

Classic Poetry Series

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali - poems -

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Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali(1837 - 31 December 1914)

Maulana Khawaja Altaf Hussain Hali (Urdu: مولانا خواجہ آصف حسین حالی) was an Urdu poet, and writer. Hali occupies a special position in the history of Urdu literature. He was a poet, a critic, a teacher, a reformer and an impressive prose-writer. He was a close friend of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

Moulana Altaf Hussain Hali has an important place in Urdu literary history. He is one of the Aanasar-e-Khamsa of Urdu. He has written the Musaddas-e-Hali which occupies an important position in Urdu literature.

 Short Biography

Born in Panipat, circumstances did not permit him to attain formal education in a school or college, yet he managed to acquire , through sustained self-effort, perfect command of Urdu, Persian and Arabic, and a good working knowledge of English. He later moved to Delhi where he wished to study the Islamic theology and poetic tradition. As a poet he did not confine himself within the narrow bounds of the ghazal, but successfully exploited the other poetic forms such as the nazm, the rubai, and the Marsia. More particularly, he harnessed his poetic abilities to the higher aims of social and moral edification. His famous long poem, Musaddas-e-Hali, examines the state of social and moral degradation prevalent in the then contemporary Muslim society. His prose treatise, Muqaddama-e-Shair-o-Shairi, is a pioneering work of literary criticism. It dwells on the limitations of the traditional ghazal, and points to the hollowness of its hackneyed themes and imagery, especially when the form is handled by inferior poets and versifiers.

 Civil Service

It was here he chose the cognomen of Khastah ("The Spent One", or "The Tired One"). He was forced to return home, and pursued a government job until displaced by the First War of Independence of 1857.

 Writing

After this turning point in his life, he drifted from job to job for several years, arriving eventually in Lahore in the mid 1870s, where he began to compose his epic poem at the request of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the Musaddas e-Madd o-Jazr

e-Islam ("An elegiac poem on the Ebb and Tide of Islam") under the new poetic pseudonym of Hali ("The Contemporary"). The Musaddas, or Musaddas-e-Hali, as it is often known, was published in 1879 to critical acclaim, and considered to herald the modern age of Urdu poetry. Hali also wrote one of the earliest works of literary criticism in Urdu, Muqaddamah-i Shay'r-o-Sha'iri.

Musaddas e mado jazr islam, one of Hali's most famous works describes the rise and fall of the Islamic empire in the sub-continent. It speaks about the Islamic empire at its best and worst. About Masadas-e-Hali, Sir Syed had said that If God will ask me that what have I achieved in life Then I will say that I've achieved The Mussadas written by Hali. The aim of this writing was to forewarn the Muslims of the sub-continent and make them more aware of their past and help them learn from their forefathers' mistakes. Some scholars of Pakistani nationalism also consider The Mussadas an important text for future articulation of a Muslim nation.

He has also written memorable biographies of Ghalib, Saadi Shirazi, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, entitled respectively, Yaadgar-e-Ghalib, Hayat-e-Saadi, and Hayat-e-Javad. His poem "Barkha Rut," describes the beauties of nature in the rainy season; "Hub-e-Watan," underscores the virtues of patriotism; while "Bewa ki Manajaat" focuses on the plight of widows in Indian society. Hali's interests were wide-ranging, and his literary abilities were commensurate with his humanitarian aims.

Divisiveness Of Bigotry

made murky that crystal-clear stream
Choked it with weeds of malice and hate
Kinsmen turned foes, brotherhood was a dream
Followers of Qibla became querulous, mean
Where are those Muslims, even ten can't be found
Who would happily see others prospering around.

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Duty Of Muslims

Islam had taught us, 'Show friendship to all' '
'In times of hardship share each other's grief '
'Extend hand to help, don't allow him to fall'
'When friends are afflicted partake in their pain'
If only so steadfast in our affections we could be
Khair-ul-Umam, we'd be called, to which all agree.

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Fruits Of Unity

A house in which all the hearts are united
In misery and joy all of them beat as one
If one is elated all the rest are delighted
If one is in sorrow, all others are saddened
That humblest of dwellings is surely more blessed
Than that royal castle where one soul is depressed.

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Honourable Quoms Of Hindus

All other noble Quoms command respect
Prosperity salutes them, with reverence hails
With wealth endowed, in trade well adept
Believers in progress, in step with time
Ever careful of training the young generation
Ever thinking of ways to empower their nation

The market is theirs and theirs is the shop
The trade is theirs, all business they own
Worldwide their reach and theirs is the crop
In work are engaged their elders and youth
Officialdom depends on their service, support
With bureau and business they have good rapport.

They are highly respected in every forum
Their word well regarded by all governments
In habits and manners imbued with decorum
Of calumny free their behaviour and speech
Work and more work is their reason for living
Toiling with their hands, never shirking from giving.

When they trip and fall, in an instant they rise
If caught in a snare, in a flash they break free
Whatever the mould, they adjust to its size
Whatever the shade they get dyed in its tint
They know what the need and demand is of time
They blow with the wind and adjust to the clime.

On so high a plane our sights have been set
That all seems one low from such lofty height
Not a clue in our head, we dare take no bet
On this 'sickly bitch' which 'progress' some call
When opening our eyes we glance all around
What inferior world us superiors surrounds!

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Impact Of Arabic Poetry

Arabs, who founded the excellence of rhyme
On heaven or earth who were second to none
The world recognized their eloquence sublime
But our honoured folk have their traces erased
Having first lost their art and second their glory
Then drowned poetry thus ending the story.

To letters they gave life, they adorned their fiction
With rhetoric they polished the text of religion
Like the tip of the sword they used their diction
The jab of their tongue was sharp as the dagger
Morality was furbished by their prose and poetry
The world was stirred by the flow of their oratory.

Their offspring here who have magic of words
Whose style is admired by aged and young
In rhetoric who are known all over the world
But their true worth is nothing more than this:
In poetry their lives when they frittered away
Then clowns in carnivals their poems do bray.

Nautch girls recite all their poems by heart
Bards and troubadours owe them much gratitude
In brothels, bordellos, their desires do start
Satan sings panegyrics, praises them no end
Having drawn thick veils over our minds entire
They have taken away our right thinking power.

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Islam: The Religion Of Unity

The Din that had built the foundation of love
Which emptied the world of all hatred and spite
Which made warring strangers as gentle as doves
From every Quom drew out the poison of hate
Arabs, Ethiops, Tajiks, Dailamites and Turks
Mixed like milk and sugar, their unity worked.

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Our Poets

Those rotten volumes of eulogies and odes
With a stink far worse than of toilets rank
Causing earth to split, which Providence forebode
Causing company of angels to blush in the heavens
What has caused decline of Din and of knowledge
Is the elegant tradition of denizens of our college.

If writing bad poetry some punishment deserves
If lies piled on lies is unpardonable sin
Then the court which Allah as Qazi preserves
Where the dividend for evil and good has been fixed
All sinners from there will be forthwith released
But our poets will fill all of Hell when deceased.

The labourers and menials, the porters and grooms
Prosper in the world by earning their wage
Singers earn patronage of the affluent and bloom
Even tambourine players get a fee when they ask
But bad poets, sick with this chronic malaise
Which ill are they cure for? By Allah's grace!

If water-carriers leave, all of us would expire
The clothes would be dirty if washermen quit
How would we survive if all servants retire?
If sweepers moved out, the towns would be filth
But if our poets would en masse emigrate
'We're rid of bad rubbish,' we'll happily state.

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Quest Of Learning

To the brim filled their cup from the fount of each tavern
From rivers quenched thirst, the big and the small
Moth-like they fluttered around flame in the cavern
Command of the Prophet they held close to heart
'Treat knowledge as if it were treasure once lost
Hold fast when you find it, no matter what cost.'

In seeking of knowledge they did not have peers
In every pursuit they were foremost and first
In charity unrivalled, in giving, what cheer!
Navigators, world famous, seamen par-excellence
In all the great nations their influence extended
To learn their trade methods every Quom contended.

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Result Of Disunity

The Prophet's words, had we only remembered
'You are brothers and sisters, Muslims one and all
When to brotherhood you have truly surrendered
Allah will then guide, be your helper, your mentor'
Our ship wouldn't have floundered, we would be safe
Prospering in adversity, we would master our fate.

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali

Revival Of Knowledge

They rejuvenated Aristotle's dead tomes
Plato from oblivion was brought back to life
Turned each spot to 'Greece', refined all the homes
Taste of wisdom's manna, they offered to all
From universal eye they removed the dense veil
From slumber woke up Time, set it ready to sail.

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