

## Revisiting Iqbal's Jâvidnâma as a Shared Space of Pilgrimage

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### Abstract

The practice of pilgrimage has been deeply ingrained in human cultures across the global. It has been prevalent in the Semitic traditions in forms of rituals, remembrance and sanctification. The phenomenon of embarking on an introspective exploration is frequently observed within the realms of Sufi and Shia discourses. Likewise, In Book of Eternity, namely Jâvidnâma, Mohammed Iqbal (1877-1938) records his metaphysical journey, as he explores different celestial realms such as the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Ultimately, he surpasses the limitations of these celestial spheres and achieves a state of closeness to the divine being. Within the framework of Muslim pilgrimage tradition, spiritual stations (aflâk/maqâmât) are perceived as domains of shared inhabitations, wherein the journeyer ultimately encounters the intersection of yearning, the individual who yearns, and the desired entity. It is worth noting that the individuals Iqbal encountered during his expedition were not exclusively chosen from the Abrahamic lineage of prophets. Therefore, approaching it from an inclusive perspective would facilitate the cultivation of a collective understanding of shared spaces in his pilgrimage. The objective of this paper is to revisit Iqbal's Jâvidnâma, using the provided framework.

**Keywords:** Mohammed Iqbal, Book for Eternity, Javidnama, pilgrimage, theology of spaces.

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## Introduction

In the context of Muslim tradition, spiritual stations are regarded as spaces of mutual habitation, wherein the traveler ultimately experiences the convergence of longing, the one who longs (*talib*), and the object of longing (*matlub*). The poet-philosopher, Mohammed Iqbal undergoes through such a transformative journey and penned it in an epic poem. This paper seeks to analyze Iqbâl's account of such a pilgrimage as recorded in his magnum opus *Javidnâme* — an expression of mutually inhabitable space of pilgrimage. In this remarkable Persian work, Iqbal, records his metaphysical journey, as he embarks on it. He explores seven celestial realms<sup>1</sup> such as the Moon where an Indian ascetic, known to the people of India as *Jahan-Dost* lives as a hermit in one of the caves, On the sphere of Mercury he has visitations of the Spirits of Jamal al-Din Afghani and Sa'id Halim Pasha. At the third sphere poet-philosopher encounters the assembly of the gods of antiquity, Likewise the Sudanese Dervish appears at the Venus. Mars, At Jupiter, however Iqbal relates to the noble spirits of Mansur al-Hallaj, (d. 922), Qurrat al-'Ayn Tahira (d. 1852), and Mirza Ghalib (d. 1869), three of them disdained to dwell in Paradise and preferred to wander forever. At the sphere of Saturn, he witnesses the evil spirits which have betrayed the nation and have been rejected by Hell. It is worth noting that the prophets, poets, and philosophers encountered during this expedition were not exclusively from the Abrahamic lineage of prophethood. Just before the ascension continues to the garden of paradise Iqbal sets the scene for the station of the German philosopher Nietzsche, beyond the spherical realms. *Javidnâme* not only brings these personalities together in poetic dialogues but the poem itself could be seen as a shared space of pilgrimage. Ultimately, he surpasses the limitations of these celestial spheres and achieves a state of closeness to the divine presence.

### 1. The Book for Eternity: *Javidnâme*

The epic poem is an expression of Iqbal's bewilderment in quest to seek the ultimate wisdom. The couplets are crafted in *Masnavi* genre of poetry. It was composed during the period spanning from 1927 to 1931, a time when Muslims across various regions were either under the dominion of imperial powers or engaged in efforts to secure independence from colonial oppression (Niyaz 1983, ix). The structure and content of the text bear resemblances to the *Mirâjnâme* tradition,<sup>2</sup> the widely acclaimed narrative of the Prophet Mohammed's celestial ascension. Likewise, similarities could be found in other mystic works such as of Ibn 'Arabî, 'Aṭṭâr of Nishapur, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, may also be regarded as a notably parallel model. Schimmel referred to *Jâvidnâme* (1932) as the final epic within the liter-

ary lineage of *Mirâjnâma* (Schimmel 1954, 149). As it asserts a more intricate perspective on the “objectification of experience” (Niyaz 1983, x) and is full of condensed underlying thoughts and visions.

The book begins with hymns and prayers while Iqbal experiences his spiritual mentor Rumi's presence. Iqbal asks him how is it that human spirit can reach to the other realms, crossing heavens and earth. The *Zarvan* an angelic spirit as a representation of time-space appears and takes Iqbal on a quasi-dream like journey.

You who say that the body is the soul's vehicle,  
 Consider the soul's secret, tangle not with the body.  
 It is not a vehicle; it is a state of the soul;  
 To call it its vehicle is a confusion of terms.  
 What is the soul? Rapture, joy, burning and anguish,  
 Delight in mastering the revolving sphere.  
 What is the body? Habit of colour and scent,  
 Habit of dwelling in the world's dimensions.  
 Your near and far spring out of the senses  
 What is Ascension? A revolution in sense,  
 A revolution in sense born of rapture and yearning  
 (Iqbal 1966, 33)

The concepts covered in this pilgrimage pertain to the transformation of an individual into a new and improved human being, characterized by a state of definitive regeneration. This state grants the individual relative perfection and the capacity to effectively address earthly challenges. In this instance, the poet assumes the epithet of '*zinda rud*', which translates to 'living stream', delves into the inquiry surrounding the predicaments of evil, ugliness, and death. The poet-philosopher proceeds to provide a concise overview of the current state of humanity and delves into an exploration of its foreseeable future. In its English translation of the poem, Niyaz articulates his observations by stating that *Jâvidnâma* depicts the spiritual turmoil experienced by a devout believer, thus transforming it into a poetic testament of humanity's spiritual crisis within the context of modern history (Niyaz 1983, xi). It is highly condensed and abbreviated poetic artefact where poet exercise his creative independence alongside his guide on this cosmic pilgrim. Iqbal demonstrates an aesthetic enactment of the inversion of Sufi terms and concepts through the reversal of various images commonly found in Sufi poetry.

## 2. Spherical Realms as Shared Spaces

Iqbal depicts these spherical realms as stages of specific investigations throughout his spiritual ascent. While exploring these stations, he remembers them as celestial bodies like the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The text discusses

Iqbal's journey to a sacred sanctuary and his connection to his inspiration, as well as his spiritual guide Jalâluddin Rumi (1207-1273). It is noteworthy that the individuals Iqbal encountered during on his journey were not primarily selected from the Abrahamic lineage of prophets. At these places, he comes across depictions of wise and holy individuals, female figures, and engages in conversations with them. It is crucial to comprehend the correlation between pilgrims, stations, and dialogue.

Iqbal's conceptualized voyage across the cosmos serves as a manifestation of his personal identity and simultaneously represents his pursuit thereof. Furthermore, it can be interpreted as the embodiment of the individual's unique concept of selfhood, which incorporates elements of Sufi beliefs (Majeed 2009, 27). The aesthetic quality of *khudi* is also apparent in the way Iqbal's persona as a poet serves as a symbol for that sense of self. Within the confines of this poetic composition, the poet's relentless pursuit of personal identity (Majeed 2009, 16) is intricately intertwined with the expression and exploration of one's own sense of self.

The text boldly presents the concept of the ontological equality between the human self and God, exemplified in the 'Prelude in Heaven' passage. This section concludes with the angels singing about the eventual harmonious refinement of mankind, symbolized by a mere handful of earth.

In light of the overarching narrative of selfhood, it is unsurprising that Iqbal expresses appreciation for the distinctiveness of individual selfhood (*khudi*) through various means, rather than perceiving it as a hindrance to spiritual connection with God. By engaging in this act, he appropriates figure of Rumi to accompany his pilgrim. As previously stated, the poem commences by making a reference to the initial verse of Rumi's *Masnavi*, which reads:

Man, in this world of seven hues / Lute-like is ever afire with lamentation (Iqbal 1966, 21)

Iqbal utilized poetry to articulate his most profound thoughts. Iqbal's philosophical opus and the compilation of lectures were released two years earlier (1930) under the title, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Yet, he sorts of expressed the condensed form of dialogue as every character encountered in the celestial realms shares the central principle of Iqbal's metaphysical system: the growth of the individual's Ego (*khudi*). Furthermore, the elevation of the poet is the ultimate culmination of the Ideal Human, as when an individual comprehends the profound meaning and immense potential of their own being, they can surpass the limitations of time and space, perhaps this is the recurring theme of the poem. According to Rumi's teachings to his disciple Iqbal, time and space are merely modes of the human spirit. One might observe in the poet's capacity to redefine his perception of spatial and temporal dimensions is apparent in this poem, as is his imaginative exploration of celestial realms.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, Iqbal surpasses the limitations of these celestial spheres and achieves a state of closeness to the divine being. In this sense one could see a strong emphasis of spiritual growth and clarity once he moves from one sphere to the other. It begins with prayers to God and initiates a Prelude in Heaven and earth. The poet's first encounter happens on the lunar heaven, encountering the "Indian sage, *Sarosh* and the prophets.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the poet proceeds to Mercury, where Jamal ad-din al-Afghani (d. 1897) and Sa'id Halim Pasha (d.1921) reside. The poet then ventures into the realm of Venus, which is inhabited by ancient deities and notable figures such as Pharaoh and Lord Kitchener. Continuing the journey, the poet reaches the Martian heaven, followed by the heaven of Jupiter, where conversations take place with the esteemed mystic al-Hallaj.

Lastly, the poet arrives at the Saturnian heaven, a dark and dull dwelling associated with betrayers. Subsequently, Iqbal traverses an enigmatic realm in which German philosopher Nietzsche resides, ultimately arriving at Paradise and encountering its devoted inhabitants. To elaborate on the mystic experience of Ego, and the difference between exoteric and esoteric perceptions, Iqbal put in Hallaj's mouth:

The free man who knows good and evil,  
His spirit cannot be contained in Paradise.  
The mullah's Paradise is wine and houris and page boys,  
The Paradise of free men is eternal voyaging;  
The mullah's Paradise is eating and sleeping and singing,  
The lover's Paradise is the contemplation of Being.  
(Iqbal 1966, 93)

### 3. Relational Cosmology in *Javidname*

In the poetic realm, the poet fervently articulates his profound emotions through the lamentation of celestial entities such as the heavens, earth, songs of stars, and angels, thereby engaging in a profound dialogue with the human self. Expressions of this nature are widely observed in the poetry of Iqbal. Moreover, the passions depicted in *Jâvidnâma* can be interpreted as manifestations of a searching individual. The individual in question is a traveler who is continuously undergoing a process of transformation, which occurs through the medium of dialogue. This can be seen as an expression of self-realization experienced by a pilgrim.

Iqbal, as a pilgrim, traverses the cosmos and admires its magnificence. He transcends the constraints of space and time to achieve the true essence of his individuality (*khudi*). Bausani elucidates the notion of Iqbalian Time, emphasizing that it is the most intimate and self-aware condition of selfhood, informed by Einstein's and Bergson's understanding of time (Bausani 1954, 160). However, it cannot be measured on a quantitative scale, as it lacks numerical attributes and is completely

qualitative. He continues; 'Time, in its pure form as a duration independent of any spatial elements, does not consist of reversible moments, contrary to what was originally believed when Time was considered a dimension of space'.

On the contrary the concept of deterministic cosmology, which incorporates fatalism, postulates a universe that is confined and whose future is predetermined. Iqbal, as a pilgrim perceives things in space and time as various impressions of the inner self. This reminds oneself of Bergson's cosmology positing a temporal framework that is spatial, sequential, and capturing in nature, necessitating the use of intuition in order to perceive the universe as an unrestricted creative motion. (Hillier and Koshul 2015, 43). The notion that the universe is in a constant state of creation, as emphasised by both Iqbal and Bergson, propels human societies in search of novel opportunities. *Jâvidnâma* is a reflection of such creative motion that seeks to actualize its potentialities.

Zarvan, the spirit of time, explains to the pilgrim the ways of selfhood and the path to the realms of beyond:

I am life, I am death, I am resurrection,  
I am the Judgment, Hell, Heaven and Hourî,  
Man, and angel are both in bondage to me,  
This transitory world is my own child;  
I am every rose that you pluck from the branch,  
I am the matrix of everything that you see.  
This world is a prisoner in my talisman,  
Every moment it ages through my breath.  
But he who has in his heart 'I have a time with God',  
That doughty hero has broken my talisman;  
If you wish that I should not be in the midst,  
Recite from the depths of your soul "I have a time with God."  
(Iqbal 1966, 34)

Iqbal's profound contemplation of history as a phenomenon of the past, juxtaposed with its potential for shaping a prosperous future, is encapsulated in this poem. The journey Iqbal undertook could be exemplified as 'an organic and relational comprehension of reality and the world' (Mirsadri 2021, 114). This epic also conveys the concept of relational theology in the context of the relationship between God and human individuals. The emergence of such a theology would align with and be congruent with a relational cosmology.<sup>5</sup>

One crucial element of *Jâvidnâma* pertains to the ontological parity between God and the human self, with God being conceptualized in relation to individual selfhood (Majeed 2009, 16). The discourse and visual representations within God's speech serve to evoke in the poet a profound sense of Selfhood. Taking this into consideration, we can decipher the dual significance embedded within the concluding couplet of the poem:

The cup you possess is so delicate that it has caused the tavern to feel inadequate  
Grasp a glass, consume judiciously, and depart!<sup>6</sup>

Throughout his spiritual odyssey, Iqbal discovers a realm in which the agency and willpower of humanity are indissolubly intertwined. He embarks on this cosmic pilgrimage with an unsettled spirit, seeking to explore and interrogate the fundamental aspects of the human experience. The poet posits that the resolution of the crisis of the human condition could be achieved through the rediscovery of humanity's lost 'ego/selfhood'. Nevertheless, in this particular procedure, the assistance of God could be deemed as equally significant as the efforts made by humanity. Iqbal contemplates the distressing state of contemporary humankind who have forsaken the pursuit of their true identity, perceiving themselves devoid of aspiration or a desire for personal growth. The poem splendidly intertwines the awe-inspiring beauty (Jamal) and majestic power (Jalal) of the divine (Schimmel 1954, 151). In the presence of the ultimate reality i.e., God, Iqbal is addressed and responds with splendor and graciousness as follows:

The Pen of God such images fair and foul  
Wrote exactly as became each one of us.  
Noble sir, do you know what it is, to be?  
It is to take one's share of the beauty of God's Essence. (Iqbal 1966, 138)

#### 4. Conclusion

This literary work is crafted with mystic imagery, poetic diction, and multitudes of aphorisms. In addition to employing intricate terminology, Iqbal incorporates quotations from the Quran, thereby presenting a wide range of profound interpretations. It gives a way to go through a similar journey by reading and exploring its depth. The initiation of an intellectual inquiry involves the act of detaching oneself from worldly comforts and delving into the examination of one's ego and its various stages. The poet arrives at the conclusion that the selfhood can be seen as a manifestation of the Divine, and that the human self serves as a temporary intermediary between the realms of the physical and the spiritual. I propose an inclusive view of its topology wherein saints and politicians coexist within the same domain, and where prophets and poets reside harmoniously alongside one another. Such a shared space could be an invitation for mutual inhabitation and continuous process of dialogue regardless of faith, color, or race.

In Iqbalian cosmology, it is evident that the concept of journey has played a significant role in shaping the course of human history. According to Iqbal, the universe is in a constant state of evolution, necessitating the presence of an explorer who can adapt and actively engage in the ongoing process of becoming a pilgrim in history. In this paper, I posit that the formation of celestial realms in *Jâvidnâma*

could potentially foster a collective environment conducive to the exploration and analysis of comparative theologies and literature. These communal areas possess significant potential for fostering interreligious dialogue within the field of Iqbal Studies.

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## Notes

1. In the majority of instances, it is commonly believed that the soul traverses a series of seven stages or stations before ultimately reaching its ultimate destination within the realm of the divine. The mystics occasionally experienced within themselves the mystical ascent of the soul through various celestial realms.
2. The concept of prophetic ascension to heaven is depicted with several references and intricate imagery in the *Mirâjnâma*. In this mystical journey, Iqbal expresses a sense of awe and contemplation towards the divine or ultimate being. The sense of curiosity described here is a common phenomenon observed in ascetic cultures, where the primary focus lies not on achieving a specific goal or position, but rather on the significance of the companionship that accompanies the journey. As is highly probable, as evidenced by the portrayal of the character *Jahan dost*. Upon selecting this particular title, my initial level of awareness regarding the textual density and intricate layers of meaning within this epic poem was rather limited. The phrase "unrestful soul" (*jan e betab*) is an expression that signifies a profound sense of curiosity and a strong desire for certainty. The establishment of such a literary environment enables Iqbal to engage in contemplation regarding profound existential inquiries, which, in my opinion, remain relevant in present times.
3. According to Majeed, the concept of 'Islamicised geographies' and the 'poetics of cartography' were formulated as a response to the prevailing Western hegemony on a global scale (Majeed 2009,



98–99). These ideas aim to portray Islam as a dynamic force that liberates human perception from the constraints imposed by geographical boundaries.

4. Schimmel observed that seeking solace in caves has been a deliberate practice that holds significant prevalence within the Muslim Sufi tradition. (Schimmel 1994, 48–50) Perhaps a further speleological investigation should be conducted to thoroughly explore the caves in the context of their significance as a Muslim site of pilgrimage and contemplation.

5. In this context, according to Mirsadri (2021), a relational theology can be conceptualized as a triadic relationship involving God, the world, and the human ego. The manifestation of dialogue among three distinct egos mutually reinforces one another in pursuit of a specific telos.

6. In the realm of Sufi terminology, various types of cups are imbued with distinct connotations. In this couplet, Iqbal employs the term 'jam' to represent the heart of the Sufi, signifying its role as a vessel for divine manifestations and revelations of the Infinite Being. The tavern, in its diverse manifestations, serves as a symbolic representation of the core essence of the Sufi individual who has attained a state of spiritual union with the divine, as well as the dwelling place of esteemed Sufi masters.