

Translation

***Gāyatrī-Mantra* and Iqbal**

Suhyle Umar*

آفتاب

(ترجمہ گایتری)

“*Devatā*. The word *devatā* means born of light in the Sanskrit language. It denotes a being made of light. This gives us to understand that the ancient Hindus regarded the *devatās* as created like all other creation and did not think of them as eternal beings. It meant for them, probably, the same that we denote by the word angel because angels, though having a luminous nature, are nevertheless created beings. Therefore, according to my lights, it would not be correct to accuse Hinduism guilty of polytheism.” (Iqbal)¹

Iqbal’s poetry is replete with examples of his grasp and application of wisdom from diverse spiritual traditions. One particularly striking example of his grasp of Advaita is given in his poem, *Nayā Shivāla* or “New Temple”. This is from the Urdu collection, *Bāng-i Darā*. He berates the Brahmin for worshipping idols, but then adds:²

*In each graven image you fancied God: I see
In each speck of dust of this land, divinity [trans. modified]*

This is a remarkable couplet for one sees here a mirror-image of the Hindu and the Muslim conception of God: what the Hindu sees through the idol is *khudā*, whereas what Iqbal the Muslim sees in each speck of dust is a *devatā*.³ So he is implicitly affirming the metaphysical validity of the Hindu conception of God, that is, seeing through the created form to the uncreated Essence, seeing the *devatā* as an icon, not as an idol, transparent to the universal Essence above and beyond all forms; but he universalises

* Formerly Director Iqbal Academy, Lahore

this perception, thus implicitly saying to the Brahmin: see God in and through all forms, without exception, rather than enclosing Him within one or other particular form.⁴ Thus, the aspect of divine immanence which justifies the Hindu conception of the *devatā* as a manifestation of divinity is coupled with a stress on the universality of this immanence; and it is this universality which opens up the dimension of divine immanence to its complementary pole, the dimension of divine transcendence: it is the one and only divine reality which is both immanent in all things and transcends all things. If immanence is restricted to some forms as opposed to others, then the dimension of transcendence is sacrificed: God's boundless reality is restricted within determinate relativities, and one commits the sin of *shirk*, polytheism, the worship of forms cut off from their divine source, forms which, thus, become idols.

The poem finishes with an affirmation of salvation for all in the new temple, and the terms he uses here are significant:⁵

*Power and Peace [shaktī and shāntī] shall blend in the
hymns the votary sings
For from love comes salvation [muktī] to all earth's living
things [trans. modified].*

Shaktī, shāntī and muktī: all are Hindu concepts deemed by the poet perfectly appropriate for the expression of the universal principles of divine power (for which he could have used *qudra* instead of *shaktī*) sacred peace (for which he could have used *sakīna* instead of *shāntī*) and salvation (*najāt* instead of *muktī*). The fact that he sees these terms as interchangeable shows clearly his implicit belief that the referents of these terms— those principles to which the words refer— are of universal scope; the names will differ from tradition to tradition, but the objects named are one and the same. The universal realities alluded to are objectively identical, it is human language— and with it, culture and even religion— which outwardly and formally differentiates those self-same spiritual realities.

Returning to the *Jāvīd-Nāma*, Iqbal had no problem about expressing divine wisdom through Jahān-Dost,⁶ that is, Vishwa-mitra (وشو امتر) author/revealer of the *Gayatri-mantra* in the *Rig Veda*, considered the holiest verse of the Vedas, second only to the mantra *Om*; and author of

the whole of the third *mandala* of the *Rig Veda* which includes the *Gayatri-mantra*.

آفتاب

(ترجمہ گایتری)

| | |
|---|--|
| شیرازہ بندِ دفتر کون و مکاں ہے تُو | اے آفتاب! رُوح و روانِ جہاں ہے تُو |
| ہے سبز تیرے دم سے چمن ہست و بود کا | باعث ہے تُو وجود و عدم کی نمود کا |
| ہر شے میں زندگی کا تقاضا تجھی سے ہے | قائم یہ عنصرِ وجود کا تماشا تجھی سے ہے |
| تیرا یہ سوز و ساز سراپا حیات ہے | ہر شے کو تیری جلوہ گری سے ثبات ہے |
| دل ہے، خرد ہے، روح رواں ہے، شعور ہے | وہ آفتاب جس سے زمانے میں نور ہے |
| چشمِ خرد کو اپنی تجلی سے نور دے | اے آفتاب! ہم کو ضیائے شعور دے |
| یزدانِ ساکنانِ نشیب و فراز تُو | ہے محفلِ وجود کا سماں طراز تُو |
| تیری نمودِ سلسلہ کوہسار میں | تیرا کمال ہستی ہر جاندار میں |
| زائیدگانِ نور کا ہے تاجدار تُو ⁷ | ہر چیز کی حیات کا پروردگار تُو |
| آزادِ قیدِ اول و آخر ضیا تری | نے ابتدا کوئی نہ کوئی انتہا تری |

ENDNOTES

- 1 Iqbal added this note in the margin of the poem آفتاب when it first appeared in the monthly magazine *Makhzan*, in 1902, introducing this ancient and famous supplication from the *Rig Veda* explaining the symbolism of light in the poem through its corresponding ideas in Sufism at the Qur'anic terminology.
- 2 *Poems from Iqbal*, tr. V.G. Kiernan (Karachi: Iqbal Academy/Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 18: New Altar [*Nayā Shivāla*].
- 3 Iqbal added note in the margin of the poem when it first appeared in the monthly magazine *Makhzan*, in 1902, explaining the expression "born of light".
- 4 This reminds us of Ibn al-'Arabī's way of interpreting the Qur'anic accusation of *kufir* in relation to Christians who say that 'truly God is Jesus, Son of Mary' (5:17). He points to the literal meaning of the word *kufir*, that is, 'covering up' or 'concealing', and writes that the Christians are called *kāfirs* in that they conceal God in the form of Jesus: the divine reality is 'covered over' by the human manifestation. He writes: 'The real error and unbelief in the full sense of the word is not in their saying "He is

God”, or “the son of Mary”, but in their having turned aside from God by enclosing [God within one particular human form].’ This is from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*; see R. W. J. Austin’s translation, *Bezels of Wisdom* (New York, Paulist Press, 1980), p. 177, which we have modified here.

5 *Poems from Iqbal*, op. cit., p.20.

6 *Jāvīd-Nāma*, op. cit., pp.40-43.

7 Iqbal added the following note in the margin of the poem when it first appeared in the monthly magazine *Makhzan*, in 1902, explaining the expression “born of light”.