

Milton and Iqbal: A Comparative Study of Their Thought and Art in *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab E Shikwa*

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Abstract

This paper endeavours to explore the points of similarities between the two poets, John Milton and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, with specific reference to their two famous poems, Paradise Lost and Shikwa Jawab-e-Shikwa. Using the comparative literature framework, it investigates how the two poets, belonging to different times, climes, religions, cultures, and writing in different languages, share a common ground in their thought and art. These include opening their poems with a prologue, justifying the ways of God to men, highlighting the social, political and moral issues, and suggesting the remedies. The paper also explores how Milton and Iqbal draw inspiration from their religious books, i.e., Quran and Bible. Moreover, the analysis also includes as to how the two works were received by the general public and literary critics. After a thoughtful analysis, it is revealed that several corresponding areas make the two works quite similar to each other. Finally, the study concludes that Iqbal's Shikwah and Jawab e Shikwa is like Milton's Paradise Lost attempt, though in a different context.

Keywords: John Milton, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Paradise Lost*, *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa*

1. Introduction

It rarely happens in literary history that two renowned poets, belonging to different times and climes, religions and cultures, and writing in different languages, show as many points of similarities in their ideas, thoughts, and poetic craft as Iqbal and Milton. They both started their poetic career at an early age and became the most accomplished poets at a young age. Milton wrote his first poem, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" at nineteen. However, the chief reason for his popularity is his excellent book, *Paradise*

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Lost, written in twelve books. The epic sweep of his tale, written in a grand style, follows the tradition of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It unfolds the story of Satan's defiance against God and the noncompliance and fall of Adam and Eve, led astray by Satan's lies.

Iqbal became prominent as a poet in the subcontinent through the revolutionary spirit that he displayed in his poems. Poetry was possibly his best talent which he used as a vehicle for his lofty thoughts. Out of various themes that constitute his poetry, *khudi* or self-consciousness turns out to be a frequently repeated, distinguishable Iqbalian theme. However, his two poems, *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* that he wrote after his return from Europe, were aimed to rekindle the dead spirit in the Indian-Muslims. It describes the role of Muslims in introducing Allah's Almighty to the rest of the world. Moreover, it highlights their contributions in lightening the dark pages of history when people did not know God, but instead of all that, God's bounties are reserved for non-Muslims. *Jawab-e-Shikwa* is not only a forceful reply to the complaint, but it urges the Muslims to return to the ways of their ancestors.

Milton and Iqbal have similarities both in their thought and art. The elements of Milton's puritan ideology are depicted in *Paradise Lost*. Similarly, *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* reflects Iqbal's voice, urging Muslims to emerge from their slumber and reclaim the heritage of early Islam. Milton's language contains words of Latin and Greek, whereas Iqbal also excessively uses Arabic and Persian expressions in his poems. Milton uses historical allusions to Hebrew and Greek mythology. Accordingly, Iqbal too uses references from Islamic history. Another significant point of similarity is the musical character which reverberates throughout their poems. Milton uses blank verse and iambic pentameter in his poem, but he adapts it to his purpose as stresses vary from three to eight. Moreover, the stresses change in degree and position. Iqbal wrote *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* in *musaddas*, a form that suits the purpose of *marsiya*. *Marsiya* was introduced in 18th-century Persian poetry to lament and retell Imam Hussain's story at *Karbala*. Milton describes the story of the fall of man according to his religion as he narrates

the story from the Bible. Iqbal also focuses on the present-day Muslims' downfall in *Shikwa*, and then he explains the reasons for their wretchedness in *Jawab e shikwa*. Moreover, seeking motivation from the Quran- the religious book of Muslims, he exquisitely uses his poetic expression to explicate how Allah would have replied. This research explores the thematic linkages between *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* using the framework of comparative literature.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What parallel areas do exist between the thought and art of Milton and Iqbal in *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa*?

2. Literature Review

Different writers have discussed the theme of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. According to Plavcan (2015, p. 29), Milton aimed to "justify the ways of God to men", which meant reconciling the paradox of human free will and divine free knowledge. Moreover, they argue that Milton also wanted to resolve the paradox of human suffering and God's goodness. Lamoreux (2017) also argues that according to the stated purpose of the poem, Milton tries to assert Eternal providence and justify the ways of God to men, but he fails to forcefully defend the claim that angels and humans are governed by freewill. Other writers have opposite views about Milton's justifying the ways of God to men. For example, Ramn (2017, p. 1) believes that God's compassionate language is a perfect complement to His simple proclamations and infinitely preferable to Satan's language of despair and lies. He opines that at the time of publication of *Paradise Lost* Milton, Milton was stricken by both public and private grief, involving the death of his wife and Oliver Cromwell. He states further that *Paradise Lost* is an endeavour to "make sense of the fallen world: to justify the ways of God to men and no doubt to Milton himself"

According to Maclean (2008), Milton's Satan has frequently stirred the Muslim writers as he has a close resemblance to *Iblis*, "the rebel angel and shape-shifter who regularly employs humankind to wage his war against God and Islam" (p.1). Referring to Iqbal's *Shikwa and Jawab- e- Shikwa*, he says that, he "is often credited with originating the idea of an independent state for Indian Muslims from *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*" (p.1) Similarly, a candid study of Western culture and ideology made Iqbal

conscious that the expansion of atheistic and materialistic trends in Europe had restrained the moral and religious beliefs of Christianity (Iqbal a great thinker, 2007, p. 9). However, he continues that Iqbal was dissatisfied with that culture, as he drew inspiration from the Quran and Sunnah. He further argues that a serious study of Islamic culture and civilization made Iqbal believe that the pantheistic attitude formed an inert mindset and arrested the spirit of inspired thinking and virile and dynamic way of living (p.10). Hassan, (n.d), states that Iqbal's *Iblis* symbolizes the evil in the world, particularly the Western values and attitudes that he perceived to be indifferent to the individual's higher self (p.21).

What Milton did in *Paradise Lost*, Iqbal also did similar in *Shikwa* and *Jawab e Shikwa*, within the context of the woes of Muslims and their complaints. According to Mehmood (2021, p. 1), "[t]he poet seems to have a clash between his internal belief and the social milieu around, creating a paradox that is the subject of *Shikwah*" (Mehmood, 2021, p.1). *Shikwa* (1909) exalts the legacy of Islam and its civilizing role in history, but it laments the fate of Muslims in modern times. It arises from the anguish of the poet's heart as a solid poetic plea to Allah on the pretext of the predicament of Muslims. In other words, in the first part, i.e., *Shikwa*, he played as a troubled and exasperated Muslim, complaining to Allah Almighty, and in the second part, he assumed as if Allah Almighty is Himself answering his protest. In this way, *Jawab-e-Shikwah* foregrounds Allah's response to the poet's voice.

Another notable common feature in the two poets is that the subject of man. Milton discusses the fall of man because of his disobedience, and the key point of most of Iqbal's writings is also the man. Lone (n.d.) states that in Iqbal's view, the man whose creation became the reason for the whole creations has become negligent of his being. The man who bears no similarity with any other creation on the surface of the earth has ruined himself by wrongdoings. The man to whom angels gave reverence has become a figure of evil. He could have ascended to the peak of the spiritual world, has downgraded himself to the lowermost ebbs of the evil hood. His "Self possesses freedom of will and is not a rigidly determined reality"

(Hassan, 1968, p. 268). In the same vein, Kirchner (2010, p.1) argues that Iqbal's *Shikwa* was a paradise lost attempt. He states that the poet personifies specific undying characteristics such as "life, beauty, love and nature". This allows him to see the creation from numerous perspectives, not only from God, Adam, Eve, and Satan.

Focusing on the language used by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, it appears that Milton took words from other languages (Kirchner, 2010). According to Rushworth (nd), Milton wrote mainly in the early modern English language of the Renaissance; however, several other languages reverberate throughout this epic, including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Dutch and Italian. Sun (2013) argues that the decision about the literal or figurative meaning causes the problems for the readers. It becomes difficult for the reader to decide with certainty when both literal and figurative meanings of a word or a sentence are available. This research work aims to explore the similarities between Milton and Iqbal in terms of how they have attempted to justify the ways of God to men in their poem: *Paradise lost* and *Shikwa and Jawab e Shikwa*.

Both Milton and Iqbal have found critics who commented on their works. The literary scholars have widely discussed Milton's theme of justifying the ways of God to men. According to Lamoreux (2017, p.5), Milton could not defend that angels and humans are governed by free will. Similarly, Said (2020, p.7) argues that Milton produced great poetry but confounded the theme because ... his purpose was at odds with his imagination. Other critics, such as Anuththara (2015), claims that Milton has successfully achieved his aim of justifying the ways of God to men. Another aspect of the poem is the character of Satan which the romantics critiqued. It means that he overvalued the character of Satan, particularly in Book-1 of *Paradise Lost*. Romantics appreciated unconquerable valour and love of freedom, and Satan abundantly displays these qualities in *Paradise Lost*. However, it is debatable whether Milton indeed sided with Satan. Suppose Satan has been an ordinary character, how he would have played his role as an adversary of God. Moreover, he would not have been able to deceive Adam and Eve.

Similarly, Iqbal was also criticized by some orthodox Muslims for being rude and insolent towards God while making his complaint, especially in the first

part (*Shikwa*). There was a heated debate among over the language that he used in some verses, particularly the word 'harjai' sparked criticism as Iqbal says:

کبھی ہم سے کبھی غیروں سے شناسائی ہے

بات کہنے کی نہیں تو بھی ہر جائی ہے

Must Thou also change Thy Will -Now

with us, now with our foe?

Thou art inconsistent too,

Though we should not speak out so (Ashraf, 2007, p.54)

This controversy continued since he wrote the poem in 1909, and the orthodox *Ulema* called him an 'infidel'. However, it ended with the second part (*Jawab e Shikwa*) in 1913. Iqbal's levels the criticism in *Jawab e Shikwa* by saying:

جو مسلمان تھا اللہ کا سودائی تھا

کبھی محبوب تمہارا یہی ہر جائی تھا

کسی یکجائی سے اب عہد غلامی کر لو

ملت احمد مسل کو مقامی کر لو

Each and every Muslim was

Madly fond of God's intent.

He was once your favourite one

Whom you say is inconstant.

Now be gone and pledge to serve.

Someone else who favours you.

Prophet's Ummah is world-wide;

You confine it to your view!

2.1. Theoretical framework

The study uses the framework of comparative literature. According to Bassnet (1993, p. 2) comparative literature involves studying texts across cultures and finding the patterns of connection in both time and space. She

cites Mathew Arnold, who states that no single piece of literature is adequately comprehensible without referring to other literature. Nayak (2017) holds that human nature is almost the same, and therefore, literary works and world classics of a different time and even different nations have close likenesses and affinities between them. The present study investigates the thematic similarities between Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Iqbal's *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa*.

3. Collection and Test of Data

The researchers have selected two poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa*, written by Milton and Iqbal, respectively. *Paradise Lost* is a long poem consisting of twelve books, but the key focus in this study is on Book-1.

4. Methodology

Based on the frame of comparative literature, this study is qualitative in nature. The research method compares *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* for different points of similarities, including the prologues, language, style, social/religious context in which the poems were written. It involves selecting the chunks from both the poems and analyzing how they show different points similar and how they sustain their distinctiveness as works of different poets.

5. Analysis

Milton opens *Paradise Lost*, Book-I with a prologue in which he tells the purpose of his poem. The subject is man's disobedience towards God, where Satan's temptation made both Adam and Eve eat the forbidden tree's fruit. As a result, they lost the life of Paradise and they were sent down to live on earth. Milton describes the story in the following lines.

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of *Eden* till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat
(*Paradise Lost*, Book-I)

Iqbal's *Shikwa* also opens with a prologue, as the first two stanzas of the poem explain why he has embarked upon the topic of complaining to Allah Almighty. For the sake of emphasis, he asks the question as to why he should observe silence over such a grave issue when he can express himself. He states that it is useless to reflect on past events and be unmindful of the future because it would worsen the situation. So, the first two stanzas give a good starting point before he comes to the actual topic of making a complaint. In the following lines, he shows his response to the wretched and worst circumstances of the Muslims in the present-day time.

کیوں زیاں کار بنوں سود فراموش رہوں
فکر فردانہ کروں مجھ غم دوش رہوں
نالے بلبل کے سنوں اور ہمہ تن گوش رہوں
میں بھی کوئی گل ہوں کہ خاموش رہوں؟ ہمنوا
جرات آموز مری تاب سخن ہے مجھ کو
شکوہ اللہ سے خاکم بدہن ہے مجھ کو

(Singh, 1981, p.1)

Why must I suffer loss, oblivious to gain,
Why think not upon the morrow, drowned in grief for yesterday?
Why must I attentive heed the nightingale's lament to pain
Fellow- bard, am I a rose, condemned to silence all the way?
No; the burning power of song bids me be bold and not to faint.

6. Discussion

Both *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa* begin with a prologue, though their length is not similar in the two poems. In *Paradise Lost*, the prime reason for the fall of humans (Adam and Eve) was eating the forbidden tree's fruit. Satan, who revolted from God, committed himself to deceive Adam and Eve, our father and mother. Consequently, they were expelled from heaven and sent to earth to live for a certain period. Thus, it became compulsory for every human being to live a life on the earth's surface before returning to the world hereafter.

In Iqbal's case, the early Muslims enjoyed the great respect and the blessings of Allah as they followed the teachings of Qur'an, the Holy Book. Life on earth was peaceful because the Muslims remained steadfast in practising their religion. However, according to him, the modern Muslims have become weak in faith. They have reached the state of decline to such an extent that keeping silence on the issue is not less than a deception to the poet himself as well as to his country. But recognizing the sensitiveness of the matter, the poet admits that to say something at this juncture or complaint against no one other than the Creator Himself, is an action of discourtesy. Therefore, he opens his poem by displaying a humble attitude and confession as he uses the phrase *Khakim badhan* (dust be in my mouth, or dust fill my mouth).

Both Milton and Iqbal open their poems with a prologue, but their contexts are different, making them unique. Milton seeks inspiration from the song of the heavenly muse in order to write on such an important topic. Therefore, he pleads for her aid in order to brighten what is dark in him and to enable him to sing his "adventurous song" (*Paradise Lost* Book 1, line-13).

Iqbal claims that he has the gift of gab to make a complaint forcefully. Milton discusses the fall of man, relating the story to Genesis, whereas Iqbal makes a plaint to Allah Almighty for the wretched conditions of the present-day Muslims. For Milton, the redemption lies in the sacrifice given by Jesus Christ on the cross, but Iqbal sees the solution in practising the teachings of Qur'an and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which their forefathers have already done.

After a prologue, Milton comes to express the purpose of his long epic in the first stanza. Milton writes, "I may assert eternal providence, and justify the ways of God to men" (*Paradise Lost*, Book- I, line-26). Though the story relates to the fall of man, declaring the theme from the very outset helps the reader understand what is to come next in the poem.

Milton means God's mercy and love by eternal providence, which can change evil to good. If there had been no disobedience of God by man, death would not have come to this world. But Adam and Eve's disobedience created an opportunity for the display of God's love, grace and mercy. As a result, their fall ultimately yields more good than it would have come about

otherwise. Milton reiterates the idea that God gives free will to man and he has the knowledge of everything, but he does not interfere with choice or free will of individual. This distinguishes God from Satan, the great egoist, who always works of his interest; and who had sworn to take revenge on God by converting every good into evil. He has vowed to spread lies about God's oppression and his own "injured merit" (*Paradise Lost*, Book- I, and line-98).

Unlike Milton's long epic, Iqbal's *Shikwah* (part-1) is a comparatively short poem consisting of 31 stanzas. It emphasizes the Islamic traditions and values in an emotional tone. The central theme of this poem is that God is not fulfilling his promise to safeguard the followers of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), which eventually leads to their decline and hardship. Looking at the miserable conditions of the Muslims, he avidly asks why such a situation was allowed to develop (Mehmood, 2021). He has blessed the others, but his own chosen people have suffered disloyalty at His (God) hand. In stanza-16, Iqbal writes:

قہر تو یہ ہے کہ کافر کو ملے حور و قصور

اور بچارے مسلمان کیلئے فقط وعدہ حور

The misery is that pagans have

Mansions and Hours today

Upon the word of life to come,

A Muslim has to wait and pray. (Ashraf, 2007, p. 15)

Both Milton and Iqbal justify the ways of God to men, but their techniques are different. God made men capable of distinguishing between evil and virtue. He also warned them of Satan's intention of laying them astray from the right path. He created the world, giving Adam an opportunity to repent and ask for forgiveness. In contrast, Satan continued with his stubbornness to remain unrepented. Satan tries to tempt Christ, but his effort goes in vain, and Christ's sacrifice on the cross saves humanity from eternal pain. God sends death as an instrument to relieve man from all the sorrows, worries, and monotony of life.

Iqbal's *Shikwa* raises the crucial questions of why the Muslims are unhappy and why the injustice is being done to them. He feels surprised that Allah, being so magnanimous, should abandon them and turn to the strangers. Moreover, according to Iqbal's *Shikwa*, it is strange that the Muslims who introduced the name of Allah on the surface of the earth at a time when others worshipped trees and idols made of stones, should be neglected. However, in *Jawab-e-Shikwa*, Allah replies to his complaint, saying that even if the complaint is false, it should be made decently. Moreover, Allah always does justice, and the reward and punishment are subject to humans' actions. He will reward those who have good conduct and punish those whose actions are unfair. Iqbal writes:

کیا کہا؟ بہر مسلمان ہے فقط وعدہ حور
شکوہ بے جا بھی کرے کوئی تو لازم ہے شعور
عدل ہے فاطر ہستی کا ازل سے دستور
مسلم آئیں ہو اکافر تو ملے حور و قصور
تم میں حوروں کا چاہنے کا والا ہی نہیں
جلوہ طور تو موجودہ موسیٰ ہی نہیں

Muslims have been promised Hoors,

"Just a promise!" Did you say?

Even if the plaint is false,

Make it in a decent way.

Justice is the eternal rule

Which is held up by the Lord.

One who follows Muslim code

Eden's gifts are his reward.

By your unfair acts, it seems,

None of you does want a Hoor.

Toor is there with all the sights,

But no Moses at the Toor! (Ashraf, 2007, p.12)

Paradise Lost was "more than a work of art. Indeed, it was a moral and political treatise, a poetic explanation for the course that English history and Humankind had taken" (Godec & Khan, 2010, p. 416). In 1649, Charles I was murdered, and Oliver Cromwell "ushered in a new state which he called the Commonwealth and Protectorate that was, nominally, Puritan." (Morton,

A.L 1955, p 211 as cited in Gudic & Khan, 2010). Cromwell was a military officer who wanted to rule harshly, calling himself the “Protector of England” (Gudic & Khan, p.2). Milton’s *Paradise Lost* draws on both British and biblical stories. Moreover, leaving the religious and moral elements aside, Satan in *Paradise Lost* is Oliver Cromwell (p. 211). Puhalo (1966) is of the view, that the ideology of *Paradise Lost* is grounded in the social as well as realistic situations of England. Moreover, it also mirrors the poet’s political views regarding the class of that time.

When Iqbal wrote *Shikwa*, the collective memory of the Muslims in India was severely damaged by British occupation and the downfall of the Mughal empire. The war of independence in 1857 that started to regain control of the country from England ultimately ended with Indian defeat. They needed someone to remind them of their rich political, religious and cultural history. British imperialism resulted in the continuation of its political power and Anglicist norms. The cultural change put them in a tough situation. Jangbar (n.d.) holds that they had to choose between alien identities based on alien values or traditional values, even though a commitment to tradition excluded Muslims from economic opportunities. In those circumstances, Iqbal wrote *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* to remind them of their golden history and rich culture embedded in Islam values and enable them to think of new possibilities.

Both *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* are the products of Socio-political and historical contexts. Milton wrote in the 17th century, which was the era of social, political, and religious polarity, including the restructurings in the English Church, generally known as Puritanism. These developments questioned Christianity as a moral order. Milton wrote his great epic for upholding the Christian faith and personal liberty in this social, religious, and politically charged scenario, though not many people agreed with his stance.

Similarly, keeping in view the condition of Indian Muslims under foreign rule, Iqbal wrote *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* to highlight their true identity. In

other words, he wants them to remain steadfast in following the Islamic tradition as this would enable them to achieve the political goal of ousting the foreign regime and obtaining rights for themselves. In *Shikwa*, Iqbal represented to God the case of Indian Muslims for their miserable situations, which apparently seemed strange and became the reason for criticism by some orthodox Muslims. However, he had a rhetorical purpose behind charging God, arguing that God was not responsible for their current situation, but they themselves should look at their glorious history and amend their situation (Jangbar, n.d). In the following lines, he reiterates the same point and prays that the love and spirit of true Muslims be revived. Iqbal says:

جنس نایاب محبت کو پھر ارزاں
ہند کے دیر نشینوں کو مسلمان کر دے
چوئے خمی چکد از حسرت دیرینہ ما
می تپد نالہ بہ نشت کدہ سینہ ما

Scarce and rare is love today;
Make it common to regain.
India's temple-sitters now
May be faithful Muslims again!
From this wistful, injured heart (Ashraf, 2007, p. 64)

7. Conclusion

This study has investigated the similarities between two famous works, *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa*, respectively, written by Milton and Iqbal. It has explored how the two poets are equal in their thought and art in these two works. The study has shown that irrespective of their different ages, languages, and cultures, they share a similar vein of thought in *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa*. After closely analyzing the poems, it has been found that *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa* are comparable in quite a few points, including the opening lines that start with a prologue, justification of God's ways to men, reflection of the socio-political and religious issues and the poets' suggested remedies according to their beliefs and the heavenly books, i.e., Quran and Bible. Furthermore, the study has also identified how differently the general public and literary scholars have reacted to the language and theme of *Paradise Lost* and *Shikwa Jawab e Shikwa*. Lastly, the study concludes that Iqbal's *Shikwah Jawab e Shikwa* is similar to

Milton's *Paradise Lost* attempt in several ways, though the context in which the poet was written is different.

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