

A Comparative Study of Milton's Satan and Iblees of Allama Iqbal

Salma Jabbar

Research Scholar (M.Phil.) Department of English, Rabindranath Tagore University, Madhya Pradesh (India)

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Corresponding Author

Email: salmajabbar12[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This write up compares and contrasts the character of Satan in the light of Milton's 'Paradise Lost', 'Paradise Regained' and Iblees [Satan] of Allama Iqbal as per the contents of his poems entitled 'Ibleeskimajlis-e-shura', 'jibreel and iblees' and 'Nala-e-Iblees'. The source of inspiration for both the writers is Christianity and Islam. Both Milton's Satan and Iqbal's Iblees are arrogant, revengeful, unrepentant and reconciled to their fate. After the expulsion of Adam and Eve from heaven, this planet of ours is peopled by the progeny of the first common parents of mankind. Satan leaves no stone unturned to lead astray and allure the children of Adam to the Sinful life. Comparative portrayal of the character of Satan and Iblees is corroborated by the textual references from the respective works of Milton and Allama Iqbal.

1. Introduction

Both Milton and Allama Iqbal were reputed rational religious thinkers and writers. They took recourse to poetry and prose for the reformation of mankind. Both have dived deep into the scriptures and allied religious literature of their respective religions. Thus, the source of their inspiration is The Bible and The Quran. Milton wrote epics 'paradise lost' and 'paradise regained' wherein he has portrayed the character of Satan very brilliantly.

Allama Iqbal, on the other hand, did not write epics. He simply dwelled on the character of Iblees [Satan] in 'Javed Nama' 'ibleeski majlis-e-shura' [the advisory council of Satan], 'A dialogue between the jibreel and Satan,' and 'Taskheer-a-fitrat' [conquest of nature].

2. Findings with Relevant Textual References

Before portraying the character of Milton's Satan and Allama Iqbal's 'Iblees' we have to study between the lines the following stanzas of Book 1 of 'paradise lost' and relevant poems of Allama Iqbal:

Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,
Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the seat
That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he [245]
Who now is Sovran can dispose and bid
What shall be right: fardest from him is best
Whom reason hath equald, force hath made supream
Above his equals. Farewel happy Fields
Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail [250]
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n. [255]
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less then he
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence: [260]

Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.

From the perusal of the above lines it becomes clear that the Satan is surveying his new home and trying to become aware of the new situation after his downfall. Satan and the rebel angels had fallen through space landing in the Hell. Satan compares the new world to the paradise and finds that everything is different here.

"The region, the soil, the clime." And there is only "a mournful gloom" all over the place instead of the "celestial light" of the paradise. He is not glad at the first to be there, but he soon rejects despair and accepts the new situation:

"Be it so, Farewel happy Fields
Where Joy forever dwells: Hail, horrors, hail [250]
Infernal world,

In the following lines Satan shows his ambitions, his self-confidence and determination. He realises that now he is the new "possessor" of a place "Farthest" from Him [God]... at least we shall be free and... may reign secure."

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His ambition is to have a reign somewhere, no matter if that place is gloomy and horrible. He is great in self-assurance and strength as he has got

A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n. [255]

Then hell or heaven is only states of mind. Milton's hell is not a real place. Hell is the mind because the mind can change the external world: if we live in a paradise but our mind perceives it as hell, that place will be hell and vice versa.

The critical analysis of the stanza from "paradiselost" book 1 shows that Milton's Satan is courageous, proud, self-confident, ambitious and a great orator. It appears that Satan embodies Milton's puritan ideas of independence and liberty since he has been a rebel against the omnipotent Almighty God. He also feels equal to God in reason and inferior to Him in power. He has great traits of great military leaders to lead and inspire his companion to wage war against his 'Maker'. Milton's Satan appears, at times, to be a coward because when he is cast down to hell, he half persuades himself that only the thunder has made his enemy greater.

Now let us study following stanza Part 43 from Allama Iqbal's "Javed Nama" entitled 'Nalah-e-Iblees [the lament of the Satan]' and find out the main characteristics of the character of 'Iblees':

If nothing but straw existed in this world,
 what profited it to endow me with so much fire?
 It were a shame to melt a piece of glass;
 to melt a rock—that is a proper task²⁵³⁰
 I have become so 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, ²⁵³⁵
 whose glance will set my body quivering,
 one who will say, 'Depart from my presence',
 one in whose eyes I am not worth two barleycorns.
 Grant me, O God, one living man of faith;
 haply I shall know delight at last in defeat.
²⁵⁴⁰

From the critical study of the above stanza we infer that Satan is proud, unrepentant, knower of the secrets of the universe and its annihilation. Iqbal's 'Iblees' is confirmed in evil and reeking with the inordinate proud spirit of seeking vengeance for the indignities and insults that he had to suffer because of the birth of Adam. Iqbal's Satan finds that the man created by God is a willing prey to sinful life and Satan finds him unequal to his fight.

Iblees [Satan] rebels against GOD and remains steadfast in his mission to lead humans astray. He tries hard in his work and does not take a second's break. He also complains that human beings are such an easy prey to him that he longs for a strong competitor or true 'momin' against whom he has to wage a very tough war. He does not enjoy that easy victory over the human beings.

In the dialogue between the Jabreel and the Satan, 'Jabreel' asked Satan to beg forgiveness from Allah and be amongst his favourites again. Satan replies that separation and struggle is the real joy of life.

"If my separation from Allah ceases, I will cease to exist"

Jabreel asked Satan whether it is possible for him to repent of his disobedience and reconcile with the Almighty to enable himself to regain his lost glory.

"They all are taking about you in the celestial sphere.
 Could your ripped garment still be mended."

The Iblees replies that he can never reconcile to his Maker and pave the way for his return to heaven because heaven is soundless and action less and he enjoys the life of action and struggle in this world. This is corroborated by the following verse quoted from 'Iblees kimajles-e-shura'.

"I can never walk to this place again, how quite this region is!
 There are no house, no streets that is this world is soundless and action less."

From the textual study of the stanzas from "Paradise Lost" and "Javed Nama" we came to know that Adam's sin of disobedience was followed by his expulsion from heaven. Up to this point both Milton and Iqbal see eye to eye with each other. The 'Bible' curses the earth because of the disobedience of Adam and his subsequential expulsion from heaven, whereas The 'Quran' declares the earth to be the dwelling place of man and the source of profit to him for the position of which he ought to be grateful to God.

Milton in the Book 1 of "Paradise Lost" is proud, indignant and appears to be the hero but in 'Paradise Regained' we find that he [Satan] has lost much of his glory and the son of God [Christ] comes out victorious in a war between the good and the evil.

3. Conclusion

According to me both the writers [Milton and Iqbal] have succeeded in justifying the ways of God to man. In other words, we can say God's plan of creation and governership of this universe is well designed and meaningful. It is binary for the fulfilment of the design of our Maker. Good and evil, Satan and angel and concept of heaven and hell are indispensable for the healthy evolution and fulfilling the mission of life.

Finally, from the perusal of a few critical reviews of Milton and Iqbal I infer that the creation of forces of evil and good is preplanned of adjudge the judicious exercise of freewill by the noblest creation of the Almighty God. Our omission and commission during the short span of life on this planet will be tested for the requital we are entitled to after our exit from the stage of life. We cannot hold God responsible for our sinful and virtuous life. Every man is responsible for his good or bad deeds because, at times, he makes an error of judgement and dives deep into the ocean of infernal deeds and invites the wrath of God. The two literary giants (Milton and Iqbal) in their master pieces appear to say that man is neither angelic nor satanic, by his actions alone he can make or mar his life on this planet as well as life after death.

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