



PAYĀM-E MAŠREQ

PAYĀM-E MAŠREQ, title of a collection of Persian verse, by [Muhammad Iqbal](#). Iqbal begins his Urdu preface to the work with the following words: “The *Payām-e Mašreq* owes its inspiration to the *Western Divān* of Goethe, the German philosopher of life, about which the Israelite poet of Germany, Heine, says: ‘This is a bouquet presented by the West to the East as a token of regard ... This *Divān* bears testimony to the fact that the West, being dissatisfied with its weak and cold spiritual existence, now seeks warmth from the bosom of the East’” (*Kolliyāt-e Eqbāl, Fārsi*, p. 173).

In other words, Iqbal clearly intended his third large-scale Persian work as a response, and in many ways as a tribute, to the *West-Östlicher Divan* of Goethe, a poet for whom he had a profound admiration, and with whose verse he had become acquainted during his stay in Germany in 1907. It would, however, be wrong to imagine that Iqbal’s work was (as it is sometimes assumed) written in imitation of Goethe’s *Divan*, even though it does contain a number of poems inspired by or freely translated from the German poet’s original verse. Indeed, many of the sentiments expressed in the *Payām* bear a strong resemblance to those of his first collection of Urdu verse, *Bāng-e darā* “The Sound of the camel bell,” which appeared almost simultaneously.

Payām-e mašreq was first published in 1923 against the backdrop of the great changes that occurred after World War I and the final collapse of the Ottoman empire, both of which, with certain reservations, Iqbal welcomed. If any theme can be detected running through its remarkably fresh and varied verse, then it is probably one of optimism and excitement engendered by the



establishment of a new world order from which it seemed likely that the East, and the Islamic East in particular, would arise supreme.

Unlike Goethe's *Divan*, which consists of twelve books, the *Payām* is divided into three sections. The first of these is entitled *Lāla-ye Ṭur* "The Tulip of Sinai" and contains 163 *robā'is*, most of which provide summaries of, or comments upon, the deeper philosophical points already made in Iqbal's earlier Persian *maṭnawis* and the Urdu verse that he began to compose after his return from Europe in 1908. By this time, Iqbal had reached firm conclusions about the nature of the Self and the path that mankind should follow in its quest for the ultimate goal, and his belief in self-reliance and unswerving activity find eloquent expression in the aphorisms that constitute his quatrains (*robā'i* no. 14, *Payām-e mašreq*, p. 199):

Take up your dust and build yourself a frame,

A rampart firm in which you can reside.

Within your frame there beats a feeling heart,

A stream that gushes from the mountainside.

The stream, "flowing merrily through the meadow like the Milky Way" is a favorite image of Iqbal and also finds its place in Goethe's poem "Mahomets Gesang," which Iqbal freely translated into Persian under the title of *ju-ye āb* (*Payām-e mašreq*, p. 299). To his rendering he appended the following note: "In this poem, which was written much earlier than the *Western Divān*, the German poet has most beautifully depicted the Islamic concept of life. In fact it formed part of a projected Islamic drama, which he never managed to complete" (*ibid.*).

The second and longest part of the work, simply entitled *Afkār* "Reflections," contains a miscellany of occasional poems followed by a collection of *gāzals*, the style and content of which foreshadow those of his finest lyric verse that was published three years later (1927) in the collection entitled *Zabur-e 'Ajām* "The Psalms of Persia." The occasional poems, all of which are given titles, treat themes that Iqbal virtually made his own, such as the birth and fall of Adam, the rejection of Satan, the respective merits of learning and love, philosophy versus poetry, imperialism and slavery. In addition to these, the images of the soaring eagle, the tireless glow-worm, the relentless drop of water, and the gushing stream all give expression to Iqbal's familiar doctrine



of constant effort and activity.

The concluding section, entitled *Naqš-e ferang* “Images of the West,” offers thoughts, sometimes fair and balanced, but often humorous and contentious, on aspects of European civilization, which Iqbal had witnessed at first hand during the three years (1905-08) he spent as a student in Cambridge, Heidelberg, and Munich. In Cambridge University he had had the opportunity to study with the neo-Hegelian John McT. Ellis McTaggart (1866-1925), and later he was able to meet the distinguished French philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whom he much admired and to whom he paid due homage (*Payām-e mašreq*, p. 377). It is perhaps not surprising that in this part of the work, which is subtitled *Šohbat-e raftagān* (*Payām-e mašreq*, pp. 197 ff.), some Western philosophers, about whose thought Iqbal had strong reservations, come in for pungent and often amusing criticism. Hegel, for example is compared to “a broody hen that in its enthusiasm lays eggs without the assistance of a cock!” Although Iqbal had some regard for the emphasis placed by Nietzsche on dynamism and self-reliance, he obviously could not accept the atheistic basis of his thought. Indeed he goes so far as to describe the eminent German thinker as a “madman in the European china-shop.” Einstein, “the high-priest of light,” is dismissed as “one who revived the religion of Zoroaster,” while Lenin, elsewhere often treated sympathetically by Iqbal, is nevertheless seen as someone, who merely changed one master for another.

These and many other delights await the reader of *Payām-e mašreq*, which in the years immediately following its publication became one of Iqbal’s most frequently quoted works. Unfortunately, no English translation of the whole work exists. Only the quatrains were attempted by the Cambridge scholar, A. J. Arberry, in his short work *The Tulip of Sinai*, which has long since been out of print and is now very difficult to find.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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A general bibliography for the life and works of Iqbal can be found in the entry IQBAL, MUHAMMAD.

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