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These Issues of Mysticism, This Exposition of Yours, Ghalib

Examining the elements of *Advaitvaad* (Monism) in Mirza Ghalib's poetry

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Abstract

In the eighth-ninth century, *Shankaraachaarya* gave the principle of monism. This doctrine is also called *Vedaanta*. According to this belief, *Brahma* is the only truth and this visible world is false and most importantly that *Jeev (Aatmaa)*, the soul and *Brahm (Paramaatmaa)*, the Supreme Power, are one and there is no difference between them. It is also said in the *Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad*, '*Aham Brahmaasmī*' that means I am Brahma. That is, the soul is *Brahma* (the supreme power). *Advaita* not only says that the soul (*Jeev*) is a part of the Supreme Soul (*Paramaatmaa*), or a particle is a bit or piece of the universe, but it also believes that this world is false

If we examine Ghalib's religious views expressed in his poetry, we find that he believed in monotheism. Ghalib says that everyone accepts that You (*Allah*) are one, unique and that no one can match you or face you. Ghalib is a strong advocate of *Tauhiid*, the belief that God is only one and unique. He is against the belief of *Shirk*, (polytheism). He favored mutual communion among all sects. He has said that we are believers of one God and our tendency is to give up the bonded

customs and rituals. Ghalib also believed in the idea of unity of *Aatmaa* and *Paramaatmaa*, *Jeev* and *Brahma* or the micro and the macro. This belief is evident in his countless *Sher*s. He says that though you are in everything in the world, you are still different and unique. In a *Sher* he says that every drop is saying that I am the ocean, in the same way we also belong to Him (He and us are the same). Ghalib has also pointed out the absurdity (uselessness) of this meaningless world in many of his *Sher*s. Ghalib considers life or existence as a hoax and this world as a web of imagination and believes that even though people say that there is existence but it is not there.

Key words

Aatmaa, Advait, Allah, Brahma, Existence, Faith, Hindu, Islam, Jeev, Kafir, Kulliyat-e-Ghalib, Miir, Mirza Ghalib, Monism, Paramaatmaa, Philosophy, Polytheism, Religion *Shankaraachaarya*, *Sher*, Sufism, Tauhiid, Valii, Vedaanta, Wahdat-ul-Vujood, Worship, Zauq,

A person's being a *Muslim* or a *Kaafir* (a non-believer) is mutually exclusive. But if a person is both a *Muslim* and a *Kaafir* at the same time, it may seem a bit strange. This paradox is not surprising in the case of a personality like *Ghalib*. *Ghalib* himself has said that I have never given up alcohol and never kept *Rozaa* (Month long fast during the holy month of *Ramzan*), therefore I am not a *Muslim*, but am a *Kaafir*. On the other hand he also says that if I was not a drunkard, I would have been called a *Valii* (Saint) considering my exposition on the issues related to mysticism and religion -

yeh masaail-e-tasavvuf yeh teraa bayaan Ghalib

tujhe ham valii samajhte jo na baada-khvaar hotaa 1

Ghalib was not a philosopher. But through his poetry, he was presenting his own idea or philosophy. In his Persian collection '*Kulliyat-e-Ghalib*' he has said that if the hobby of poetry was the law of land, then the fame of my poetry would have been as high as that of *Parveen Nakshatra* (Pleiades) and if poetry was a religion, then this book of mine would be a religious one - a Gospel or a revealed one.

Gar Zauq-e-Sukhan ba dahar Aaiin boodii***Diiwan maraa shohrat-e-parviin boodii******Ghalib agar iin fann-e-sukhan diin boodii******Aan diin raa yazdi kitaab-e-iin boodii 2***

If we examine *Ghalib's* religious views expressed in his poetry, we find that he believed in monotheism, the basic belief of *Islaam*. The demonstration of this belief of his is found in many of his *Sher*s. In a *Sher*, he says that no one can see him (God) , he is one in himself, there can be no other like him-

use kaun dekh saktaa ki yagaanaa hai vo yaktaa

jo duii kii boo bhi hotii to kahiin do chaar hotaa 3

Ghalib says that everyone accepts that you (*Allah*) are one, unique and that no one can match you or face you-

sab ko maqbool hai daavaa tiri yaktaaii kaa

roobaroo koi but-e-aainaa-siimaa na huaa

Ghalib appears to be in favor of *Tauhiid*, the belief that God is only one and unique. He is against the belief of *Shirk*, that is, polytheism or paganism. He argues that embellishment of singular into plural is a false form of worship. These imaginary fetishes or idols have made me a disbeliever a *Kaafir* -

kasrat-aaraai-e-vahdat hai parastaari-e-vahm

kar diyaa kaafir in asnaam-e-khayaalii ne mujhe

Ghalib was an advocate of mutual communion among all sects. He says we are believers of one God and our tendency is to give up the obsolete customs and rituals.

ham muvahhid hain hamaaraa kesh hai tark-e-rusoom

millatien jab mit gaiin ajzaa-e-iimaan ho gaiin

Literature is considered to be a mirror of the cultural and social beliefs of its time. And changes in those beliefs are reflected in the literature of the time. As a result of the influence of *Sufism* and its replication from *Hindustaani* culture, some of *Ghalib's* predecessors and contemporary poets (*Valii Dakhiniij, Saudaa, Miir and Zauk etc.*) took a syncretic approach by attacking the radical ideas. Rejecting the symbols and ostentation, *Valii* says that if freedom is wanted, then freedom from the bondage of *Subhaa* (the rosary used by *Muslims*) and *Zunnaar* (*Janeoo*- the *Hindu* sacred thread) is necessary

Gar huaa hai taalib-e-azaadgi

Band mat ho subhaa-o-zunnaar kaa 4

Saudaa believes that God is present everywhere, temples and mosques are nothing but bricks and stones.

Juz sang kyaa hai dair-o-haram mein jo sar jhuke

Sajdaa kiya hai tujhko main pahchaan har kahiin 5

Look at the following *Sher* of *Saudaa*. How interestingly he describes the omnipresence of God through this simile of *Krishna* -

Nahiin hai ghar koi aisaa jahaan us ko na dekhaa ho

Kanhaiyaa se nahiin kuchh kam sanam meraa vo harjaaii 6

Zauq, taking a jibe at the established beliefs, said -

Zauq jo madarson ke bigde hue hain mulla

Unko maikhaane mein le aao sanwar jaayeinge 7

while advocating equality and coordination, *Miir* says-

Uske farogh-e-husn se jhamke hai sab mein noor

Shama-e-haram ho yaa ki diyaa somnaat kaa 8

At that time, the poets were not only talking about mutual reconciliation, but adopting a rebellious attitude, and were also getting attracted towards the things of other religions which they found acceptable. *Miir* had even taken the risk of *Fatwa* of *Kufr* and said that I have left *Islaam* way back and sat in the temple sporting a *Qashqa* (*Tilak*) -

Miir ke diin-o-mazhab ko ab poochhte kya ho un ne to

Qashqaa khiinchaa dair mein baithaa kab kaa tark islaam kiyaa 9

Or he says -

aaye hain Miir kaafir ho kar khudaa ke ghar mein

peshaanii par hai qashqaa zunnar hai kamar mein 10

No wonder that even *Ghalib* could not remain unaffected by all this. *Ghalib* also accepts that faith and belief are the true criteria for *Braahmins* and *Sheikhs* rather than symbols like *Zunnaar (Janeu)* and *Subhaa (Islamic rosary)*.

nahiin kuchh subhaa-o-zunnaar ke phande mein giiraaii

Vafaadaarii mein shaikh-o-barhaman kī aazmaaish hai

Ghalib believed that the sustenance or permanence of faith is the primary condition in religion.

Vafaadaarii ba shart-e ustuvaarii asl-e iimaan hai

mare but-khaane mein to kaabe mein gaado barahman ko

Ghalib goes rather even further and suggests a way to break *Islamic symbols of rosary* of a hundred beads and wear the *Hindu sacred thread*-

zunnaar baandh subhaa-e-sad-daanaa tod daal

rahrau chale hai raah ko hamvaar dekh kar

In this *Sher*, *Ghalib* is not only telling the difference between physical forms of the *Tasbeeh* and the thread (just as the shape of the beads of a rosary is bumpy and fluctuating and the shape of the thread is straight), in this manner probably he is suggesting the latter path being flat and easy as well.

In the eighth-ninth century, *Shankaraachaarya* gave the principle of monism. This doctrine is also called *Vedaanta* or *Advaitvaad*. According to this belief, *Brahma* is the only truth and this visible world is false and most importantly that *Jeev (Atmaa)* and *Brahm (Paramaatmaa)* are one and there is no

difference between them. There is a saying in *Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad*, - 'Aham Brahmaasmi' that means I am *Brahma*. That is, the soul is *Brahma* (the supreme power) .

During this very period, *Hazrat Mansoor* in Iran had said '*An-al-Haq*'. That means, I am the truth. This statement of *Mansoor* was seen as his claim to be God and he was eventually crucified. *Shankaraachaarya* also had to face a lot of opposition during his time.

In the *Bhakti* period too, we find that this belief had begun to be widely recognized. We see shades of it in *Tulsi Daas* also. The following *chaupaai* (quadruped) of *Kishkindhaa Kaand* says that the water of a river becomes still, once it pours into the ocean. Just as the *Jeev* finds eternal rest on attaining oneness or union with *Hari* (God)

Sarita jal jal nidhi mahun jaayii ,

hohin achal jin jiv hari paayii 11

Kabiir has also advocated the *Advaita* philosophy. Its reflections are also found in many of his works.

jal mein kumbh kumbh mein jal hai baahar bhiitar paanii

tut kumbh jal jal hii samaanaa yo kath kahai giyaanii 12

(the Pitcher is in Water and the water is in the Pitcher, the water is inside and outside the Pitcher

The learned Scholars say that if The pitcher broke the water amalgamates with water)

Ghalib also believed in the idea of unity of *Aatmaa* and *Paramaatmaa*, *Jeev* and *Brahma* or the micro and the macro. This belief is evident in his countless *Shers*. He says that though you are in everything in the world, you are still different and unique.

har-chand har ik shai mein too hai

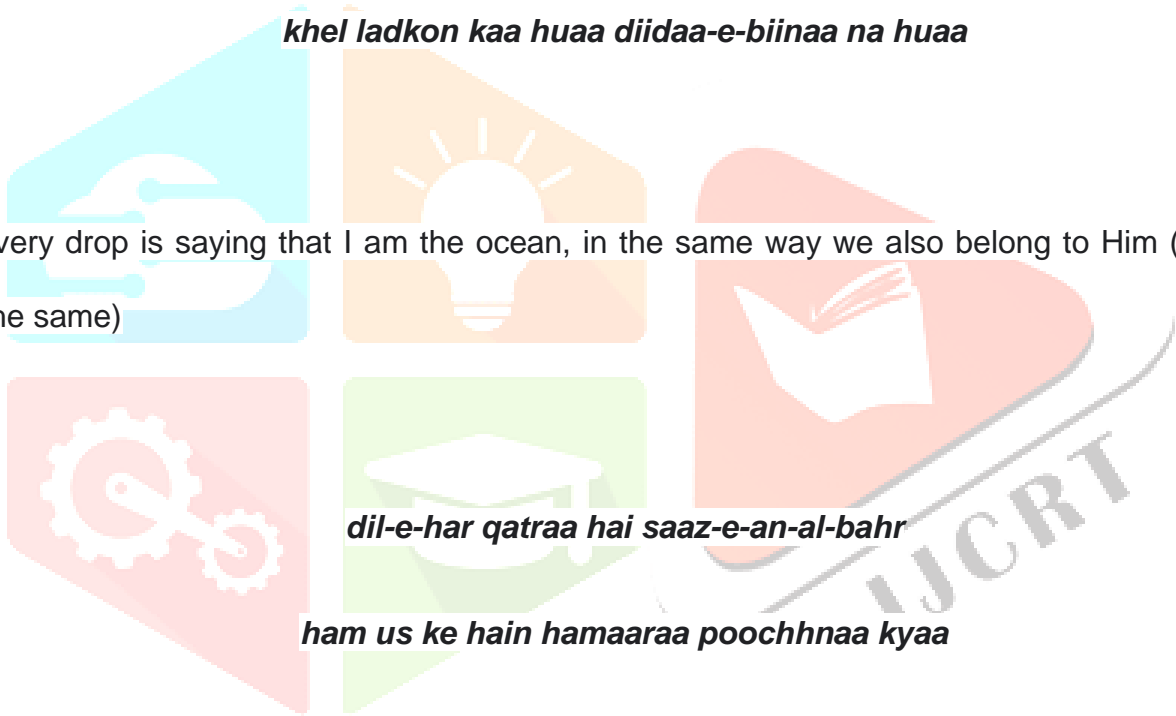
par tujh-sii koi shai nahiin hai

Ghalib opines that an eye or the vision that could not identify the ocean in a drop and the whole in a fraction is not a vision but a child's affair.

qatre mein dijlaa dikhaii na de aur juzv mein kul

khel ladkon kaa huaa diidaa-e-biinaa na huaa

like every drop is saying that I am the ocean, in the same way we also belong to Him (He and us are the same)



dil-e-har qatraa hai saaz-e-an-al-bahr

ham us ke hain hamaaraa poochhnaa kyaa

In a *Sher*, he says, I am not making any pride or swaggering like *Mansoor*, but in reality, my drop is in fact an ocean in itself-

qatraa apnaa bhi haqiqat mein hai daryaa lekin

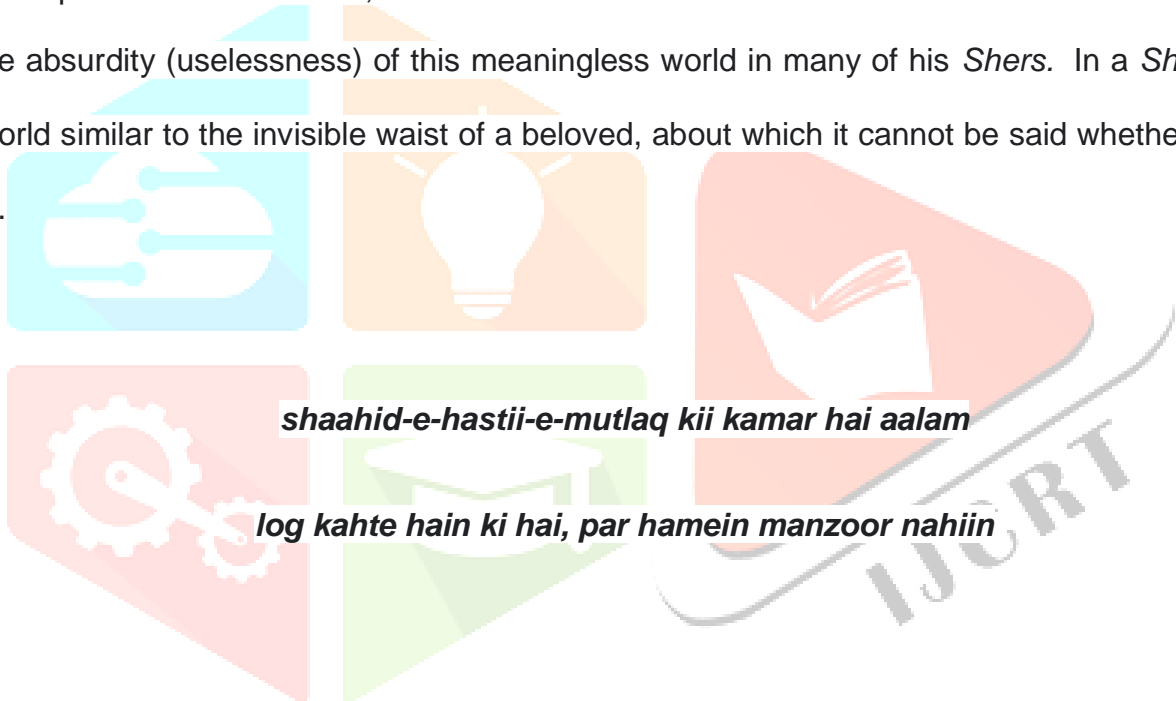
ham ko taqliid-e-tunuk-zarfi-e mansoor nahiin

He perceives that like the ultimate joy of a drop lies in ending its existence by merging with the ocean, in the same way the soul also has to eventually merge with God.

Ishrat-e qatraa hai daryaa mein fanaa ho jaanaa

dard kaa had se guzarna hai davaa ho jaanaa

Advaita not only says that the soul (*Jeev*) is a part of the Supreme Soul (*Paramaatmaa*), or a particle is a bit or piece of the universe, but it also believes that this world is false. *Ghalib* has also pointed out the absurdity (uselessness) of this meaningless world in many of his *Sher*s. In a *Sher*, he puts this world similar to the invisible waist of a beloved, about which it cannot be said whether it is there or not.



shaahid-e-hastii-e-mutlaq kii kamar hai aalam

log kahte hain ki hai, par hamein manzoor nahiin

Ghalib considers life or existence as a hoax and this world as a web of imagination and believes that even though people say that there is existence but it is not there

hastii ke mat fareb mein aa jaaiyo asad

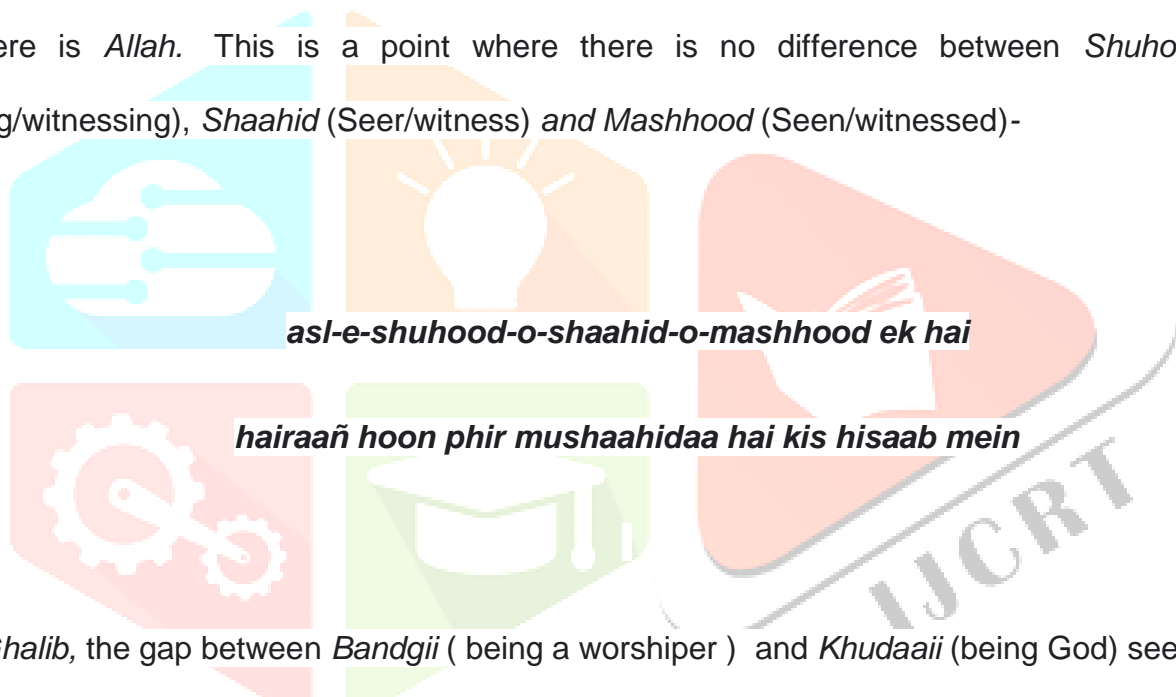
aalam tamaam halqaa-e-daam-e-khayaal hai

And -

haan khaaiyo mat fareb-e-hastii

har-chand kahein ki hai, nahī hai

This oneness between *Brahma* and *Jeev* is called '*Wahdat-ul-Vujood*' in *Persian*. It means the oneness of existence, that is, all that is there is only one, the supreme. Similarly '*Wahdat-ul-Shuhood*' means all that is visible is only one. However, there has been opposition to this belief. According to another belief, '*La-Mauzood-al-Allah*' means there is no one present other than *Allah*. That is, all that is there is *Allah*. This is a point where there is no difference between *Shuhood* (act of seeing/witnessing), *Shaahid* (Seer/witness) and *Mashhood* (Seen/witnessed)-



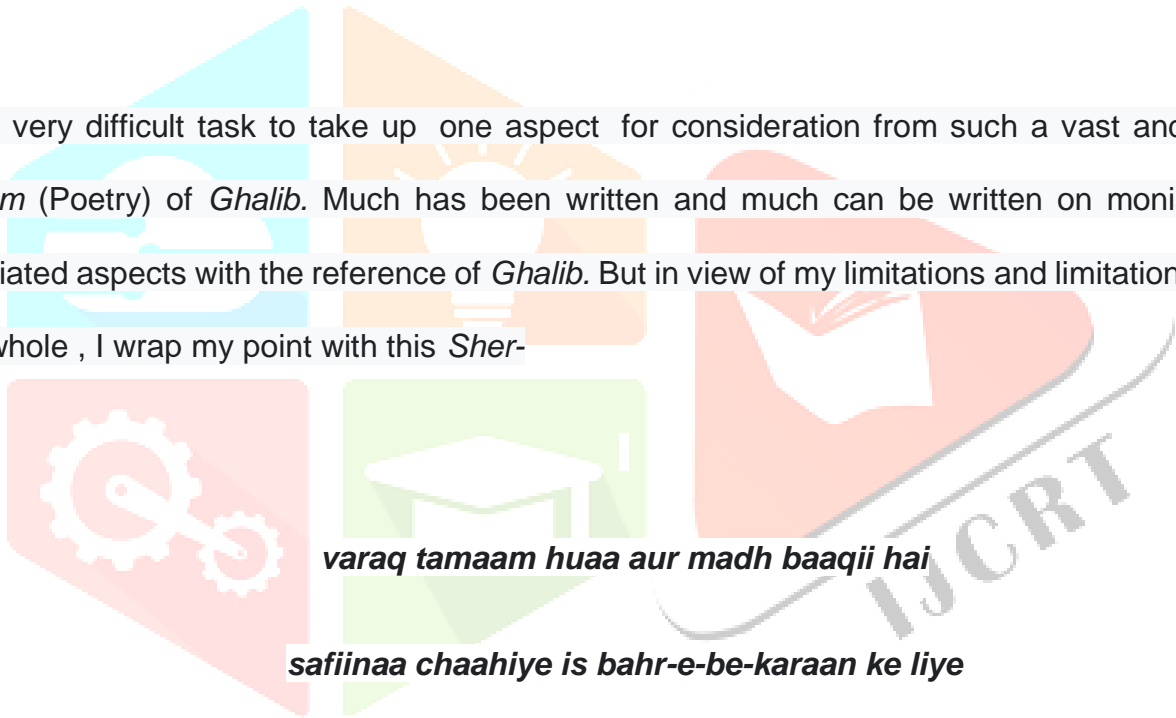
For *Ghalib*, the gap between *Bandgii* (being a worshiper) and *Khudaii* (being God) seems to have been bridged. He says "*Jise too bandgii kahtaa hai, daavaa hai Khudaii kaa*" (what you call worship is in fact an assertion of being God). He is entangled in seeing himself even when in worship. "*Bandagii mein bhi vo Azaadaa-o-Khud biin Hain*". See the following *Sher*-

niyaaz pardaa-e-izhaar-e-khud-parastii hai

jabiin-e-sijdaa-fishaan tujh se aastaan tujh se

Reading the first *Misraa* (1st line) , it seems that *Ghalib* is referring to God-worship as a means of covering up self-worship, that is, giving *Khud* (himself or *Adam*) a status equal to that of *Khudaa* (God). But *Misraa-e-Sanii* (2nd line) of the *Sher* unravels the layers of the meaning of the *Sher* very clearly. Here, *Ghalib* says that the *jabiin* (forehead) that is bowed to you is from you only (it is you only), the doorsill on which the forehead is bowed is also yours (you only) . Then how can we consider *Masjood* (to whom one bows) and *Sajid* (the one who bows) to be different from each other? The worshiper is actually a part of the one who is worshiped. That way, the worshiper is worshipping himself. Therefore this *Niyaaz* (worship) is only an attempt to cover up this *Khud-Parastii* (self-worship) so that the worshiped and the worshiper, who are actually one, may appear different.

It is a very difficult task to take up one aspect for consideration from such a vast and elaborate *Kalaam* (Poetry) of *Ghalib*. Much has been written and much can be written on monism and its associated aspects with the reference of *Ghalib*. But in view of my limitations and limitations of writing as a whole , I wrap my point with this *Sher*-



(the page has come to an end , yet the praise remains

a sail-boat is needed for this boundless ocean)

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