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Piam-I-Mashriq

Piam-i-Mashriq (پیام مشرق) or Message from the East; published in Persian, 1923) is a philosophical poetry book of Allama Iqbal, the great poet-philosopher of India and Pakistan. Piam-i-Mashriq is an answer to West-östlicher Diwan by Goethe, the famous German poet.

Immediately after the end of World War I, Iqbal started writing the Payam and it can be presumed that he would have thought in this respect to achieve a goal of bringing the East and the West closer to each other.

It is evident from some of Iqbal's Urdu letters that he first disclosed about his book-in-preparation (i.e. Payam) to Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, a distinguished scholar and his esteemed friend, in 1919:

"At present, I am writing a reply to the Divan of a Western poet (i.e. Goethe) and about half of it has been completed. Some poems will be in Persian and some in Urdu..... Two great German poets, Goethe and Uhland, were barristers. After practicing for a short time Goethe was appointed as an educational advisor to the state of Weimar and, thus, found much time to pay attention to his artistic intricacies. Uhland devoted his whole life to the law suits, and, therefore, he could write a few poems."

Let us now pass on to the Piam. It is meant to be a response to Goethe, who wrote the West ostlicher Divan about a century ago. In that book Goethe had denounced the coldness of spirituality in the Occident. The Divan invited the Orient to inspire the West with spiritual enthusiasm, fire of love. Faith, and conviction. It was a protest against scepticism and dout. The East has now responded after about a century through our poet, who has in the Message presented those moral, religious and social truths that concern the life and development of nations and individuals. In it Iqbal has tried to utter the East to the West. He has also afforded Europe an opportunity to see itself as others see it by presenting a "Picture of Europe." The poet makes the West see it is, and exhorts it to be. Iqbal has beautifully brought into prominence the points of similarity and contrast between Goethe and himself. According to the poet whilst Goethe is born and bred in the garden, Iqbal has emerged from a dead land. Whilst Goethe is the bird of the Garden, Iqbal is the sound of the bell that accompanies a caravan in the desert. Whilst the former is a drawn dagger, the

latter is still in the scabbard; and whilst the one has torn the shell and come out, the other is still within it.

In the Piam Iqbal has laid great stress on the cultivation of the inner sense, fervour, warmth of heart, and Divine Love. He has therein emphasised the point that the intellectualism and the materialism of the West are devoid of the real zest of life. They allow no relief. The West has the boat, but does not know the shore where to land. Wed reason to love, and get relieving moments of ecstasy is Iqbal's message to the West. Iqbal also exhorts the West not to restrict its attention to the external world alone, but to extend it to the inner self. The Piam asks the West to have a dip into the sea of introspection so that the self should attain to what Socrates called "perfection of soul."

So far as the arrangement of the book is concerned, its first part contains the "Rubais" (quatrains), each one of which is the language-symbolism of one mystic experience of the poet. Then we have his poem "The Conquest of Nature," that deals with the original sin of man and propounds his theory of evil; and points out the way in which man will master the forces of nature and become the superman. He then deals with his well-known themes of life and self through the tulip, the wave, the firefly, the spring, the stars, and many other objects. Then we, have his Ghazals each of which is a repository of the experiences received by the poet at one sitting or in one mood. We have then a picture of Europe, in which the poet has dealt with the philosophers, the politicians, the activities of the West. We have again in the end another collection of his poetic experiences that supplement his thought.

The Payam has been very rightly acclaimed as "a genuine attempt by an eminent Eastern poet, endowed with knowledge of Western literature and thought....to enter into a dialogue with Europe." The work includes a collection of quatrains, followed by a group of poems setting forth Iqbal's philosophy of life in lyrical form and some poetical sketches that picture European poets, philosophers and politicians.