

IMAGERY IN IQBAL*

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It is both a pleasure and a privilege for me to address this gathering of distinguished scholars, students and admirers of Iqbal, and I must at the outset express my gratitude for the honour done to me in having invited me to read this paper to you. It is an important occasion, since the poet's birthday is being celebrated for the first time throughout the country, on a date having been, after all, correctly determined.

At this meeting today I propose to pay my tributes to the poet by pointing out that Iqbal was outstanding not only as a philosopher-poet who wrote poetry with a purpose, but also as one who produced poems containing some of the most artistic, vivid, living and emotional pieces of imagery in the whole range of Urdu poetry, and excelled even in ghazal-writing in its purest form. These reveal the superb imaginative quality of his mind and poetic talent of the highest order and attraction.

I, therefore, wish to present in this paper very briefly some glimpses of imagery in Iqbal, through my own translations in English, for better understanding and enjoyment of these by persons who do not know Urdu and Persian well enough to appreciate fully the beauties of the original. I do feel intensely that English-knowing people the world over, particularly in Muslim countries, could be made increasingly interested in Iqbal, Pakistan, universal brotherhood and peaceful co-existence, if the obvious masterpieces of Iqbal could be effectively presented to them through such translations as retain the fire and fervour, inspiration and imagery in addition to ecstasy and emotion of the original.

To start with, I refer to the poem, Himalaya, in which Iqbal presented his picture of a calm and colourful evening and sunest thus:

When the Night's Darling doth

Unfold her fresses long;

* A paper read on the occasion of observance of the birth anniversary of Iqbal under the auspices of Iqbal Academy Pakistan, in Karachi on 9th November, 1974,

When hearts pulled out by sound
Of cataracts far off;
When Evening's silence reigns
And prettier seems than speech,
And meditating trees
Present a sight to see!
The Sunset-colours lo!
Thus quivering on Hills
The rouge doth lovely look
On cheeks of evening Sky.

Allama Iqbal rose to great heights of imagination in his poem, *Mab-i-Naw* (*The New Moon*) wherein he sang:

Perhaps the Barge of Sun
Deep down the Nile did sink—
A piece from it now floats
On river's surface, lo!
Now red blood flows into
The Salver of the Sky?
Has Nature cut the veins
Thus of the setting Sun?
The Sky did steal the rings

From ears of Evening's Bride,

Or swims a Silver-fish

In waters of the Nile?

In his poem, *Love and Death*, Allama Iqbal so artistically revealed what the Sun, the Moon and the plant of Life looked like at the Dawn of Creation, and how the flowers got their smiles:

So pleasant was the hour

Of World's creation then;

All Buds of Life *en bloc*

Beamed forth their sylvan smiles!

The Sun was being blessed

With Crown made of pure gold,

And Moon was beauteous made

With what is moon-light called

At places leaves did sprout

To branches of Life's Plants,

And then of Life the Buds

Too blossomed here and there.

The Angels taught the Dew

To shed some drops of Tears,

And for the first time did

The Rose learn how to smile.

The poem entitled, *Taswir-i-Dard* (Portraiture of Pain) is full of pathos, and even in his couplets written with the obvious objective of warning the people against coming dangers, Iqbal presented some exquisite background imagery thus:

To me my Heart the Mirror holds

The two world's Secrets which unfolds:

Just what I see therein I speak,

And in my Verse to sing I seek.

Know what the Sky holds in its Sleeves?

Sparks of Lightning, I conceive,

Which may strike thy garden-Nest—

O Nightingales ! feel not at rest!

The poet seems to have splashed the evening-red in his poem, *Beside the Ravi*, whilst presenting a sunset scene by the river thus:

Behold ! the Evening's skirts

Thus tainted with red Wine:

The Old Man of the Sky

Holds Wine in trembling hands!

Allama Iqbal, as I have already remarked, excelled also in *ghazal* writing in purest form, and his imagery therein reminded us of Ghalib and Dagh. Iqbal sang:

From whence, Say, could I pick and take

To build my Nest such magnet-straw

As shall the lightning restless make

And straight to strike and burn it draw?

O Friends of this Assembly know

That any moment I may go;

For like the Lamp at Dawn no doubt

I am about to be put out!

Allama Iqbal's poem entitled, *Muhabbat* (Love), is remarkable for his most beautiful presentation of a pre-creation scene, and identifying the elements which were fused by a clever alchemist to produce what was named, Love, by God's decree. How exquisitely and emotionally Iqbal sang:

The Tresses of the Bride of Night

With Curls had not been blessed,

The Stars in Skies by no means knew

Their roving's pleasures then.

The Moon in its attire all new,

Indeed, so queer looked,

And of Revolution had not learnt

The established Law still then.

And, of the Alchemist the poet said:

He from the Stars their brilliance took,

And from the Moon its Heart's Scars.

Got from the Lightning restlessness,

And warmth from breath of Mary's son.

He then dissolved these elements all

In water from the Nectar Pool—

The Elixir was then christened "Love"

From God's seat in the highest Heaven!

The Sun and Stars in skies thus learnt

Their gait of coquetry, and then

All flower-buds their blossom got

And Tulip-fields received their Tints!

Also, unique in imagery is Iqbal's poem, *Haqqiqat-i-Husn* (The Reality of Beauty) wherein he has most vividly and dramatically described how the reply which Beauty received from God expansion and pervasiveness in the skies, and the channels by which it reached the Earth, and the effect it had on the delicate sentiments of budding beauties, spring-time and youth. He sang:

The Moon which happened to be close

The Talk did overhear;

On Skies it was the common talk

Which the Morning Star did hear.
The Dawn then having heard from Stars
Conveyed it to the Dew.
Thus did the Earth's confidant know
The Dialogue in the Skies.
Ah! at the Message of the Dew
The Flowers were in Tears
And of the Buds the tiny Hearts
In pain profusely bled;
And shedding Tears did Spring-time go
Youth too that for sight-seeing came
So sad at Heart, went out!
Writing in ghazal form, Iqbal warned the Western nations in 1907 thus:
Your Civilisation, this New Age
Is all in Turmoil and in Rage,
And with the Dagger of its make
It shall its own life take.
When Nest's built on a Bough that's frail
Disater cannot but entail!
And, of his own song he said:
Hark! of Iqbal the Song

Sounds like the marching Gong:

Our Caravan is Lo!

A-foot and on the Go!

One of the greatest amongst the poems of Iqbal produced after 1907 is his: he *Shikwa* (Complaint to God) which was followed by the *Jawab-i-Shikwa*. These present vivid pictures of the glorious achievements and traditions of Muslims in the past, their subsequent downfall and recipe for reconstruction. The imagery in many a couplet therein is superb.

As for example:

The Nations through their Faith do live;

Without it nowhere wouldst Thou be:

Their mutual gravity doth give

To Stars eternal Assembly!

And, speaking of the new age he stressed the need for regenerating what he called, Ibrahim's Faith, Allama Iqbal wrote:

A Thunder-bolt is this New Age;

No Harvest can escape its Rage;

Secure is not the Garden's bloom,

And Deserts too may meet their Doom!

To this new Fire the Nations old

Do Fuels add as I behold:

The last of Prophet's Race of fame

Is clothed in mantle made of Flame!

Ibrahim's Faith alone could make

This Fire the form of Flowers take!

As for the secrets of life, how beautifully Iqbal revealed these in simple and charming words, when in his poem, the *Shama aur Shair* (The Candle and the Poet), he says:

A Drop of water lives

As Tears, Pearls or Dew,

And thus lo ! out it gives

Life's Secrets known to few.

And, to presented his message of hope and good-cheer to Muslims thus:

A glorious Sun is bound to rise

To put the Night at last to flight ;

And this the Garden that we prize

Shall gleam with tunes of *Tawhid's* light:

In another poem Iqbal insisted:

Do with thy Millat march along,

And keep thy Bonds with it all strong:

Do to thy Plant securely cling

Thus hope to live and see the Spring:

Indeed. one of the most charming and life-like poems of Iqbal is *Khidr-i-Rab* (Khidar of the Way) in which he presents the array of his

imagery his thus:

Engrossed in view by river-side one Night,
I held a restless world within my Heart.
The Night was still, the breeze content and slow
The river-flow—I wondered if I saw
A river of its picture in a Dream.
Just like a Suckling in its mother's arms
The restless Waves in depths were fast asleep,
The spell of Night kept Birds to Nests confined
And Stars were stunned by Magic of the Moon!

I saw the Trotter of the World, Khidr
With Dawn-like signs of Youth in his old age.
He talked to me and said, "O Seeker of Creation's Secrets!
Thou shouldst know now—
That if thy Heart's the Eye wide-open be.
Man's Destiny would stand revealed to Thee!"
Later, in the same poem, Iqbal presented some picturesque scenes thus:
And Lo ! the Stag on dunes of Sand,
How unconcerned he moves about:

His Home's without a Leaf or Straw,
His mileless Track without a Stone!

Behold ! beside the Pool the sight
Of Caravans at halting place
It seems the Faithfuls gathered are
In Paradise round Salsabil!

Allama Iqbal's poem, *Tulu-i-Islam* (The Dawn of Islam), contains, some highly inspired couplets which are amongst his masterpieces from the point of view of imagery and poetic beauty. As for example:

Alas! for many a thousand Years
In Garden Narcissus forlorn
On its Sightlessness sheds its Tears—
A seeing-Eye's not easily born!

Beyond the Blue we call the Sky
A Muslim knows his Goal doth lie:
Of Stars this Galaxy is just
His Caravan's the pathway Dust!

On Thee there's Dust of Colour and Creed;
O Bird of Haram! Thou dost need

Polluted Plumes of thine to fling

Aside — ere Thou dost take to Wing:

Some of the couplets even in A llama Iqbal's "*Prayer*" for Muslims have impressive background imagery.

As for example:

To Stag that's gone astray

Show now the Haram's way,

And grant the Desert vast

To one town-sick at last!

Am wailing Nightingale—

A ruined Garden's Trail:

What in my Song I say

Be fruitful Lord ! I pray.