceived of the horrors of tyranny and genocide in Palestine and Afghanistan and Bosnia and Iraq and elsewhere. Thus Iqbal's prophetic voice failed to carry conviction, if taken on its own.

Things might have been different if our literary critics had risen to the occasion and told us that Iqbal was a truly great poet and here are the reasons for his greatness, never mind the fact that his "message" and his certainties seem slightly dated and his "philosophy" sounds somewhat simplistic. His glory begins with his poetry, even if Iqbal may have occasionally lapsed into denying that he was a poet in the conventional sense.[7] Unfortunately, our literary critics were apparently so overwhelmed by the "Poet-Sage-Philosopher of the East and the [Muslim] People" that they regarded as futile any exercise to examine and establish Iqbal's right to be placed among the poets of the world, and not just the poets of Urdu or Persian.

In a conference on Iqbal organized in New Delhi in 1987, Al-e Ahmad Surur began his short paper with the words:

> The emphasis in Iqbal studies so far has been on his thought. His art has not been given sufficient and proper attention. Iqbal's greatness is not because of his philosophy, or because of the depth and strength of his thoughts, but because of the thought having been moulded into poetry.[8]

But he hedged his bets and wrote in his concluding paragraph as follows:

> Today, when there is greater attention on the breaking and disintegration of beliefs, expression of [the poet's] self, [poetry as] soliloquy, irony, distortion and shattering of language and free form, we should not ignore the Taj Mahal of Art that we find in Iqbal and which proves to us that no exalted purpose injures poetry, provided the content of that purpose comes to us as [integrated] form and whose thought observes and follows the rules of poetryness. Again, in this age of the breaking and disintegration of beliefs, one mustn't forget that the authoritativeness of [the truth of] personality

> that is the distinguishing mark of true and unalloyed poetry develops through a taste and joy of certainty.[9]

The problem with most Urdu criticism about Iqbal is it fails to appreciate the fact that "great thinker" is not synonymous with "great poet." In fact it may be easier to write poetry in philosophy that to write philosophy in poetry. One recalls Coleridge writing to Wordsworth, "...Whatever in Lucretius is poetry is not philosophical, whatever is philosophical is not poetry..." He was talking about Wordsworth's *Excursion* which was published in 1814 as a fragment of a larger poem called *The Recluse* about which he went on to say, "I expected the colours, music, imaginative life, and passion of *poetry*, but the matter and arrangement of *philosophy*..."[10]

The philosophical poet's problem thus was of dissolving the one into the other, or of "wedding" truth to verse. Coleridge made an interestng point about the enjoyment of poetry, particularly philosophical poetry when he asked how could a person " fully enjoy Wordsworth who has never meditated on the truths which Wordsworth has wedded to immortal verse?"[11] Although Coleridge didn't explain what he meant here by "truths", or how the "truths" should be "wedded" to verse, his point was that full enjoyment of philosophical poetry is not possible unless one shares the belief-system of the poet, or at least has sufficient empathy with it to enable one to "meditate on the truths set out through that belief-system".

This is an apparent though not real similarity in Coleridge and Surur's positions. Surur seems to imply that Iqbal's *zauq-e yaqin* can be, or in fact should be shared by all his readers. Coleridge is in fact saying something quite opposite: if one cannot meditate upon (is out of empathy with) what Coleridge terms as "truths" one can't enjoy Wordsworth's poetry fully. Surur's position is simplistic, but can be rescued somewhat by postulating that it's possible for all of us to at least respond emotionally to someone else's "taste and joy of

certainty". But Asloob Ahmad Ansari, another major critic who is keen to establish Iqbal's position as a great poet, is very nearly naïve in his formulation:

> Iqbal's is great poetry because it has bejewelled artistic embellishment and is moreover the creation of a great mind and consciousness, one which has derived inspiration and benefit from diverse intellectual, philosophical, cultural and political streams of the East and the West and has imbibed into the unity of its inner self the fruits of such derivation and has transformed them from its own standpoint and has stamped the impress of its personality on them. And over and above this, it [the poetry of Iqbal] distills its light and song from values which are those of a world religion and the civilization based on that religion.[12]

Well, one can only say about such criticism, if criticism it is, that having such friends and advocates, Iqbal's poetry needs no enemies. The case for Iqbal's poetry to have "the colours, music, imaginative life, and passion of *poetry*, but the matter and arrangement of *philosophy*" is at best not proven, and the demand from the reader to accept the claim that a poetry should be termed great because "it distills its light and song" from Islam is like asking him to place all religious and devotional poetry on a rung equally high with Iqbal, or claim a special niche of greatness for Iqbal's poetry and all Islam-inspired poetry to the exclusion of other poetries springing from other faiths. Neither position, it is obvious, can be sustained even for a second. The question of "literary" against other kinds of merit—philosophical, religious, whatever, still remains tantalizingly open.

One might like then to discard Coleridge as too old fashioned and argue for the poetry of belief—any belief, and say that it is belief (something like Surur's *zauq-e yaqin*) which makes great poetry by itself. One need not share that belief, and in fact even "suspend" that belief, as Eliot recommended:

> If you read poetry as poetry, you will "believe" in Dante's theology exactly as you believe in the physical reality of his journey; that is, you suspend both belief and disbelief.[13]

But Eliot's counsel on this matter is not disinterested, and is a dangerous one to boot. He believes that since Dante has a philosophy so every poet as great as Dante should have a philosophy too.[14] Ignoring the glib oversimpilicity of the argument and the vagueness of the terms "philosophy" and "great", one would still want to know which poets are as great as Dante, and what are the means to identify them? Eliot responds with a stunningly nonliterary and loaded answer: The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards".

Then, as a gesture of Christian grace, he adds in the same breath: "though we must remember whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards".[15]

Since Eliot has already warned us in his essay on Dante that one "cannot afford to ignore Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs"[16], we know which way his critical wind is blowing. It'll blow no good to Iqbal, and its Christian obscurantist odour should have been strong in the noses of our Professors of literature long ago. As Ezra Pound wrote in his review of Eliot's *After Strange Gods*, "all the implications" of Eliot's ideas about man's "need for more religion" are "such as to lead the reader's mind into a fog."[17]

In *After Strange Gods* Eliot was trying to elucidate a matter that was important to Eliot himself. Peter Ackroyd summarizes Eliot's position in *After Strange Gods* in the following words:

> What he wished to attack was the absence of moral, and therefore religious, criteria in the criticism of contemporary literature. Having at Harvard rebuked the dogmatism of those critics who considered literature (and especially poetry) to be some kind of substitute for religion, he was now reversing the equation he wished to introduce in the appreciation of modern literature those concepts of good and evil which were part of the religious comprehension.[18]

The point that emerges now is that to determine the ideas implied, embedded or stated in a poem as true in a religious, philosophical or scientific sense and therefore acceptable or desirable and to decide that the poem therefore is a good one is actually denial of the true nature and function of poetry. Richards made this clear a long time ago when he said:

> The 'Truth' of *Robinson Crusoe* is the acceptability of things we are told, their acceptability in the interests of the narrative, not their correspondence with any actual facts....It is in this sense that 'Truth' is equivalent to 'internal necessity' or rightness. That is 'true' or 'internally necessary' which conforms or accords with the rest of the experience, which cooperates to arouse our ordered response, whether the response of Beauty or another....It is evident that the bulk of poetry consists of statements which only the very foolish would think of attempting to verify. They are not the kind of things which can be verified....But even when they are, on examination, frankly false, this is no defect....And equally, a point more often misunderstood, their truth, when they are true, is no merit.[19]

In Urdu we often talk of the "universality" of poetry's appeal, or of the "universal truths" that poetry deals in. Simplistic as these notions are, they are even more dangerous to a proper literary appreciation of poetry because they tend to be based upon the assumption that a classification of "Truths" exists and lead us to the further assumption that those "Truths" that strike us as "Universal" must be truly so, and that they may even have the force of Science. Thus we have Hamidi Kashmiri, another leading critic and admirer of Iqbal telling us in all seriousness that as opposed to his Western counterparts, Iqbal found himself in confrontation with regional and collective problems like colonialism and backwardness.

> His appreciation and cognition of these, and other human problems created by the industrial society, was on a purely personal, individual level. Thus his poetic being was able to attain a Truth and Universality which remained denied to other Urdu poets of that time.[20]

Hamidi Kashmiri is trying to establish that Iqbal "felt" and not just "thought about" the political and social problems of his times and this is what gives "Universality" to his poetry. Apart from the fact that we are not told how "feeling" not "thinking" a problem confers "Universality" and "Truth" on the end product of the process, we are left with a somewhat uncomfortable feeling that it is the "problems" and the "Truth" of their solutions that the critic wants us to attend to; the poetry will then take care of itself. That's why we find him saying a page later that while making questions of "Nationalism, Patriotism, Sufism or Philosophy...part and parcel of his thought, Iqbal didn't deal with them in a doctrinally passive way", and that is why he:

> [D]escribed philosophy as being 'distant from life', made Hegel and Bergson targets of his critique, in Sufism he approved of *wahdatu'sh shahud* (Unity of Manifestation) instead of *wahdatu'l wajud* (Unity of Being)...and as regards Politics, he granted the critical importance of the Individual in the shaping of the collective systems and censured Democracy.[21]

The other problem with this kind of thinking is that it treats the poet's philosophical or ratiocinative thinking as scientific, and therefore reliable and even true. We know now that even scientific truths are tentative. None after Karl Popper can think different. But there is a greater problem, as Richards realized, and as Coleridge dimly understood more than a century before. Science cannot be reduced to impulses or emotions while poetry is mainly a matter of impulses and emotions:

> The essential point, however, is that Science is autonomous. The impulses developed in it are modified only by one another, with a view to the greatest possible completeness or systematization.....So far as any body of references is undistorted it belongs to science....And just as there are

> innumerable human activities which require undistorted references if they are to be satisfied, so there are other innumerable human activities not less important which equally require distorted references or, more plainly, *fictions*.[22]

Poetry, of course, is fictive in character, and the poet is the maker of fictions. This was known to Qudama Ibn Ja'far seven centuries before Shakespeare and nearly a thousand years before Richards[23]. It is only in our time, and with great but uncomfortable making poets like Iqbal that such questions are raised. Denying the fictive character of poetry enables us to impose our own notions of truth and falsehoods on poetry. As Richards astutely noted, even poets are not immune from this temptation. With his characteristic gentle irony Richards says:

> Many attitudes...can be momentarily encouraged by suitable beliefs held as scientific beliefs are held....When the attitude is important, the temptation to base it upon some reference which is treated as scientific truth is very great, and the poet easily comes to invite destruction of his work; Wordsworth puts forward his Pantheism, and other people doctrines of Inspiration, Ideals, and Revelation.[24]

I won't say that Asloob Ahmad Ansari or Salim Ahmad didn't read these words, but I wish they had remembered them while writing about Iqbal. And I suspect that even Iqbal fell into the temptation in some of his poems. But it was up to us, the literary critics, to read him and love him for his fictions rather than his lectures.

As we saw above, Eliot said that it is perfectly possible to believe in Dante's theology if we read poetry as poetry. Richards had made this point five years earlier, and better. For the question is not whether Dante's theology is believable: the question rather is whether Dante's poetry is believable. And a cognate question is whether it is at all necessary to believe, or even accept Dante's theology before we can "fully enjoy" Dante's work. Eliot was unwilling to shed the baggage of what he thought was Christian belief, so

he answered in the negative. Yet both the history and theory of reading poetry belies Eliot. Richards made this point in his *Practical Criticism* in the following words:

> For it would seem evident that poetry which has built upon firm and definite beliefs about the world, *The Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost*, or Donne's *Divine Poems*, or Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, or Hardy's *The Dynasts*, must appear differently to readers who do and readers who do not hold similar beliefs. Yet in fact most readers, and nearly all good readers, are very little disturbed by even a direct opposition between their own beliefs and the beliefs of the poet.[25]

Such being the case, there seems hardly any need to be exercised about "proving" or not proving the statements made in a poem. As Richards pointed out, "disputable statements so constantly presented to us in poetry, are merely *assumptions* introduced for poetic purposes."[26] Richards went on to say:

> It is better to say that the question of belief or disbelief, in the intellectual sense, never arises when we are reading well. If unfortunately it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we have for the moment ceased to be reading poetry and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in quite a different type of activity[27].

But it is a sad fact of the human condition that even literary critics expect poets to perform like circus artists on the trapeze of meaning. Sartre once described Baudelaire's greatest failure to have been his attempt to achieve and establish a personal though false concept of good and evil. "Baudelaire submitted to Good in order to violate it."[28] Somebody made a very good reply to this by saying that Sartre forgot that Baudelaire was a poet, and thus had a right to a spurious philosophy. Sartre's displeasure was because Baudelaire consciously drove himself into a dead end, leaving no retreat open. And yet Auerbach held that "Souls such as Baudelaire are the *aimes choisies* [chosen souls] of our time or

of a time that is not too far in the past."[29] And in fact Lionel Johnson gave an even better, because literary, reply long before Sartre came out with his indictment. Johnson said that "Baudelaire sings sermons".[30]

It is understandable for European literary critics to lapse into questions of (philosophical, scientific or doctrinal) Truth in poetry because Plato gave a permanent bad conscience to European poets and writers. George Steiner says, regrettably adopting a somewhat patronizing tone about Aristotle that the only point where the classic view of poetry and drama touched on the nature of language was:

> ...in the conflict between the Platonic theory of *mimesis* and the Aristotelian model of *katharsis*. The Platonic notion of the capacity of language, particularly when joined to music to elicit imitative action, his insight into the possibility that verbal fictions weaken or corrupt our grasp on what Freud was to call 'the reality principle', his attempt to distinguish negatively verifiable and poetic truths—all these raise linguistic issues of final importance. Aristotle's rejoinder is based on a far less penetrating sense of language and inclines to a cursory identification of form with explicit content.[31]

Yet the issue is hardly linguistic: it in fact relates to the performatics of language where our presence at a performance of poetry somehow enables us to participate, or at least be in some present at the scene being narrated or the occasion being described. This may be pernicious from Plato's point of view, but it only goes to confer a sort of autonomy on poetry as regards questions of 'Truth' or 'The reality principle.' The Arab theorists were quite correct in demanding that poems have words, rhyme, metre, and meaning. Whether the meaning was 'true' in any particular sense was not the concern of poetry per se. What constituted 'word', 'rhyme' and 'metre' was the concern of the everyday language user and the poet. We Urdu critics who should have found interpretive and explicatory tools for Iqbal from our own Arabo-Persian-Sanskrit traditions fell into the error of

accepting Plato's hegemonic role in the formulation of our modern theories of literary appreciation and interpretation. The loss has been ours.

2.

So how should one go about reading Iqbal? One thing, which our Ancients knew all the time but we have of late tended to forget is that thanks to literary tradition, all poetry represents a kind of historical continuity:

> Every writer writes within a tradition or complex of traditions and hews the wood of his or her experience in terms conformable to the traditionally provided matrices thereof....Literature is identifiable by this conformity of the individual work to the canon, which determines what will or can count as literature at any given time, place and cultural condition.[32]

Salim Ahmad made a brilliantly perceptive remark about Nazir Akbarabadi (1740-1830), when he said that the "lack of a large tradition of *nazm* writing let one of our great men go waste."[33] Iqbal was placed better, because he had, among others, Bedil (1644-1720) in Persian and Mir Anis (1802-1874) in Urdu.

The mention of Mir Anis may surprise some of us until we realize it that Mir Anis's marsiyas[34] are the best premodern model in Urdu of narrative-historical, narrative-lyrical, and oral-dramatic poetry and Iqbal's poetry extends and exploits the possibilities created by Anis. More importantly in the context of our modern anxieties about poetry's doctrinal or philosophical Truth, Mir Anis provides the perfect example by the very great value placed on his poetry in the entire literary community. For Mir Anis's original impulses arose from Shi'i beliefs and a generally Shi'ite view of History. Yet the majority of his poetry's lovers have been non-Shi'i, and the first major and still current critical articulation about Mir

Anis was *Mavazina-e Anis o Dabir* (1907) written by Shibli No'mani, a staunch Sunni historian, critic, poet, and much else besides. It was Shibli, and not some Shi'i divine who said that "the poetic qualities and merits of Anis are not matched by any other poet."[35]

I myself come from a strict family of Deobandis and had nothing in my background or environment to prepare me for the protocols of mourning and tragic lamentation that the *marsiya* abounds in. In fact, I still do not find myself fully empathetic to the "weeping verses" which are an integral part of all *marsiya.* It was my father, no great admirer of the Shi'i school of Islam, who introduced me to Shibli's book when I was very young, and I was able immediately to relate to it, and to the poetry of Mir Anis. I may not weep, but I can spend days in raptures at the beauty of verses like the following:

The refulgence, the awful splendour, the prime elegance,
The majestic lustre...
Moons of the House of Zahra,
And the Suns for all Times;
And suddenly something dark descended upon the world,
The sun had not yet receded but they
Went into decline.[36]

These are just four lines, and by no means the best of their mode in Mir Anis, not to speak of his whole vast oeuvre. I am aware of the inadequacy of my translation, yet I feel I have conveyed some of the *frisson* of the majestic first two misras descending into the dark vale of shock and sorrow of the last two.

Iqbal was aware of his legacy from Mir Anis, as his Urdu poems from all periods of his poetic activity amply demonstrate. But I bring up Mir Anis here with a different purpose. If, in spite of a cultural or even religious cleavage Mir Anis the poet can remain valid for his myriad readers, should we not believe that Iqbal, undoubtedly the greater poet, can be understood and enjoyed in his own right?

What does, then, Iqbal the poet give to his reader? In the first place, Iqbal lets me have full or partial entry into five extremely powerful poetic traditions: the Arabo-Persian, the Indo-Persian, the European, the Indo-Sanskrit, and the Urdu. The first one is evident everywhere in his longer and shorter poems like *Khizr-e Rah, Zauq o Shauq, Masjid-e Qurtuba,* the ghazals of *Zabur-e 'Ajam,* the longish poem *Hudi* in *Payam-e Mashriq* and in much else besides. The Indo-Persian tradition speaks everywhere in the numbered pieces of *Bal-Jibril,* the long poem in that collection in imitation of Sana'i, the numerous poems of intellectual and emotional probing like *Mihrab Gul Afghan ke Afkar, Lala-e Sahra, Jibril o Iblis,* and of course in the two masnavis, *Asrar-e Khudi* and *Rumuz-e Bekhudi* where Bedil speaks in many disguised voices. These latter also partake of the Indo-Sanskrit tradition, and their speculative tone occasionally recalls Swami Bhupat Rai Begham Bairagi's (d. 1719) long masnavi sometimes described as *Qisas-e Fuqara-e Hind.* The poem clearly mixes Rumi's thought and Vedantic thought, and its discursive techniques too, especially in the dialogue mode, anticipate Iqbal.[37]

If the ghazals of *Payam-e Mashriq* are in the Indo-Persian mode, its nazms like *Tanha'i, Shabnam, Hur o Sha'ir,* and the general tone of the whole collection recalls Western ways of poem making and even poem thinking. The long poem *Sham' o Sha'ir* is a triumph of the use of the Western soliloquizing, monologic mode in the Indo-Persian style. Bedil seems to be much in evidence here again.

Iqbal's derivations from the Urdu tradition go back not just to Dagh, but also, and very much more considerably to Mir Anis, and Ghalib, then Zauq and Sauda. It is not often realized that Iqbal would have made a very great qasida poet and would easily have rivalled Zauq and Sauda had he lived in premodern times.

Let me speak here a bit more of Iqbal's allegiance to the European and Indo-Sanskrit poetic traditions. It must be obvious that all the dramatic poems, and all the dialogue

poems could not but owe their existence the German Romantics and to a certain extent to Goethe in terms of general technique and in any case even the conception of writing dramatic poems is Western, not Indian or Eastern. There does exist a favourite dialogue device in classical Persian masnavis, and occasionally in ghazal too. It is actually a rhetorical device called *saval o javab* (Question Answer) where the poet frames questions in one misra and gives the reply in the second. The form is highly stylized and very often the poet seems to first frame the answer and then invent a suitable question for it. Whereas in Iqbal, the dialogue, even a very short one like *Subh-e Chaman* in *Zarb-e Kalim*, middle length ones like *Muhavira-e Ilm o Ishq* and *Muhavira Mabain-e Khuda va Insan* which recalls the influence of George Herbert in the reverse, or longer ones like *Pir o Murid* in *Bal-e Jibril*, or the truly longer dialogues in *Javed Namah* are proper dialogues and vehicles for exchange of subtle ideas. They have hardly any parallels in the nonwestern traditions of poetry.

Then we have poems like *Iblis ki Majlis-e Shura* in *Armughan-e Hijaz*, where the epic imagination seems at work in the Western manner even if briefly. *Ek Arzu*, and *Rukhsat Ay Bazm-e Jahan* and some other early poems of *Bang-e Dara*, remind one of he early English Romantics while the hortatory and celebratory poems like *manind-e saba khez vazidan digar amoz* in *Zabur-e Ajam*, and the short poem *Rumi Badle Shami Badle...* in *Zarb-e Kalim* remind us of Shelley's passionate appeals to the Irish peasants. The *Javed Nama*, of course is a incredible masterpiece in terms of the fusion of Western and Eastern, especially Ibn-e Arabi and Dante.

Perhaps it is yet more important to observe that the fusion is not so much on the level of borrowing of ideas or intellectual approaches as on the level of creative patterning. *Javed Nama* bears the same relation to Dante and Ibn-e Arabi as the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore bears to the Jama Masjid of Delhi, or the Sher Dar Madrasa at Samarqand, built at almost the same time (1630's), while the Sher Dar Madrasa

itself recalls Mahmud Gavan's Madrasa in Bidar built in the far South of India in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Humayun's tomb in Delhi bears the same resonances as Hoshang Shah's tomb in Mandu in central India, built a century earlier around 1450. It is not so much a question of imitation as of kindred spirits making their appearance in an inspired series of flights of creativity.

The astonishing variety of Western modes and techniques, including experiments in metre and form is rivalled by the numerous Western subjects, persons, ideas, places, and political situations that crowd Iqbal's poetry and give it the feel and air of a Western metropolis. The sheer imaginative reach and the wide range of the creative imagination are truly unparalleled in modern world poetry anywhere. The existence of such poems in such large numbers shows that Iqbal was fully comfortable through the vast cultural and literary hinterland of Europe.

When I talk of the Indo-Sanskrit stream of poetic tradition also enriching Iqbal's poetry, I do not merely mean the marvellous translation of the *Gayatri Mantra*, in *Bang-e Dara*, or the little gem from Bhatrihari in *Bal-e Jibril*, nor yet the presence of Vishvamitra and Bhartrihari in *Javed Nama*. I do not even refer to the fact, important in itself, that Iqbal intended to translate the whole of *Ramayana* and also the *Gita* into Urdu.[38] Nor do I refer specifically to poems in *Bang-e Dara* like *Ram*, and *Swami Ram Tirath*. To my mind Iqbal's most remarkable debt to the Sanskrit literary tradition is in his knack for peopling his poetry with natural or cosmic objects, the sun, the stars, the moon, the morning, the night, the sunrise, the flower, birds, the dewdrop, the mountain, the ocean, God himself, and treat them as characters in a semi-secret play whose scenes and significance are known only to himself. This imaginative device is apparent in even the earliest poems like *Insan aur Bazm-e Qudrat, Chand aur Tare, rat aur Sha'ir, Bazm-e Anjum, Sair- Falak*, the opening stanzas of *Javab-e Shikva* in *Bang-e Dara* and finds absolutely perfect

expression in *Bang-e Dara* itself in the short poem called *Insan.* In later collections we have *Lala-e Sahra, Ruh-e Arzi Adam ka Istiqbal Karti Hai, Mulla aur Bihisht* in for instance *Bal-e Jibril,* and many others. The first few pages of *Payam-e Mashriq* yield poems of bewildering imaginative power in this strain, like *Gul-e Nakhustin, Taskhir-e Fitrat, Bu-e Gul, Sarud-e Anjum.*

It is difficult to find such plenitude, such abundance of both cosmic and non-human on the one hand and earthly and human on the other within the space of any poetic tradition other than Sanskrit. A look at the first few pages of a short Anthology gives us the following (from the Vedas): *Ushas: The Dawn, To Night, To Varuna, For Parajnaya: Bearer of Rain, Aranyani: Forest Spirit, Two Birds, A Tree in Flashing Heaven;* (from secular verse): *Nightfall, Moonrise, Speed, Young Tree, Flower,* and so on.[39] The reason for this treatment of the human and the non-human as one is not obscure or esoteric at all. As the editors inform us in their Introduction, there are many strands of unity that form the fabric of Hindu literary and philosophic thought. One of them is:

> ...A world-view which does not allow for a dichotomy between matter and spirit, man and nature. In this holistic view all life is one, and inner and external reality are mutually dependent. This world-view is held by all the languages of India...

Further on, we learn that Indian thought assumes a correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm, a perpetual identification of things create and uncreate with Being and Becoming.

> 'Yonder world is in the likeness of this world as this one is the likeness of that', says the *Aitreya Brahmana.* ...Man in Indian literature is operating simultaneously on two planes, one situated in time and space and the other transcending both....According to Abhinava Gupta, the most significant exponent of the Indian aesthetic, Being is neither merely an atemporal visualisation of itself, nor an absolute separation from time and space.[40]

It should be obvious that in spite of Iqbal's great interest in the philosophy of Time and Being, what is relevant here to his student is the question of poetic technique, of how Iqbal is able to draw upon strands of Indo-Sanskrit thought where in Abhinava Gupta's words, Being is neither atemporal nor an absolute separation from time and space. Yet a question might be asked if Iqbal's interest in the Muslim philosophical questions of Time would not by itself have led him to a point where the route might have become open for him to create a poetic world in which the cosmic and the non-cosmic, the earthly human and non-human, all could become characters in his poems?

There are two answers to this: first, there is no other literary tradition on the immediate horizon of Iqbal's literary world in which the human and the non-human world meet and interpenetrate all the time. The other answer is provided by Coomaraswamy who suggests the existence of a similarity if not correspondence here among the traditions of the East. He says, "There are very few metaphysical doctrines in Islam that could not, if one made the attempt, be very plausibly derived from Vedic or Buddhist sources." Coomaraswamy quotes Meister Eckhart as saying, "God is creating the world now, this instant" and comments that this "might have been said by any Sufi". Doubtless, Coomaraswamy is more interested in the philosophical content rather than what he calls "the literary history of ideas" but what he says here is sufficient for the literary students of Iqbal.[41] Quoting from the *Athirveda*, Coomaraswamy says that Time is not a "duration", but rather the "Timeless" to which "all movable time is ever present". Coomaraswamy goes on:

> It is in these terms that the *Maitri Upanishad* distinguishes the "two forms" (*dve rupa*) of Brahman, i. e., aspects of the "two natures" (*dvaitibhava*) of the single essence (*tad ekam*)....There are, indeed, two forms of Brahma; time, and the Timeless.[42]

Coomaraswamy concludes his discussion of the Sufi concept of Time with these words:

> Time, in other words, is an imitation of eternity, as becoming is of being and thinking is of knowing.[43]

Given such sources for the imagination, Iqbal's creativity was bound to take the course that it did. It is not relevant to the literary critic to ask whether Iqbal actually believed these things. It is even less relevant for the literary critic to himself share his or anyone else's beliefs about Time and Being. All we need to assert is Iqbal's poetry gives us imaginative *entrée* into more worlds of literary and creative tradition than any other poetry of the twentieth century.

In addition to the general grace, power and elegance that Iqbal' poetry derived from his full use of the resources of the Indo-Persian tradition, Iqbal's remarkable intertextuality and plurivalence owe their power, and maybe even their existence to the Indo-Persian poetic tradition. It must be remembered that the main Arabo-Persian literary thought and praxis of which Iqbal was the indirect but able inheritor did not have much to say about what Todorov has described as the "overflowing of the signifier by the signified." This he defines as the signifier of a single proposition leading us to "knowledge of two signifieds, one direct and the other indirect".[44] Todorov identifies three kinds of discourse; literal, ambiguous and transparent[45], and brings support for this classification by invoking Abhinavagupta through K. Kunjunni Raja:

> Abhinavagupta says that when an expression gives its own literal meaning, and in addition suggests some other sense, we cannot regard both these distinct senses as conveyed by the same power. The former proceeds directly from the words, while the latter comes from this literal sense. *Tatparya* pertains to the expressed sense, whereas *dhvani* pertains to non-expressive factors also...[46]

That is to say, the poet is able to invest new or unexpected meanings to the literal meaning and can construct meaning on two levels between which there may not be any direct discernible relationship and what is "literal" may not be so

literal after all. This insight came into the Indo-Persian tradition through interactions between Sanskrit and Persian in India and through the Indian Style (*sabk-i hindi*) Persian poets and is otherwise not to be found in mainline Arabic or Persian literary theory.

The quest of intertextuality is different, for intertextuality, in the sense of making poems from poems has been an established poetic practice in the Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu classical traditions. By the time of Iqbal the principle and practice both fell into disrepute, or were at least looked at with discomfort and suspicion because the poet was now mostly seen as "doing his own thing" unbeholden to others. Iqbal here again demonstrated the creative and evocative power of poetry when images, themes, and poems of the past are made to serve as the foundation for other images, themes, or poems. With its wealth of allusion, its direct and indirect echoes of other poets, and its wide background studded with poems and poets of the past Iqbal's poetry feels like a panorama of Persian, Urdu, Arabic, Sanskrit, German and English poets of the past. And there is never any doubt as to who is in control: the presiding genius is Iqbal and none else. He manipulates, uses, abandons, re-embraces, refashions, approaches from unexpected angles. This is not merely learned poetry. This is poetry whose wardrobe of jewels is like the "metaphor of the mind" described by Abdul Qahir Jurjani as a metaphor whose meaning is inexhaustible.

In *Tulu'-e Islam* (1922) Iqbal has a verse:

> *The Reality of all things—whether of fire or earth, is the same*
> *Slash the particle's heart, the sun's blood will come dripping forth.*[47]

Iqbal went back to this stunning image through a different perspective thirteen years later in a short poem in *Zarb-e Kalim:*

> *Should a maestro of the art so desire,*
> *The grace and plenitude of Art will make*
> *The light drip from the sun's body*

Like dew.[48]

I don't want to go into the "message content" of these verses. I want merely to point out that the images actually go back to the Indo-Persian poet Faizi (1547-1594) through another Indo-Persian poet Talib Amuli (d.1626). Let's hear Talib Amuli first:

I gather the flowers of her face
In the skirt of my thought,
I squeeze the sun and pour it
In my glass.[49]

Now listen to this from Faizi:

Where Eternity's light falls ever
On the heart:
Squeeze a particle and the sun
Will drip forth from it.[50]

We can see that Iqbal is reliving the images for a different purpose. He invests a moral power and an urgency of action in both the cases, but what to us is more important is the greater sensuousness and less abstract treatment. The first image is almost intolerably violent in its intensity, the next one engages our senses by its contradictoriness: the sun becoming cool, or hot, and oozing away his light out of embarrassment or excitement. Talib Amuli's image in the first misra was too non-physical, too bloodless, and too abstract to create a visual or sensual effect. The purpose or result of Iqbal's operation on the particle is to remove the fetter on his being and let it shine forth in the amplitude of Unity. Iqbal's poem pulls in reverberations of caesarean birth and ritual pulling out of the foetus of the infinite from the body of the finite. Yet there is also the disturbing suggestion of the sun weeping blood when the heart of the article is torn open. Thus the other suggestion is it's not a matter of identity, but of empathy. The sun weeps when violence is done to the dust

mote and its heart is ripped out. The "mighty heart" beats for everyone.

In the she'r about the miracle of Art, Iqbal is doing much more with Faizi's image, again because he is more concrete: it is difficult to visualize in Faizi "eternity's light" dropping ever of the heart. Iqbal takes us to a more tangible world which obeys the rules and laws of Art. And Art's grace and plenitude conquers the sun, makes it change its character. It is inevitable here to recall Yeats' magic bird which the poet fashions and which sings of all that is past, or passing, or to come. But the magic bird can only sing, while the Art of the maestro can pull the sun down to the level of the human.

Creation of complex structures of meaning, images fashioned or refashioned anew, making poems so as to make statements that yield sidereal or even contradictory meanings are major features of the Indo-Persian, and the Urdu tradition.[51] Writing as he did at a time when the Urdu poet was under constant pressure to abandon his native love of metaphor and work away from his tradition that valued abstractness and complexity and saw poetry mainly as a play of meaning on ideas many of which could be found elsewhere but would not often be suspected to carry an extra charge of meaning. Iqbal is our greatest modern *ma'ni afirin* (meaning-maker) poet and since unlike his younger "modern" contemporaries, Iqbal makes his meanings within the realm of the Indo-Persian where poems went beyond "mere images" (in Yeats's phrase) and poets went on even to say that not saying something was the best form of utterance. This was a discovery made by 'Urfi and Faizi who had a strong sense of the frontiers to which the power of the human utterance could be stretched. 'Urfi said:

For the world is a foreign country,
No one here is from my people.[52]

Thus in a world of strangers silence was the equivalent of an utterance in which meaning was so tightly folded as to

make its unfolding nearly impossible. Ghani Kashmiri (d. 1666) declared:

> *A person who has no understanding,*
> *Were he to glue his eye to a book*
> *He wouldn't still see meaning's visage*
> *Even in his dreams. The brainless ones do not*
> *Reflect on poems: the bubble*
> *Has no capability to dive into the ocean.*[53]

Iqbal brought this tradition alive for us in all its glory; he made us feel proud of it. In a place and time when our literary critics chose to sneer at Bedil, greatest of *sabk-i hindi* poets for what was seen as his opacity and complexity, Iqbal wrote:

> Doubtless, Ghalib imitated Bedil's manner, but Ghalib's harvest remained empty of Bedil's themes and ideas. Bedil was ahead of his contemporaries in regard to thought. Evidence can be produced to show that Bedil's Indian and foreign contemporaries and the lovers of Persian verse have been unable to understand Bedil's view of the world.[54]

Many things are happening here, but I'll only point out to one that is not articulated here: In his role as *hakimul ummat* Iqbal may have liked to believe that a poet's meaning should be entirely clear. But he had a curious theory for this. He wrote:

> The lack of clarity in his [Momin's] (1800-1852) style viewed in the light of psychology appears as an important but painful proof of the decline of the Muslims' urge to rule. It only among the people who are the ruling power that clarity of expression is essential. This state of lack of clarity which is so common with Momin is also found in a somewhat lesser degree in minds far deeper than Momin's, for instance, Ghalib and Bedil.... [Here] ambiguity becomes a source of enjoyment and inadequacy of expression is savoured as depth of thought.[55]

The import of the above two utterances can be fully appreciated only when we read them side by side with this interesting critique of Bedil and others offered by Iqbal:

> Ghalib wouldn't probably have understood Bedil's thought. All [Ghalib's] admiration and praise of Bedil is just because of Bedil's [extraordinary-beautiful] Persian compounds [*tarkib*], and that's it. Ghalib learnt [the art of] *tarkib* from Bedil. I myself have benefited from Mirza Bedil in this matter.[56]

So Iqbal as *hakimul ummat* may have wanted his prescription for his people to be unambiguous but Iqbal the poet was like Baudelaire, quarrying the poems and texts of others for making his own images. Iqbal had no shame in admitting that he made use of Bedil's dazzling linguistic and metaphoric constructions as building blocks for his own texts. Peter Quennell said of Baudelaire, he was industrious and workmanlike, recording on little pieces of paper his "linguistic discoveries", storing them in a tea chest "against the moment when they should be embodied in a poem." Iqbal the poet seems to have been little different in his love of words.

It was not for nothing that Iqbal chose one of Bedil's more obscure verses to explicate and unfold in a delightful little poem, thus establishing the supreme relevance of Bedil's imagination forever in his own poetry. The poem occurs in *Zarb-e Kalim* (1935), a collection of Urdu poems whose central importance for Iqbal's literary criticism has not yet been fully recognized:

Mirza Bedil

> *Is this the Reality, or the mischief wrought*
> *By my false-seeing eye?*
> *The earth, the wilderness, the mountain range,*
> *The dark-blue sky,*
> *Some say: It is; others, it is not,*
> *Who knows if this your world exists at all.*
> *How well Mirza Bedil unknotted this knot*
> *Whose unravelling has been*
> *So hard for the Philosopher:*
> *'If the heart had enough space, this garden*

Were sightless: the wine's hue chose to come out
Because the wine-flask didn't have enough room ."[57]

So this is how Iqbal the poet gives us entry into our literary traditions, creatively, challengingly, and recuperatively. Take care of the poetry, he seems to say, and the philosophy will take care of itself. More than any modern Urdu poet it is Iqbal who makes us respect and try to understand the foundations of our poetics. The structures of meaning that Iqbal makes for us exist in their own right and also as continuities.

A question might be asked: So what about Iqbal's originality? Should not a poet have an "individual voice", a "style of his own"? The first answer to this is that a great deal of truly great poetry passes beyond petty considerations of "individuality" and "style." All of us know about Omar Khayyam's "individuality" and all of us also know that out of the several hundred ruba is that pass as Omar Khayyam, there are only about a handful that can with some certainty be ascribed to Omar Khayyam. We know that some of the most famous and well-loved she'rs and even whole ghazals in the Divan of Hafiz have now been shown to be not from Hafiz though they reflect Hafiz's true "individuality" and "style." We know that scores of ghazals of Sauda's (1706-1781) contemporaries somehow found their way into Sauda's mss. collections and continued to be quoted and studied as part of Sauda's work for two centuries and more. So questions of "individual style" are essentially contextual, not absolute.

That is not to say that Iqbal has no style of his own. One way of putting the matter would be that he has many styles, he has different styles for different occasions. The style of *Shkiva* and *Javab-e Shikva* is different from that of *Zauq o Shauq* whose style is again very different from that of the ghazals and ghazal like poems in *Zabur-e 'Ajam*. Then there is the grand Iqbalian manner, especially apparent in the Urdu, but not so prominent or differentiated in the Persian. These matters can't be decided with a few strokes of bureaucratic

pens. Nor can we understand them by counting the so-called patterns of sounds, labial, or dental, or fricative, or liquid, or whatever that scribal critics pretend to have discovered in Iqbal. To believe that the existence of poetry could be accounted for by counting vowels and consonants is to believe that patterns of vowels and consonants do not exist elsewhere in the language. In fact, they would seem to occur more richly in film songs.

Iqbal should be seen as a perfector of different styles in Urdu poetry, and as the inventor of many new ones, for instance, the dramatic dialogue, the verse style that is suited to speech rhythms, the narrative of the imagined landscapes of the mind. Similarly his nature poems range from formal stylized narratives that recall the qasidas of Iranian Mirza Habib Qa'ani (1807-1853) to interior monologue-like poems that seems to take us back to Wordsworth.

All modes, all manners of poem making are within Iqbal's practical range: the celebratory, the narrative, the lyrical, the dramatic, the hortatory, the speculative, the ironical, the satirical, the comic, the tender, everything melts in his hand and takes whatever shape he wants to give it. Nothing is a stranger here: the intensely introspective, the highly metaphorical, the plain, or the prophetic, all tones are present in their appropriate place. Iqbal's poetry teaches us to recognize the most distant horizons of Urdu poetry as our own.

Majnun Gorakhpuri said something perceptive about the music of Iqbal, and I think he was the first to say that even the most difficult of Iqbal's she'rs can be sung on the subtlest and most delicate of musical instruments.[58] He didn't say this in precise or subtle enough words, but the point, sadly so often lost in the welter of words generated by us about Iqbal's "truth" and "message", was a valuable one. Iqbal wrote some of the world's most mellifluous poetry and that's a quality that takes its place right there where the highest poetry is. In fact it is to be doubted if there ever can be great

poetry without the quality that Amir Khusrau called *ravani* ("flowingness").

"Flowingness" has been a quality about which it is impossible to frame theoretical statements, yet it is clear that some poem or poets have more of this and some have less of it. More important, the question of *ravāni* ("flowingness") has engaged the attention of many theorists in the Arab-Persian-Urdu tradition since Khusrau. Even before Khusrau, the Arabs seem to have devoted some attention to the matter as an important aspect of literary appreciation. Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said) quotes from Al–Farabi's discussion of the musical quality or the "beauty of sound" in poetry. Among other elements, al–Farabi identified "purity: where there is nothing in the melody to spoil it qualitatively or quantitatively; ...suppleness and delicacy in long-drawn-out melodies", and above all, the harmonization of vowelled letters.[59] This doesn't take us very far, for Al–Farabi was speaking as a musicologist, but Al–Jahiz had a somewhat more penetrating observation as a literary critic:

> The letters of the words and the verses of the poem should seem harmonious and smooth, supple and easy...gentle and pleasant, flexibly ordered, light on the tongue, *so that the entire verse is like one word, and one word is like a single letter.*[60]

This is very much better, though still quite far from a precise, prescriptive description. Khusrau had much more to say on *ravani* [61] and by early eighteenth century in Delhi, *ravani* had become accepted as the prime quality of prime poetry. Miscellaneous attempts to find the principle or principles where *ravani* may be located have been made with little success. The fact however remains that for instance, the poetry of Mir and that of Mir Anis is recognized to have more flowingness than any of the premodern poets. Similarly, Iqbal should have been placed at the very highest pinnacle of *ravani* had we found time to read his poems as literature and not philosophical dissertations or politico-religious manifestos whose truth, real or

imagined contradictions and falsehoods disputatiously analyzed, confirmed, or rejected.

In the delight that he took and gave in the sheer music of poetry Iqbal reminds me of Mir who is the only Urdu poet whose *ravani* is equal to that of Iqbal, and of Coleridge who among all great critics placed the greatest positive value on the music of poetry. Hartley Nelson Coleridge remarks in his edition of Coleridge's *Table Talk* that Coleridge had "an eye, almost exclusively, for the ideal or universal in painting and music: But his demand from music was "either thought or feeling; mere addresses to the sensual ear" didn't appeal to him.[62] The exact meaning of words like "universal", "thought", or "feeling" must differ from person to person, nonetheless, the general principle enunciated here is entirely sound for it makes an attempt to relate sound with sense which Richards also attempted to do a century later. Coleridge spoke of "the music of nobler thoughts"[63] and thus in a way glossed the terms "thought or feeling" used by Hartley Nelson Coleridge: there can be noble music only where there are noble thoughts. This is insufficient for it denies the property of music to satirical or hate poetry which Coleridge would not have granted the rank of "noble". We need therefore to rethink the matter a bit.

It is Coleridge again who provides the clue by informing us that:

> But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of the imagination; and this together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling, may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learnt.[64]

This implies or postulates a number of fundamental values of the nature of the music of poetry. The power to sense musical delight is complimentary to the power of producing it among others. Musical delight in a poem is obtainable only when the imagination is at work. The musical delight doesn't function in a vacuum, it has to emanate from a thought, or

feeling which itself has the power to pull together a number of disparate feelings or experiences.

This does not fully explain the nearly autonomous nature of the music of poetry, or *ravani*, though later in his discussion of metre Coleridge throws in another valuable insight in his typical off hand manner when he says,

> As the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself must be accompanied by the natural language of excitement.[65]

Walter Jackson Bate has an extremely interesting annotation here from Coleridge himself who wrote to Southey on July 13, 1802 as follows: "...*Metre itself* implies a *passion*, i. e., both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of the Reader–"[66]

At one place in *Zabur-e Ajam* Iqbal seems to be echoing or recalling Coleridge in some way when he characterizes poetry or the music of poetry as "lifeless" without "meaning", the term "meaning" here would seem to signify something like Coleridge's "nobler thoughts" or "predominant thought or feeling." Characteristically, Iqbal also brings in Rumi who among the Persian poets had perhaps the most to say about "meaning" (*ma'ni*) in the sense of "Reality". We read the following verses toward the end of *Zabur-e Ajam*:

> *I do not know where ma'ni's origins are,*
> *Its form is apparent and familiar to me*
> *Though; The song that has no meaning is*
> *Dead, its words are from a fire that's ashen.*
> *The Master of Rum revealed the secret of meaning;*
> *My thought bends its forehead at his doorstep. "Meaning*
> *Is that which takes you away from yourself,*
> *Leaves you in no want for the form. Meaning is not*
> *That which renders you blind or deaf, or makes*
> *Man even more in love with the form."*[67]

In his dialogue with Bhartrihari in *Javed Nama* Iqbal makes the Sanskrit poet and linguistic philosopher describe the

poet's music or mode of existence to be "the crescendo and diminuendo of sound". Other than this, "none in the world know where the poet is."[68] I think there can be no more fitting conclusion to our effort to understand the secret of Iqbal's music than to leave the matter here with Iqbal's prayer at the beginning of *Zabur-e Ajam*:

> *Make my clod of dirt blaze with the light*
> *Of David's song,*
> *To every particle of my being give*
> *Fire's feathers and wings.*[69]

If there ever was a poet's prayer answered, it was this.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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[1] *Payam-e Mashriq*, 5th printing, Lahore, 1944, page *kaf* (=11).

[2] Majnun Gorakhpuri, *Iqbal, Ijmali Tabsira*, Gorakhpur, n. d. (circa 1946), p. 106. Capitals added by me, Urdu has no capital letters but the three words here seemed to cry out for capitalization at least in English.

[3] Salim Ahmad, *Iqbal, Ek Sha'ir*, Lahore, 1978, p. 28. The capitalization here is again mine.

[4] Salim Ahmad, *Iqbal, Ek Sha 'ir*, p. 19.

[5] Salim Ahmad, *Iqbal, Ek Sha'ir*, p. 105.