

THE HIMALAYAS

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal

Translation

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INTRODUCTION

‘This poem, consisting of twenty four verses, belongs to the first period of Iqbal’s poetic and intellectual evolution, which ended at the time of his departure for Europe, in 1905, for higher education. This period is considered to be that of his national and natural poetry. “The Himalayas” is the opening poem of the collection of his poems called Bang-i-Dara (The Clarion Call). The poem eulogizes the physical beauty and geographical importance of the Himalayas range. Though mountainous tracts are objects of beauty all over the world, and the beauty of many such regions has been extolled by poets and intellectuals, the Himalayas stand out of the rest for their superb beauty and elegance.

The word Himalaya is a simplification of the Sanskrit word Himachal, which means “The Abode of Snow”. The name reflects the long range of permanently snow covered peaks, which are among the highest in the world and form a continuous wall of shimmering silver. The beauty of the mountain range has to be seen to be appreciated and cannot be described in words. However, the reader is referred to NIGEL NICOLSON’S The Himalayas, 1979 Edition; published by The World’s Wild Places/Time-Life Books/Amsterdam for getting a glimpse of the beauty of the Himalayas.

Iqbal, being a native of the India- Pakistan region and one with origins in Kashmir, which is a part of the Himalayan range and is itself beauty par excellence, must have had a special love for the Himalayas. However, his object in writing this poem was not to sing the praises of the tract. Being an aril (gnostic) the beauty of Allah’s countenance as reflected in His Creation had become manifest to his insight. He was moved by the beauty and the

grandeur of the Himalayas. To Iqbal the Himalayas are one of the innumerable masterpieces of the creative power of Allah (S.W.T.). To him it, is one of the shuhuds of Allah's (S.W.T.) artistry and a way of witnessing the effluence of Allah (S.W.T.). This feeling bursts out in verse 3. The writer had the good fortune of witnessing the sylvan beauty of the Himalayas for twenty years and of sharing the feelings' of Sa'di when he says:

برگ درختان سبز در نظر پوشیار!
پر ورقے دفتر یست معرفت کردگار

(سعدی)

For a wide awake eye every leaf of green trees is like a page which is equal to a book of the knowledge of God.

The reader is requested to read the translation with this thought at the back of his mind to get the full pleasure from his effort.

THE TRANSLATION

O Himalaya! O rampart of the Indian region the firmament bends to kiss thy forehead

THE HIMALAYAS

Thou showeth not any signs of old age

Thou art young in the midst of the alternation of the day and night^[1]

The Kalim^[2] of the Tur of Sinai witnessed an effluence (Jalwa)

Thou art the complete manifestation of God's grandeur (Tajalli) for the discerning eye

In appearance thou art only a mountain range

In reality thou art our sentinel, thou art the rampart of India

The art the poetical work whose opening verse is the sky Thou guideth man to the inner solitudes

The snow over thy peaks has endowed thee with the turban of honour^[3]

The turban which mocks at the cap of the world illuminating sun

Antiquity is only a moment of thine age gone by Dark clouds are encamped in thine valleys.

Thy peaks equal the Peides^[4] in elegance

Though thou standest on the earth the whole expanse of the sky is thine abode.

The spring in thine bosom is like a rapidly flowing mirror for which the breeze acts like a kerchief (for cleaning)

In the cloud's hand for the ambling horse

A whip has been given by the lightning on the mountain tops

O Himalaya art thou a theatre stage

Which has been made by nature's own hand for the elements

(to show their performance)

Oh how does the cloud sway around with excessive joy! The cloud is peeding like an unchained elephant

The gentle movement of the morning zephyr acts like a cradle

Every flower bud is swinging as if intoxicated by its own existence

The silence of the leaves declares

“I have never witnessed the jerk of the hand of the flower picker”

“My very silence is relating my tale

My abode is the quiet corner of nature’s solitude”

The brook descends musically from the mountain heights making the waves of Kauser and Tasneem feel small.^[5]

Like showing a mirror to the nature’s beauty Now avoiding, now dashing against the rock

In passing, play the orchestra of the pleasant music O traveller, the heart understands thine echo

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THE HIMALAYAS

When the *Laila*^[6] of the night opens its locks of long hair the sound of waterfalls spells charm

That silence of the night on which speech is sacrificed That thought-provoking state over-shadows trees

The beauty of dusk moves along the mountain range How beautiful looks this rouge on thine cheeks!

O Himalaya narrate some tale of the times

When thine valleys became the abode of Man’s ancestors^[7]

Say something about that simple life

Which was not stained with the rouge of sophistication

O imagination show me those eves and morns, that period again

Turn back O! advancing time

[¹] The alternation of the day and night is what produces time and advances age.

[²] Kalim is the abbreviation of “Kalimullah” (the one to whom God spoke), which is the title of the Prophet Hadhrat Musa (A.S.) (Moses). fl was honoured by God by speaking to him on the Tur in Mount Sinai.

[³] In the institutions of higher learning in the Islamic world completion of education culminates in the scholar being endowed with a turban as an insignia of his degree. It corresponds with the cap and academic hood of the Western world.

[⁴] Surriya or the Pleides is the cluster of seven brilliant stars in the Constellation of Taurus.

[⁵] These are two fountains and their rivers in paradise.

[⁶] Laila is the proverbial beloved in Arabic, Persian and Urdu literature. She is the heroine of the famous Arab epic story of “Laila-o-Majnun”. She derives her name from the traditional story which says that she was dark. Laila is often,used as metaphor for Light as is used here.

[⁷] *This refers to the antiquity of the Himalayas. Kashmir was inhabited at the time of the Indus Valley civilization in the third millenium B.C. (See CASSON STANLEY - 1940) The Discovery of Man: The Story of the Inquiry into Human Origins; Printed by the Star and Gazette Ltd., for Readers' Union Ltd., London, England, pp. 306-309). It is also believed that the Aryan philosophers wrote the Vedas in the solitude of the Himalayas.*