

Classic Poetry Series

Meer Taqi Meer
- poems -

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Meer Taqi Meer(1723 - 1810)

Syed Amanullah Meer Taqi was the only son of a Sufi saint, Meer Muttaqi. When Meer was a little child, his father looking at his face used to say which is this fire burning within your heart that is reflecting on your face. Sufis are lovers of God and so he thought that it was the fire of love for Allah. Living in a atmosphere of sufism at a very young age had profound effect on Meer. He did not have much desires for worldly things.

While on his death bed, his father instructed Meer to "Adopt the path of love. A life without love is an ordeal and losing one's heart in love is the real art. Though this path is riddled with difficulties, love is what drives the world." This is a philosophy reflected by Meer in most of his works.

After his father's death, at the age of 11 years, he was abandoned by the people in whose care he had been left. His elder step-brother also treated him badly. Meer left Agra for Delhi in search of livelihood . Samsamudaula gave him a scholarship of one rupee per day, but this did not continue for long because in 1739, Nadir Shah attacked Delhi in which Samsamudaula was killed. At that time Meer was in Agra. After staying in Agra for few days, Meer again went to Delhi. In Delhi, he stayed in the home of Khan Arzoo, who was the maternal uncle of Meer's step-brother Hafiz Muhammad Hasan. Muhammad Hassan wrote a letter to his uncle criticizing Meer. Soon Meer was homeless and jobless and roaming in the streets aimlessly.

After Nadir Shah's carnage there was no charm left in Delhi for the poets, many of them moved to Lucknow. Meer came to Lucknow in 1783; Nawab Asafaddaula fixed him Rs. 200 a month stipend.

His early experiences in life and shortness of money though had made a permanent change in his nature and even in the peaceful atmosphere of Lucknow he lived a terrible life. Simple things used to make him upset, many times he walked out of the Nawab's court. In 1810 he died in Lucknow.

A Meditation

How often in the years that close,
When truce had stilled the sieging gun,
The soldiers, mounting on their works,
With mutual curious glance have run
From face to face along the fronting show,
And kinsman spied, or friend- even in a foe.

What thoughts conflicting then were shared,
While sacred tenderness perforce
Welled from the heart and wet the eye;
And something of a strange remorse
Rebelled against the sanctioned sin of blood,
And Christian wars of natural brotherhood.

Then stirred the god within the breast-
The witness that is man's at birth;
A deep misgiving undermined
Each plea and subterfuge of earth;
They felt in that rapt pause, with warning rife,
Horror and anguish for the civil strife.

Of North or South they reeked not then,
Warm passion cursed the cause of war:
Can Africa pay back this blood
Spilt on Potomac's shore?
Yet doubts, as pangs, were vain the strife
to stay,
And hands that fain had clasped again
could slay.

How frequent in the camp was seen
The herald from the hostile one,
A guest and frank companion there
When the proud formal talk was done;
The pipe of peace was smoked even 'mid the
war,
And fields in Mexico again fought o'er.

In Western battle long they lay

So near opposed in trench or pit,
That foeman unto foeman called
As men who screened in tavern sit:
'You bravely fight' each to the other said-
'Toss us a biscuit!' o'er the wall it sped.

And pale on those same slopes, a boy-
A stormer, bled in noon-day glare;
No aid the Blue-coats then could bring,
He cried to them who nearest were,
And out there came 'mid howling shot and shell
A daring foe who him befriended well.

Mark the great Captains on both sides,
The soldiers with the broad renown-
They all were messmates on the Hudson's
marge,
Beneath one roof they laid them down;
And, free from hate in many an after pass,
Strove as in school-boy rivalry of the class.

A darker side there is; but doubt
In Nature's charity hovers there:
If men for new agreement yearn,
Then old upbraiding best forbear:
'The South's the sinner!' Well, so let it be;
But shall the North sin worse, and stand the
Pharisee?

O, now that brave men yield the sword,
Mine be the manful soldier-view;
By how much more they boldly warred,
By so much more is mercy due:
When Vicksburg fell, and the moody files
marched out,
Silent the victors stood, scorning to raise a
shout.

Meer Taqi Meer

Ankhon Mein Ji Mera Hai Idhar Yar Dekhna

ankhon mein ji mera hai idhar yar dekhna
ashiq ka apne akhri didar dekhna

kaisa chaman ke ham se asiron ko mana hai
chak-e-qafas se bag ki diwar dekhna

ankhen churaio na tuk abr-e-bahar se
meri taraf bhi didah-e-khunbar dekhna

ae ham-safar na able ko pahunche chashm-e-tar
laga hai mere paon mein a kar dekhna

hona na char chashm dik uss zulm-paishah se
hoshiyar zinhar khabardar dekhna

sayad dil hai dag-e-judai se rashk-e-bag
tujh ko bhi ho nasib ye gulzar dekhna

gar zamzama yahi hai koi din to hamsafar
is fasl hi mein ham ko giraftar dekhna

bul-bul hamare gul pe na gustakh kar nazar
ho jayega gale ka kahin har dekhna

shayad hamari khak se kuch ho bhi ae nasim
girbal kar ke kucha-e-dildar dekhna

us khush-nigah ke ishq se parhez kijio 'Mir'
jata hai leke ji hi ye azar dekhna

Meer Taqi Meer

Be-Khudee Le Ga'Ee Kahaan Ham Ko

be-KHudee le ga'ee kahaaN ham ko
der se intaZaar hai apnaa

rote phirte hain saaree-saaree raat
ab yahee rozgaar hai apnaa

de ke dil ham jo ho ga'e majboor
ismeN kyaa iKHtiyaar hai apnaa

kuchh naheeN ham misaal-e-'unqaa lek
shahar-shahar ishtahaar hai apnaa

jisko tum aasmaan kahate ho
so diloN kaa Gubaar hai apnaa

Meer Taqi Meer

Hastee Apnee Hubaab Kee See Hai

hastee apnee Hubaab kee see hai
ye numa'ish suraab kee see hai

naazukee uss ke lab kee kya kahiye
paNkhaRee ik gulaab kee see hai

baar-baar us ke dar pe jaata hooN
Haalat ab iztiraab kee see hai

maiN jo bola kaha ke ye aawaaz
usee KHaanah-KHaraab kee see hai

Meer" un neem-baaz aaNkhoN meN
saaree mastee sharaab kee see hai

Meer Taqi Meer

In The Prison Pen

Listless he eyes the palisades
And sentries in the glare;
'Tis barren as a pelican-beach
But his world is ended there.

Nothing to do; and vacant hands
Bring on the idiot-pain;
He tries to think- to recollect,
But the blur is on his brain.

Around him swarm the plaining ghosts
Like those on Virgil's shore-
A wilderness of faces dim,
And pale ones gashed and hoar.

A smiting sun. No shed, no tree;
He totters to his lair-
A den that sick hands dug in earth
Ere famine wasted there,

Or, dropping in his place, he swoons,
Walled in by throngs that press,
Till forth from the throngs they bear
him dead-
Dead in his meagreness.

Meer Taqi Meer

Malvern Hill

Ye elms that wave on Malvern Hill
In prime of morn and May,
Recall ye how McClellan's men
Here stood at bay?
While deep within yon forest dim
Our rigid comrades lay -
Some with the cartridge in their mouth,
Others with fixed arms lifted South -
Invoking so
The cypress glades? Ah wilds of woe!

The spires of Richmond, late beheld
Through rifts in musket-haze,
Were closed from view in clouds of dust
On leaf-walled ways,
Where streamed our wagons in caravan;
And the Seven Nights and Days
Of march and fast, retreat and fight,
Pinched our grimed faces to ghastly plight -
Does the elm wood
Recall the haggard beards of blood?

The battle-smoked flag, with stars eclipsed,
We followed (it never fell!) -
In silence husbanded our strength -
Received their yell;
Till on this slope we patient turned
With cannon ordered well;
Reverse we proved was not defeat;
But ah, the sod what thousands meet! -
Does Malvern Wood
Bethink itself, and muse and brood?

We elms of Malvern Hill
Remember every thing;
But sap the twig will fill:
Wag the world how it will,
Leaves must be green in Spring.

Meer Taqi Meer

On The Photograph Of A Corps Commander

Ay, man is manly. Here you see
The warrior-carriage of the head,
And brave dilation of the frame;
And lighting all, the soul that led
In Spottsylvania's charge to victory,
Which justifies his fame.

A cheering picture. It is good
To look upon a Chief like this,
In whom the spirit moulds the form.
Here favoring Nature, oft remiss,
With eagle mien expressive has endued
A man to kindle strains that warm.

Trace back his lineage, and his sires,
Yeoman or noble, you shall find
Enrolled with men of Agincourt,
Heroes who shared great Harry's mind.
Down to us come the knightly Norman fires,
And front the Templars bore.

Nothing can lift the heart of man
Like manhood in a fellow-man.
The thought of heaven's great King afar
But humbles us- too weak to scan;
But manly greatness men can span,
And feel the bonds that draw.

Meer Taqi Meer

Rebel Color-Bearers At Shiloh

_A plea against the vindictive cry raised by civilians
shortly after the surrender at Appomattox_

The color-bearers facing death
White in the whirling sulphurous wreath,
Stand boldly out before the line;
Right and left their glances go,
Proud of each other, glorying in their show;
Their battle-flags about them blow,
And fold them as in flame divine:
Such living robes are only seen
Round martyrs burning on the green-
And martyrs for the Wrong have been.

Perish their Cause! but mark the men-
Mark the planted statues, then
Draw trigger on them if you can.

The leader of a patriot-band
Even so could view rebels who so could stand;
And this when peril pressed him sore,
Left aidless in the shivered front of war-
Skulkers behind, defiant foes before,
And fighting with a broken brand.
The challenge in that courage rare-
Courage defenseless, proudly bare-
Never could tempt him; he could dare
Strike up the leveled rifle there.

Sunday at Shiloh, and the day
When Stonewall charged- McClellan's
crimson May,
And Chickamauga's wave of death,
And of the Wilderness the cypress wreath-
All these have passed away.
The life in the veins of Treason lags,
Her daring color-bearers drop their flags,
And yield. _Now_ shall we fire?
Can poor spite be?

Shall nobleness in victory less aspire
Than in reverse? Spare Spleen her ire,
And think how Grant met Lee.

Meer Taqi Meer

The College Colonel

He rides at their head;
A crutch by his saddle just slants in view,
One slung arm in splints, you see,
Yet he guides his strong steed - how coldly too.

He brings his regiment home -
Not as they filed two years before,
But a remnant half-tattered, and battered, and worn,
Like castaway sailors, who - stunned
By the surf's loud roar,
Their mates dragged back and seen no more -
Again and again breast the surge,
And at last crawl, spent, to shore.

A still rigidity and pale -
An Indian aloofness lines his brow;
He has lived a thousand years
Compressed in battle's pains and prayers,
Marches and watches slow.

There are welcoming shots, and flags;
Old men off hat to the Boy,
Wreaths from gay balconies fall at his feet,
But to him - there comes alloy.

It is not that a leg is lost,
It is not that an arm is maimed,
It is not that the fever has racked -
Self he has long since disclaimed.

But all through the Seven Days' Fight,
And deep in the Wilderness grim,
And in the field-hospital tent,
And Petersburg crater, and dim
Lean brooding in Libby, there came -
Ah heaven! - what truth to him.

Meer Taqi Meer

The Martyr

(Indicative of the Passion of the People
on the 15th Day of April, 1865)

* * *

Good Friday was the day
Of the prodigy and crime,
When they killed him in his pity,
When they killed him in his prime
Of clemency and calm-
When with yearning he was filled
To redeem the evil-willed,
And, though conqueror, be kind;
But they killed him in his kindness,
In their madness and their blindness,
And they killed him from behind.

There is sobbing of the strong,
And a pall upon the land;
But the People in their weeping
Bare the iron hand;
Beware the People weeping
When they bare the iron hand.

He lieth in his blood-
The father in his face;
They have killed him, the Forgiver-
The Avenger takes his place,
The Avenger wisely stern,
Who in righteousness shall do
What the heavens call him to,
And the parricides remand;
For they killed him in his kindness,
In their madness and their blindness,
And his blood is on their hand.

There is sobbing of the strong,
And a pall upon the land;
But the People in their weeping
Bare the iron hand;

Beware the People weeping
When they bare the iron hand.

Meer Taqi Meer

The Mound by the Lake

The grass shall never forget this grave.
When homeward footing it in the sun
After the weary ride by rail,
The stripling soldiers passed her door,
Wounded perchance, or wan and pale,
She left her household work undone -
Duly the wayside table spread,
With evergreens shaded, to regale
Each travel-spent and grateful one.
So warm her heart, childless, unwed,
Who like a mother comforted.

Meer Taqi Meer

The Released Rebel Prisoner

Armies he's seen- the herds of war,
But never such swarms of men
As now in the Nineveh of the North-
How mad the Rebellion then!

And yet but dimly he divines
The depth of that deceit,
And superstition of vast pride
Humbled to such defeat.

Seductive shone the Chiefs in arms-
His steel the nearest magnet drew;
Wreathed with its kind, the Gulf-weed drives-
'Tis Nature's wrong they rue.

His face is hidden in his beard,
But his heart peers out at eye-
And such a heart! like a mountain-pool
Where no man passes by.

He thinks of Hill- a brave soul gone;
And Ashby dead in pale disdain;
And Stuart with the Rupert-plume,
Whose blue eye never shall laugh again.

He hears the drum; he sees our boys
From his wasted fields return;
Ladies feast them on strawberries,
And even to kiss them yearn.

He marks them bronzed, in soldier-trim,
The rifle proudly borne;
They bear it for an heirloom home,
And he- disarmed- jail-worn.

Home, home- his heart is full of it;
But home he never shall see,
Even should he stand upon the spot:
'Tis gone!- where his brothers be.

The cypress-moss from tree to tree
Hangs in his Southern land;
As weird, from thought to thought of his
Run memories hand in hand.

And so he lingers- lingers on
In the City of the Foe-
His cousins and his countrymen
Who see him listless go.

Meer Taqi Meer

The Stone Fleet

I have a feeling for those ships,
Each worn and ancient one,
With great bluff bows, and broad in the beam:
Ay, it was unkindly done.
But so they serve the Obsolete-
Even so, Stone Fleet!

You'll say I'm doting; do but think
I scudded round the Horn in one-
The Tenedos, a glorious
Good old craft as ever run-
Sunk (how all unmeet!)
With the Old Stone Fleet.

An India ship of fame was she,
Spices and shawls and fans she bore;
A whaler when her wrinkles came-
Turned off! till, spent and poor,
Her bones were sold (escheat)!
Ah! Stone Fleet.

Four were erst patrician keels
(Names attest what families be),
The Kensington, and Richmond too,
Leonidas and Lee:
But now they have their seat
With the Old Stone Fleet.

To scuttle them-a pirate deed-
Sack them, and dismast;
They sunk so slow, they died so hard,
But gurgling dropped at last.
Their ghosts in gales repeat
Woe's us, Stone Fleet!

And all for naught. The waters pass-
Currents will have their way;
Nature is nobody's ally; 'tis well;
The harbor is bettered-will stay.

A failure, and complete,
Was your Old Stone Fleet.

Meer Taqi Meer