

“Iblis” In Iqbal’s Philosophy

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The figure of Satan or *Iblis* occupies a considerable portion of Iqbal’s religious philosophy. As A.M. Schimmel observes, there are tendencies towards the development of the *Iblis*-figure in the traditional way, and yet towards a completely original re-formulation of it.¹ On the whole, in his treatment of *Iblis*, one can see many of Iqbal’s brilliant “flashes” of poetic and philosophical insight.

IBLIS AS A PRINCIPLE OF ACTIVITY

Mani had regarded Satan as a principle of activity, Iqbal refers to this fact in his thesis: “In darkness - the feminine principle in nature - were hidden the elements of evil which, in course of time, concentrated and resulted in the composition, so to speak, of the hideous-looking devil, the principle of activity.”² Perhaps this is the germ of the idea which figured prominently in Iqbal’s later thought, namely, that the movement of the world and the evolution of humanity is possible only through the conquest of darkness and the powers of Chaos.³ In fact, in Iqbal’s opinion, Satan is not far from the truth when he asserts in “*Taskhir-e-Fitrat*”

تو به بدن جان دہی، شور بجان من دہم
تو به سکون رہ زنی، من بہ تیش رہبرم
آدم خاکی نہاد، دون نظر و کم سواد
زاد در آغوش تو پیر شود در برم⁴

The stars’ bodies were made by you;
I am their motive force.
I am the substance of the world;
I am life’s primal source.

1. Schimmel, A. M. “The Figure of Satan in the Works of Muhammed Iqbal” (consulted in the manuscript by courtesy of the author).

2. Iqbal, M, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Lahore, 1964, p. 18.

3. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel’s Wing*, Leiden. 1963, pp. 209-210.

4. *Payam-e-Mashriq*, Lahore, 1948, p. 98.

The body draws its soul from You
But I arouse the soul.
While you waylay with blissful peace,
I lead with action's call.
That low-born creature of earth, man,
Of mean intelligence,
Though born in your lap, will grow old
Under my vigilance

(Translation by Hussain, H., *A Message from the East*, Karachi, 1971, p. 43)

It is *Iblis* who leads human beings on from conquest to conquest, who shows them the way to knowledge and perfection.⁵ The words of *Iblis* when he tempts Adam could very well be the words of Iqbal himself, and that is hardly surprising because, in one sense, both *Iblis* and Iqbal are prophets of a new world. First *Iblis* praises a life of action, of perpetual excitement and challenge - a marked contrast to the effortless ease of parasitical living.

زندگی سوز و ساز، یہ ز سکون دوام
فاختہ شاہیں شود، از تپش زیر دام
کوثر و تسنیم برد، از تو نشاط عمل
گیرز میناے تاک، بادہ آئینہ نام⁶

A life of struggle, strain and stress
Is better than eternal rest.
When a dove strains hard at its nest
An eagle's heart beats in its breast.
These streams of milk and honey have
Deprived you of the strength to act.
Come, take a hearty draught of wine
From the cup of the vine direct.

(Translation by Hussain, H., *A Message from the East*, p. 43)

Then he urges Adam to open his eyes and reach out for a new world - a world in which

5. Maitre, L. "Iqbal : A Great Humanist" in *Iqbal Review*, April 1961, p. 28.

6. *Payam-e-Mashriq*, p. 98.

there are untold opportunities for his manifold potentialities to manifest themselves and acquire maturity. *Iblis* becomes Adam's guide to a new world.

خیز کہ بنمایمت مملکت تازہ
چشم جہاں بین کشا، بہر۔ تماشا خرام
قطرہ بے مایہ گوہر تابندہ شو
از سر گردوں بیفت، گیر بدریا مقام
تیغ درخشندہ، جان جہانے گسل
جوہر خود را نما، آئے بروں از نیام
تو نہ شناسی ہنوز شوق بمیرد ز وصل
چیست حیات دوام، سوختن ناتمام⁷

Arise, for I will show to you
The prospect of a whole new world
Unveil your eyes and look around;
Go forth and see it all unfurled.
You are tiny, worthless drop;
Becoming a shining, priceless pearl.
Descend from Eden's halcyon heights
And plunge into the life-stream's swirl.
You are a brightly shining sword;
Go dip into Creation's heart,
To prove your mettle issue forth
And from your scabbard's bosom part.
You have not learnt this lesson yet;
Fulfillment dooms desire to death.
You know what is eternal life?
To burn anew with each new breath

(Translation by Hussain, *H.*, *A Message from the East*, pp. 44-45)

Adam does not leave Paradise with "wandering steps, and slow"⁸ I but joyfully. He sounds more like Columbus setting out on an expedition to discover wonderful lands than as exile who has

7. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

8. Milton, J. "Paradise Lost" (Book XII) in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, Glasgow, 1952, p. 349.

fallen from grace. *Iblis* has indeed, been successful in arousing his enthusiasm.

چه خوش است زندگی را ہمہ سوز و ساز کردن
دل کوہ و دشت و صحرا بہ دمے گداز کردن
ز قفس درے کشادن یہ فضائے گلستانے
رہ آسمان نور دن بہ ستارہ راز کردن
بگداز ہائے پنہاں، بہ نیاز ہائے پیدا
نظرے ادا شناسے بحریم ناز کردن
ہمہ سوز ناتمام، ہمہ درد آرزویم
بگماں وہم یقین را کہ شہید جستجویم⁹

O what a joy it is to make
One's life a constant, ardent glow;
And with one's breath make desert, hill
And plain like molten metal flow!
Open a door out of one's cage
Onto the garden's vast expanse!
Roam in the spaces of the sky,
And tell the stars one's weal and woe;
With secret yearnings, open prayers,
Cast looks on Beauty's seraglio!
I burn in a slow-consuming fire.
I am an agonized desire.
I give up faith for living doubt;
I seek, I question, I aspire.

(Translation by Hussain, H., *A Message-from the East*, p. 46)

When Adam returns to the presence of God having conquered the forces of Nature, he is both triumphant and penitent. He is triumphant because he has fulfilled his mission on earth; he is penitent because he erred. He let himself be beguiled by Satan. But Iqbal's Adam could not be wholly penitent knowing that "error which may be described as a kind of intellectual evil is an indispensable factor in the building up of experience."¹⁰

Adam speaks of God with a curious childlike innocence which yet has a kind of dignity and

9. *Payam-e-Mashriq*, pp. 99-100.

10. Iqbal, M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, 1962, p. 57.

self-assurance:

گرچہ فسوئش مرا بردز راه صواب
از غلطم دد گذر عذر کناہم پذیر
رام نگر دد جہاں تانہ فسوئش خوریم
جز بکمند نیاز نازنہ گردد اسیر¹¹

I was deflected from the path
Of virtue by the Devil's fraud.
Forgive my error and accept
My humble penitence, O God!
One cannot subjugate the world
Unless one yields to its allure;
For Beauty's wild pride is not tamed
Until it falls into Love's snare.
(From Hussain, M. H., *A Message from the East*, pp. 47-48)

True to some degree to the principle of Milton's Satan: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven,"¹² *Iblis* tells the righteous (perhaps also a little self-righteous) Gabriel that it is he who has made possible the drama of human evolution, that - in a way - God is more aware of him than of the eternally-pious Gabriel.

ہے میری جرات سے مشت خاک میں ذوق نمو
میرے فتنے جامہ عقل و خرد کا تار و پو!
دیکھتا ہے تو فقط ساحل سے رزم خیر و شر
کون طوفان کے طمانچے کھا رہا ہے؟ میں کہ
تو
گر کبھی خلوت میسر ہو تو پوچھ اللہ سے
قصہ آدم کو رنگیں کر گیا کس کا لہو؟
میں کھٹکتا ہوں دل یزداں میں کانٹے کی طرح
تو فقط! اللہ ہو اللہ ہو اللہ ہو!¹³

11. *Payam-e-Mashriq*, p 101.

12. Milton, J., "Paradise Lost" (Book 1), p. 85.

13. *Bal-e-Jibril*, Lahore, 1947, pp. 193-194.

In Man's pinch of dust my daring spirit has breathed ambition,
 The warp and woof of mind and reason are woven of my sedition.
 The deeps of good and ill you only see from land's far verge;
 Which of us is it, you or I, that dares the tempest's scourge?
 Ask this of God, when next you stand alone within his sight -
 Whose blood is it has painted Man's long history so bright?
 In the heart of the Almighty like a pricking thorn I lie;
 You only cry for ever God, oh God, oh God most high!
 (Translation by Kiernan, V. G., *Poems from Iqbal*, London, 1955 pp. 52-53)

It is worth mentioning that in regarding *Iblis* as the dynamic principle of life, it is very likely that Iqbal was also influenced by Goethe¹⁴ for whom, next to Rumi, he had the greatest admiration and affection. In his play *Faust*, Goethe shows the Devil as humankind's companion, forming human beings, working on them lest they slumber.

IBLIS AS A PRINCIPLE OF EVIL

In Iqbal's thought, *Iblis* is never wholly evil. He is the symbol of the eternal "la" (negation) but for Iqbal, "Id" implies "illa" (affirmation) and is "an absolutely necessary constituent of a perfect social order."¹⁵ *Iblis* himself, says:

من دلبلی، در پرده 'لا' گفته ام
 گفته من خوشتر از نا گفته ام!¹⁶

Under the veil of "No" I murmured "Yes"
 What I have spoken is better than what I never said.
 (Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, London, 1966, p. 184)

Milton's Satan aims out of good still to find means of evil.¹⁷ As God's representative, it must be Adam's endeavour to "seek to bring forth good,"¹⁸ from his evil. In *Javid Nama* Shah-e-Hamadan says:

14. Schimmel, A. M., "Mohammad Iqbal and, German Thought" in *Mohammad Iqbal*, (The Pak-German Forum), Karachi, 1960, p 97)

15. Khayal. T. M., "Iqbal's Conception of Satan," in *Iqbal*, July 1953 Volume II Number I, p. 9.

16. *Javid Namah*, p. 158.

17. Milton, J., "Paradise Lost" (Book 1), p. 82.

18. *Ibid.*

بنده کبر خویش تن دارد خبر
 آفریند منفعت را از ضرر!
 بزم با دیو است آدم را و بال
 رزم با دیو است آدم را جمال!
 خویش را بر اهرمن باید زدن
 تو همه تیغ آن همه سنگ فسن!¹⁹

The man who is fully aware of himself
 Creates advantage out of loss.
 To sup with the Devil brings disaster to a man,
 to wrestle with the Devil brings him glory.
 One must strike oneself against Ahriman;
 You are a sword, he is the whetstone.
 (Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 117)

True, however, to tradition, Iqbal identifies *Iblis* with whatever evil he sees in the world. *Iblis* is loveless and leads to the betrayal and destruction of humankind. One of the traditional symbols for *Iblis* is the serpent, and this symbol is suited to Iqbal's identification of *Iblis* with (negative) reason, for when attacked, a serpent defends itself with its head.²⁰

Iblis also comes to stand for what Iqbal perceived to be Western values and attitudes e.g., materialistic creeds and indifference to the individual's higher self. In one poem, Iqbal says to God about Western politics:

بنایا ایک ہی ابلیس آگ سے تو نے
 بنائے خاک سے اس نے دو صد ہزار ابلیس!²¹

You made just one Satan from the fire,
 It has made two hundred thousand Satans from the dust

Iqbal regards most European politicians as devils in disguise. Furthermore, they are not creatures of fire but merely devils of the dust incapable of anything but scheming and base

19. *Javid Namah*, p. 186.

20. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 216.

21. *Zarb-e-Kalim*, Lahore, 1949, p. 144.

maneuvering. The politician - *Iblis* of “*Iblis ka farman apnay siyasi farzandon kay nam,*”²² and “*Iblis ki majlis-e-shura*”²³ has no element of the grandeur possessed by the proud worshipper of God. He is repulsive even as Milton’s Satan is repulsive when he is shown gloating over his triumph in Book X of *Paradise Lost*. For Iqbal, the devils of modern civilization are far more unsatisfactory than *Iblis* who had been in the company of God for so long. He says,

گنہ ہم شود بے لذت و سرد
اگر ابلیس تو خاکی نہاد است
مشو نخچیر ابلیسان ایس عصر
خساں را غمزہ شان سازگار است
اصیلاں را ہماں ابلیس خوشتن
کر یزداں دیدہ و کامل عیار است²⁴

Sin itself becomes cold and unsatisfactory
As soon as your Satan is formed only of dust.
Do not become game for the devils of this time
Since their glance is directed only towards the inferior ones.
For those who are noble that Satan is better
Who has seen God and has a perfect standards!

Iqbal also shows *Iblis* as an advocate of the life-stultifying art and mysticism to which he was so bitterly opposed. In the confrontation of Zoroaster and Ahriman in *Javid Nama*, *Iblis* “defends the pure spirituality of mysticism and self-isolated asceticism against the prophetic activity which manifests itself in the community.”²⁵ *Iblis* urges his counsellors to preach that which weakens the life-urge in human beings and makes them strangers to the inner turmoil of life.

ہے وہی شعر و تصوف اس کے حق میں خوب تر
جو چھپا دے اس کی آنکھوں سے تماشائے حیات²⁶

That poetry and mysticism is best for it (humanity)
which obscures its vision of the theatre of life.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

23. Iqbal, M., *Armaghan-e-Hijaz*, Lahore, 1948, pp. 213-228.

24. *Ibid*, p. 182.

25. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 217.

26. *Armaghan-e-Hijaz*, p. 228.

But, as Schimmel has observed, “whether it is as a seducer to useless dreams, fruitless mystical seclusion and in social flight from the world, or as a protector and defender of a civilization which is devoid of divine love, Satan is, in all these aspects, always a necessary partner of the Perfect Man.”²⁷ That is why Iqbal says

م زى اندر جہانے کور ذوقے
کہ یزدان دارد و شیطان ندارد²⁸

Do not live in such an ill-devised world
where there is a God but no Satan.

CREATURE OF FIRE VERSUS CREATURE OF CLAY

Iblis is nothing if not proud. He does not doubt for an instant that he is superior to Adam. He is a creature of fire while Adam is made of dust. *Iblis* says to God justifying his disobedience

نوری نادان نیم، سجدہ بآدم برم!
او بہ نہاد است خاک، من بہ نژاد آدم!²⁹

I am no creature of mere light
That I should bow to man.
He is a base-born thing of dust,
And I am of fire born.

(Translation by Husain, H., *A Message from the East*, p. 42)

Iqbal's Adam is not one to let himself get the worst of an argument - not even when his adversary is the ingenious *Iblis*, and so, in his turn, he retorts

جہاں تا از عدم بیروں کشیدند
ضمیرش سرد و بے ہنگامہ دیدند
بغیر از جان ما سوزے کجا بود
ترا از آتش ما آفریدند³⁰

27. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 219.

28. *Payam-e-Mashriq*, p. 154.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

30. *Armaghan-e-Hijaz*, p. 177.

When they brought forth the world from non-existence,
They saw that its heart was cold and lifeless.
Where was fire save in my heart?
They created you out of my fire!

Schimmel observes that the contrast between fire and clay “leads back to early Islamic discussions about the preferability of earth (of which the *Ka’ba* is made) to fire (the element brought into the discussion by admirers of Persian fire-worship): Satan becomes, thus, the inventor of the misleading comparison of incomparable objects.”³¹

IBLIS AND PREDESTINATION

In a poem called “*Taqdir*”³² (which Iqbal acknowledges was inspired by Ibn ‘Arabi)³³ we see another *Iblis* - not the proud lover and adversary of God for whom one can feel some admiration but a moral coward who is trying to attribute his wilful act of disobedience to God’s will. Mystics and theologians have sometimes differentiated between God’s Command and God’s Will.³⁴ According to Hallaj, “the command is eternal whereas the will and foreknowledge of God concerning it, whether it shall be obeyed or disobeyed, is created, and therefore subordinate. God wills both good and evil, but commands only good.”³⁵ *Iblis*, though he disobeyed the Word of God, nonetheless obeyed God’s inner Command which forbids prostration before any but God.

The poem begins with *Iblis* seeking to justify his disobedience by the plea that he knew it to be predestined

اے خدائے کن فکاں مجھ کو نہ تھا آدم سے بیڑ
آہ! وہ زندانی نزدیک و دور و دیر و زود
حرف اشکبار، تیرے سامنے ممکن نہ تھا
ہاں مگر تیری مشیت میں نہ تھا میرا سجود!³⁶

31. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 213.

32. *Zarb-e-Kalim*, pp. 42-43.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 211.

35. Nicholson, R. A., *The Idea of Personality, in Sufism*, Cambridge, 1923, p. 33.

36. *Zarb-e-Kalim*, pp. 42-43.

Oh God, Creator! I did not hate your Adam,
That captive of Far-and-Near and Swift-and-Slow;
And what presumption could refuse to You
Obedience? If I would not kneel to him,
The cause was Your own fore-ordaining will.
(Translation by Kiernan, V. G., *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 64)

God asks *Iblis*

کب کھلا تجھ پر راز؟ افکار سے پہلے کہ بعد³⁷

When did that mystery dawn on you? before,
Or after your sedition ?
(Translation by Kiernan, V. G., *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 64)

and *Iblis* answers

بعد! اے تیری تجلی سے کمالات وجود!³⁸

After, oh brightness
Whence all the glory of all being flows
(Translation by Kiernan, V. G., *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 64)

By saying that it was *after* his act of disobedience that he felt it was predestined, *Iblis* betrays himself for he is admitting indirectly that when he refused the prostration he felt free to choose. God then turns to the angels and says

پستی فطرت نے سکھلائی ہے یہ جیت اسے
کہتا ہے تیری مٹیت میں نہ تھا میرا سجود
دے رہا ہے اپنی آزادی کو مجبوری کا نام
ظالم اپنے شعلہ سوزاں کو خود کہتا ہے دود؟³⁹

37. *Ibid.*, p 43.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

See what a groveling nature taught him this
 Fine theorem! His not kneeling, he pretends,
 Belonged to My fore-ordinance; gives his freedom
 Necessity's base title; - wretch; his own
 Consuming fire he calls a wreath of smoke.
 (Translation by Kiernan, V. G., *Poems from Iqbal*, p. 64)

“It is Satanic short-sightedness,” observes Schimmel, “which ascribes any decision which leads to disaster to divine predestination and unchangeable laws.”⁴⁰ This poem also indicates that the *Iblis* whom Iqbal admires is not the one who denies the freedom of his will. Iqbal's interpretation of *Iblis* as a lover of God is based on the assumption that *Iblis* was not predestined to disobey but that his disobedience was a wilful act.

Iqbal also mentions *Iblis* in another context of predestination and freewill. It was through Satan's seduction of Adam that human beings acquired free-will. To Adam, Satan said

بیچ نیاہد ز تو غیر سجد نیاز
 خیز چو سرو بلند، اے بعمل نرم گام
 زشت و نکو زاده وہم خداوند تست
 لذت کردار گیر، گام بنہ جوئے کام⁴¹

O you are fit for nothing but
 Abject obeisance like a slave,
 Like a tall cypress stand erect,
 O you which do not act but crave.
 Good and evil, virtue and sin,
 Are myths created by your Lord.
 Come, taste the joy of action and
 Go forth to seek your due reward.
 (Translation by Hussain, H., *A Message from the East*, p. 44)

In *Javid Nama*, *Iblis* shown as a sad old man, speaks to the sons of Adam in words touched with pathos:

40. Schimmel, A. M., “The Figure of Satan in the Works of Muhammad Iqbal”.

41. *Payam-e-Mashriq*, pp. 98-99.

شعله با از کشتت زار من دمید
او ز محبوری به مختاری رسید
ز شتئی خود را نمودم آشکار
با تو دادم ذوق ترک و اختیار⁴²

Flames sprang forth from my sown field;
Man out of predestination achieved free-will.
I displayed my own hideousness
and have given you the joy of learning or choosing,
(Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 104)

IBLIS AS A UNITARIAN

According to Hallaj, “*Iblis* is God’s lover and one of the two true Unitarians in the world, the other one being Muhammad.⁴³ As a strict believer in God’s Unity, he refused to prostrate himself before Adam saying, ‘Has somebody else taken away the honour of the prostration from my heart so that I should prostrate before Adam?’⁴⁴ Iqbal seems to be sympathetic towards this view and the words of Hallaj in *Javid Nama* seem to speak also for him:

عاشقی در نـار او و اسـوختن
سوختن بـه نـار او نـا سوختن!
زانکه او در عشق و خدمت اقدم است
آدم از اسرار او نا محرم است!
چاک کن پیراین تقلید را
تا بیاموزی از و توحید را⁴⁵

Love is to burn in his fire;
Without his fire, burning is not burning
Because he is more ardent in love and service,
Adam is not privy to his secrets.
Tear off the skirt of blind conformity
That you may learn God’s Unity from him.
(Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 101)

42. *Javid Namah*, p. 159.

43. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 210.

44. Baqli, R. quoted in *Ibid*.

SATAN IN THE POETRY OF MILTON AND IQBAL

Both Milton and Iqbal had a fiery, restless spirit and an intense religious consciousness. With all their individual differences the works of the two poets convey an impression of power. It is hardly possible to read their poetry without realizing the temperamental affinity between them. It is interesting to know that Iqbal had deep admiration for Milton, and in his youth wanted to write an epic similar to *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁶

A number of writers have pointed out the similarity between Satan and *Iblis*. This statement needs a qualification (or a clarification) at the very outset. Milton's Satan is not a uniform character. The Satan of the first two books of *Paradise Lost* is quite different from the Satan of the rest of the poem.⁴⁷ The reason most commonly given for this is that Milton was a man divided against himself, "a Promethean, a renaissance humanist in the toils of a myth of quite contrary import."⁴⁸ His explicit purpose was "to justify the ways of God to man" but the Satan he created, the Satan of Books I and II, the leader of the fallen angels, became such a formidable obstacle for him, that he had to "transform" him from indomitable rebel who could say in the face of eternal damnation:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable will:
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
That Glory never shall His wrath or might
Extort from me⁴⁹

to a wailing creature who could gaze tearfully at the sun, and say:

O then at least relent: is there no place
Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left:⁵⁰

Iqbal's *Iblis* is also not a uniform character in the sense that the *Iblis* portrayed in various poems is not the same figure. Since Iqbal did not undertake to write a long poem in which *Iblis* appears as one of the chief characters, he was not obliged to be consistent in his treatment of *Iblis*. So we see different aspects of *Iblis*, sometimes a totally new *Iblis*, emerging in different

46. Iqbal's Letter quoted by Vahid, S. A., *Iqbal : His Art and Thought*, London, 1959, p. 7.

47. This opinion is not universally accepted, but it finds support in a number of writers and seems to me to be valid.

48. Willey, B., *The Seventeenth Century Background*, London, 1934, p. 255.

49. Milton, J. "Paradise Lost" (Book I) p. 81.

poems. Therefore, when it is said that Satan resembles *Iblis*, it must be made clear that the Satan of the first two books of *Paradise Lost* resembles, in the main, the *Iblis* of “*Taskhir-e-Fitrat*”,⁵¹ “*Jibril-o-Iblis*” and *Javid Nama*, and that there is some resemblance between the degenerate Satan of the later books of *Paradise Lost* and the politics-afflicted *Iblis* shown in “*Iblis ka farman apnay siyasi farzandon kay nam*” and “*Iblis ki majlis-e-shura*.”⁵²

The first point of similarity between the “heroic” Satan and *Iblis* is the splendour of their reckless courage. They are “sinners” but one cannot help admiring their unbroken spirit, their tenacity of purpose in the face of insuperable odds. Such qualities as they have would make a hero out of a rebel. A second point of similarity between them is that they are completely unrepentant. Even if they could, they would not retrace their steps.⁵³

There are differences too, between them, and these are not often remarked upon. Satan is an adversary of God and hates God, *Iblis* is not an enemy of God and loves God Both Satan and *Iblis* are painted in brilliant colours but while those of the former glitter, those of the latter glow. We admire Satan but our heart does not go out to him as it does to *Iblis*. Satan is proud and belligerent, *Iblis* is proud and heart-broken. In the last analysis, despite all their similarities Satan and *Iblis* are very different - as different from each other as hate is from love. It is possible to build up a case for Satan as a tragic hero, but there is no doubt at all, Iqbal’s *Iblis* - the *Iblis* of *Bal-e-Jibril* and *Javid Nama* - is a tragic hero.⁵⁴

IBLIS AS A TRAGIC HERO

According to Aristotle a tragic hero is an outstanding character whose fortunes suffer a sudden reverse and who is, in some measure, responsible for his downfall. Were he not responsible, were his calamity just the working out of an unrelenting Fate, his situation though it would call for pity would bring about no catharsis. It would not, in fact, be tragic, at all, but simply unfortunate. To say of *Iblis* that “he is fulfilling his allotted role in the scheme of things”⁵⁵ and that “the tragedy of Satan’s life is that he cannot change his destiny, his inner helplessness and sheer inability to be other than he is,”⁵⁶ is surely to misunderstand the *Iblis* nearest to Iqbal’s heart. Although in most tragedies one is aware of a sense of predestination, of ominous agencies working against a character seeking to destroy him, yet - as has been said already - there is always something in the tragic characters themselves which brings about their

51. Iqbal, M., *Payam-e-Mashriq*, pp. 97-101.

52. *Bal-e-Jibril*, p. 148.

53. Iqbal, M., *Zarb-e-Kalim*, p. 148.

54. *Armaghan-e-Hijaz*, pp. 213-228.

55. Vahid, S. A., *Iqbal : His Art and Thought*, p. 224.

56. *Ibid.*

tragedy. *Iblis* is a free agent otherwise he would not have refused to obey God. The role he is fulfilling in the scheme of things is not an “allotted” one - it is a role he chose for himself and therein lies his tragedy - not in that he hates God and must serve God’s ends, but that he loves God and has chosen forever to displease God.

Iblis denies the charge of being an infidel. His words,

از وجود حق مرا منکر مگیر
 دیده بر باطن کشا ظاهر مگیر
 گر بگویم نیست، این از ابلهی است
 زانکه بدع از دید نتوان گفت نیست!⁵⁷

Do not take me for one who denies God’s existence;
 Open your eyes on my inner self, overlook my exterior.
 If I say, “He is not,” that would be foolishness,
 for when one has seen, one cannot say “He is not.”
 (Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 104)

wrung from the agony of his soul, are reminiscent of the tortured Mephistopheles who, when asked by Faustus if he was out of hell, answered sorrowfully⁵⁸

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.
 Thinkst thou that I, who saw the face of God
 And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
 Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
 In being deprived of everlasting bliss?⁵⁹

It was the “tragic flaw” in the character of *Iblis* which brought about the eternal separation between him and his beloved. The traditional motive for the disobedience of *Iblis* is pride, but due to the influence of Hallaj, Iqbal also gave to his *Iblis* the passion and tenderness of a lover. Milton’s Satan would not return to Heaven because

Farthest from Him is best

57. *Javid Namah*, p. 158.

58. Marlowe, C., *Doctor Faustus* (Act I, scene III), (Edited by W. W. Gregh, Oxford, 1961. p. 10.

59. Milton, J., “Paradise Lost” (Book 1), p. 84.

Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
Above His equals.

Iblis when asked by Gabriel about the possibility of his return

کیا نہیں ممکن کہ تیرا چاک دامن ہو رفو؟⁶⁰

Is it not possible that the rent in your robe be mended?

answers:

آہ! اے جبریل تو واقف نہیں اس راز سے
کر کیا سر مست مجھ کو ٹوٹ کر میرا سبوا!
اب یہاں میری گذر ممکن نہیں ممکن نہیں
کس قدر خاموش ہے یہ عالم بے کاج و کو!
جس کی نومیدی سے ہو سوز درون کائنات
اس کے حق میں تقنطوا اچھا ہے یا لاتقنطو؟⁶¹

Ah, Gabriel; you do not know this mystery –
by breaking, my glass made me intoxicated!
Now it is impossible that I should dwell here again -
how silent is this realm without palaces or lanes!
Whose despair is the inner fire of creation?
Is not for him, “Despair” better than “Don’t despair”
(of God’s Grace)? (Reference to Surah *Al-Zumar* : 39:53)

Thus, so far from setting out as Satan does to pervert God’s purpose, *Iblis* is actually conscious of being God’s instrument. He does not seek for God’s Grace because if he were to do so, the world which God made - the world of human beings - would come to a standstill. Schimmel observes that in presenting this viewpoint Iqbal has made “one of the most original contributions to the problem of Satan’s destiny.”⁶²

60. *Bal-e-Jibril*, p. 192.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

62. Schimmel, A. M., *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 212.

The *Iblis* portrayed in *Javid Nama* is sad and old - like the Satan of Nietzsche. His heart is heavy with the burden of his sins - sins not against God who “sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven,”⁶³ but against his Beloved. He begs human beings before whom he would not bow, not to sin any more, not to make his scroll any blacker.

تو نجاتے دہ مرا از نار من
واکن اے آدم گرہ از کار من!
اے کہ انر بند من افتادہ
رخصت عصیان بشیطان دادہ⁶⁴

Deliver me now from my fire;
Resolve, O man, the knot of my toil,
You who have fallen into my noose
And given to Satan the leave to disobey,
Live in the world with true manly zeal,
as you pity me, live a stranger to me
Proudly disregarding my sting and my honey,
So that my scroll may not become blacker still.
(Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 104)

Although he suffers endlessly, yet *Iblis* does not wish to return to the presence of God. It is a part of the character of a tragic hero that having brought about his end he accepts it without flinching. When the poet asks *Iblis* to give up “this cult of separation,”⁶⁵ the latter answers:

گفت "ساز زندگی" سوز فراق
اے خوشا سر مستی روز فراق!
بر لبم از وصل می ناید سخن
وصل اگر خواهم نہ او مانہ نہ من⁶⁶

He said, “The fire of separation is the stuff of life;
How sweet the intoxication of the day of separation.

63. Milton, J., “Paradise Lost” (Book I) p. 81.

64. *Javid Namah*, p. 159.

65. Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 104.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

The very name of union comes not to my lips;
If I seek union, neither He remains nor I.”
(Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 104)

These lines also bear the implication that Love does not mean union or the annihilation of identity. Thus in upholding the belief in separation, *Iblis* becomes a preserver of the principle of individuality.

“*The Lament of Iblis*” in *Javid Nama* is part of the most profound poetry Iqbal ever wrote. He shows a strange spectacle *Iblis* praying to God - not for relief from pain or remission of his sins, but for a worthy opponent! In lieu of all his past worships of God, *Iblis* asks for a man who dares to resist him. He says:

صيد خود صیاد را گوید بگیر
الامان از بنده فرمان پذیر!
از چنیں صید لے مرا آزاد کن
طاعت دیروزه من یاد کن
قطرت او خام و عزم او ضعیف
تاب یک ضربم نیارد ایس حریف
بنده صاحب نظر باید مرا
یک حریف پخته تر بایدد مرا!⁶⁷

The prey says to the huntsman, “seize me”:
save me from the all-too obedient servant!
Set me free from such quarry:
remember my obedience of yesterday.
His nature is raw, his resolution weak,
this opponent cannot withstand one blow from me.
I need a servant of God possessed of vision,
I need a riper adversary!
(Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 105)

Iblis is weary of all his easy triumphs. Tormented as he is, by his separation from God, he has not even the satisfaction of measuring his strength against a person of God. *Iblis* would rather meet his death at the hands of a man of valour than live for a millennium surrounded by

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

weaklings and cowards;

آنچنان تنگ از فتوحات آمدم
پیش تو بهر مکافات آمدم
منکر خود از تو می خواهم بده
سوئے آن مرد خدا را هم بده
بنده باید که پیچید گردنم
لرزه انداز و نگاهش در تنم
اے خدا یک زنده مرد حق پرست
لذتے شاید کہ یابم در شکست!⁶⁸

I have become saddened by all my triumphs
that now I come to you for recompense;
I seek from You one who dares to deny me –
Guide me to such a man of God.
I need a man who will twist my neck,
whose glance will set my body quivering.
Grant me, O God, one living man of faith;
haply I shall know delight at last in defeat.
(Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 105)

In this cry of despair one can see the world of tragedy, the world which lies beyond good and evil. F.A Bijlefeld writes, “I must admit that the passages about *Iblis* above all others Satan’s lament that he can hardly find a genuine opponent in the world, appealed to me more than a lot of enlightened quasi-Christian statements about the devil, and that these words will live in my spirit for a long, long time.”⁶⁹

In seeing *Iblis* as a complex character, a character torn between his pride and his love, a character who possessed all the lineaments of a tragic figure, Iqbal revealed one of his deepest poetic insights. This *Iblis* - for whom the poet confessed his heartfelt sympathy:

68. *Ibid.*, p, 161.

69. Bijlefeld, W, A. quoted by Schimmel. A. M., “The Figure of Satan in the Works of Muhammad Iqbal.”

جانم اندر تن ز سوز او تپید⁷⁰

My soul in my body quivered for his agony.
(Translation by Arberry, A. J., *Javid Namah*, p. 103)

is one of the greatest achievements of Iqbal's philosophic vision. This *Iblis* whose suffering brings catharsis is a much more profound and satisfying figure than the traditional Devil who leaves unexplained the greater part of the mystery of evil. It is true that Iqbal's presentation of the tragic *Iblis* is only very fragmentary, but even though it does not answer all the questions pertaining to good and evil, God and Satan, it does point to the close and complex relationship between concepts commonly held to be mutually exclusive.

70. *Javid Namah*, p. 158.

“*Iblis* in Iqbal's Philosophy,” in *Iqbal Review*, October 1984, Volume XXV, No. 3, October 1984, pp. 25-45. A segment of this article had been published under the title “Satan in the Poetry of Milton and Iqbal,” in *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, July 19, 1968