

Marsiya - Translation and Notes

1. When the sun had completed its nightly journey, the unveiled dawn appeared in all its radiance; the king (Husain) whose stirrups are the firmament¹ looked towards the sky. That Lord, turning to his companions, called out to them and said: 'At last the time has come;² praise and magnify God. Arise and perform the morning-prayer'.
2. 'Indeed, brave warriors, this is the day of strife and slaughter. Here the blood of the family of Muhammad will flow. The face of the darling of Zahra³ is red with joy. The night of separation has passed, the day of union has come.⁴ We are those for whom the angels will grieve. We have spent our nights in anguish waiting for this day.
3. 'This morning is the very morning whose evening is blessed. Those who depart from here will find a place in Paradise. May we who are dying of thirst reach Kausar with honour.⁵ May God inscribe all our names in the roll of the faithful. All of them are peerless. May this clamour ring out from every side, "May the martyr rise up from the world in glory".⁶

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1. gərdun-rykab: i.e. Husain is so mighty that he rides the heavens like a horse.
 2. axyr implies two things: (1) at last dawn has broken and the time for prayer has come. (2) the last day has dawned for the martyrs who will all be dead by evening.
 3. zəhra: lit. 'bright, pure' - the epithet of Fatima, the mother of Husain.
 4. I.e. today we shall be united with God.
 5. abru: lit. 'with water / lustre on the face' Kausar is one of the springs of Paradise.
 6. swrxru: 'with a red face'. Red is associated with honour; black (siyahru) with disgrace. Red of course is the colour of the blood which will flow in the battle.

4. Hearing this, the faithful ones rose from their beds. Each one of them adorned himself with glorious raiment. All fearlessly combed their beards and moustaches, and putting on their turbans came near to their incomparable leader.⁷ They had coloured cloaks on their shoulders; their loins were girded up; their clothes were perfumed with musk, civet and attar of roses.
5. On their dry lips was the praise of God, on their faces light. Fear, panic, grief and sadness were far away from their hearts. Generous, pious men, steadfast and accomplished; happy and joking, skillful and proud. Their beautiful accents brought joy at once to every ear. Such charm there was in their words, that all hearts were gladdened.
6. Brave warriors,⁸ forbearing men equal to the heavens, courageous. High-minded, like Solomon in battle, like lions in Sheba.⁹ The most valliant men of the time were subdued by their might. Even in hunger, their hearts, eyes and desires were sated. They considered the world of no account whatsoever. Their great hearts thought of the ocean as nothing but a drop of water.¹⁰

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7. Note the play on words: ymame 'turbans'; ymam-e zaman 'the leader of the time', i.e. Husain.
8. savent - one of a number of unusual 'Hindi' words which Anis uses, presumably to display his mastery of the language.
9. saba 'Sheba', where Solomon fell in love with Queen Balqīs. Logically the line should read: saba men swlayman, vyva men fer. The reverse order is probably a deliberate attempt on the part of Anis to make his audience take notice. Sheba was also famous for its lions, and Solomon as a fighter.
10. daryadyl 'having a heart like the ocean' - a play on words with behr and qatra.

7. In their speeches, those allusions and innuendos were incomparable. Even if (one small) point came out of their mouth, then it was choice. It was as if their mouth was a chapter from the book of rhetoric. Their dry tongues were more effective than the honey of eloquence.¹¹ The poets of Arabia were captivated by their accents. The pistachios of their lips were filled with salt.¹²
8. Laughter was on their lips, their faces were more blooming than the roses. Their bodies gave off the fragrance of the cloak of Joseph. They were abstemious, devout, saintly and good-natured. The servants of Paradise desired to emulate their devotion (lit. 'the desire for whose slavery was in the hearts of the servants of Paradise').¹³ Such rubies are not found in stones, nor such pearls in the oyster-shell. The houris declared that they were angels, not men.
9. There was no water in which these celestial lords might wash before prayers, but a magnificent lustre was imparted to their faces by the dust they used as a substitute.¹⁴ Suns seemed (to be shining) through a fine cloud.¹⁵ They are humble men, the servants of Abū Turāb.¹⁶ Their moon like faces were made even

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11. kam (in Persian) means 'the palate' - an obvious play on words with zaban.
12. pistachios, because the two halves of the nut are said to resemble the lips. namak, as often, figuratively means 'charm'.
13. yylman - the beautiful boys of Paradise who serve the faithful.
14. ab is often used in the sense of 'brightness', 'sparkle', 'lustre'. teyemmum - when no water is available for ritual washing (vwzu), dust or sand may be used as a substitute.
15. Their faces shone through the dust, as the sun shines brightly through a cloud of dust in the desert, giving a silvery effect.
16. abu twrab lit. 'father of the dust' - a title of 'Ali. In Arabic abu functions like -vala in Urdu, thus a better translation would be 'dusty one'. The nickname was given to Ali by the Prophet who one day found him sleeping in the sand. There is an obvious play on words with xaksar - one who puts dust on his head as a sign of humility.

brighter. Because of the dust, there was even more lustre on these mirrors.¹⁷

10. The noble relations of the King (Husain) came out from the tent. Among them were some of the darling children of Fatima.¹⁸ There was the beautiful Qasim and the handsome Ali Akbar. On one side there was Aqil and Muslim, and the young striplings of Ja'far.¹⁹ The light of their faces was (reflected) on the highest heaven. The flower-bud of these eighteen suns was on the earth.²⁰
11. That morning, the shadow of the stars²¹ and that light. If Moses, who asked God to show Himself on the summit of Sinai, saw (that light), he would fall unconscious.²² The glory of God was manifest in the flowers. Here and there on the trees, the birds were singing the praise of the Lord.²³ Rose gardens were put to shame by the valley which resembled Paradise. The whole desert was perfumed by the scent of the flowers.
12. The dancing brilliance²⁴ of that desert-verdure in the cool wind. The russet satin²⁵ of the sky was put to shame before it. The
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17. Mirrors, originally made of metal, were polished with sand. On the other hand, something coated with dust would hardly be expected to become brighter. The figure is known as tazad (contradiction).
18. xeyr wn nysa - lit. 'the best of women' - a title of Fatima. Cf. xeyr wl befer 'the best of men' - Muhammad.
19. Ja'far was the paternal grandfather of 'Aun and Muhammad, two young boys who are introduced in verse 54.
20. The eighteen relatives of Husain, who fought at Karbala. cf. verse 30
21. The early morning when the stars are setting.
22. arēni-go 'he who said "show me"' - referring to Moses who asked God to show Himself and was blinded by the effulgence on Mount Sinai (tur).
23. tesbih-xwan 'pronouncing "swbhan ullah"'.
24. lehek 'flashing', 'brilliance', 'dancing of a flame'.
25. The early morning sky has a russet colour. Satin (etlas) also appears to dance and flash as it catches the light.

swaying of the trees, the fragrance of the flowers; the glinting of the dew-drops on every rose petal. Diamonds were ashamed; incomparable pearls acknowledge defeat.²⁶ Even the leaves of every tree were studded with jewels.

13. How miraculous the art of the Creator's pen!²⁷ From every leaf the craft of embellishment was revealed.²⁸ The imagination of accomplished poets is powerless (before it).²⁹ How could the mind of a plain workman understand such arts.³⁰ The whole world is captivated by the glory of the Lord of Servants (i.e. God). How beautifully adorned (with enamel) was this valley which resembled Paradise.³¹
14. That light, that fresh, cool desert, that sky. The call of the pheasant, the quail, the partridge and the peacock! The flowers in full bloom, the plaintive song of the sweet-voiced birds. The morning breeze imparted coolness to the heart. The green-leafed trees, covered in flowers, were clothed in red. The ditches around the date-palms were (like) the baskets of flower-sellers.³²

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26. nisar: literally 'sacrificed', 'devoted'.
27. qwrban: literally 'sacrificed' (syn. with nysar), here used as an exclamation.
28. tarsi: (1) the art of decorating gold and silver with jewels; (2) the art of balancing the words of a clause in ornamental prose. vereq can mean both 'a leaf of a tree' and 'the page of a book'.
29. Reading fykrst-e-šwera-e-hwnar-šwar, rather than fykr se which does not scan or make sense!
30. sadekar: (1) a jeweller who specialised in simple pieces of gold and silver.
(2) a writer who produces unadorned prose
31. mina: (1) enamel, a blue colour
(2) heaven, paradise. An obvious play on words.
32. nexl in Arabic means 'a date palm'. In Urdu and Persian it means any kind of tree. Anis probably takes the word in its primary sense.
thala 'dish', 'tray' here refers to the irrigation ditches dug at the foot of the palm. They were filled with petals which had been blown down by the wind.

15. The deserts, the gusts of the morning breeze, the verdant gardens. Here and there on the flowers those pearls full of lustre. The rising and falling of the branches, swaying ceaselessly in the wind. If there was one nightingale on the top of the palm, there were a thousand flowers.³³ Because the primroses of the garden of Zahra desired water, dew filled the cups of the roses.³⁴
16. The gathering of the ring-doves around the cypress.³⁵ The voice of the cuckoo, the song (of the dove) declaring 'righteousness is his secret'.³⁶ The cry of 'our Lord is blessed' ringing out on all sides. The birds carried out their rites of worship in this way. It was not only the flowers which praised God on high, but the very thorns had the praise of God on their lips (lit. 'on the tip of their tongue').
17. Lifting its hand, the ant repeated over and over, 'Oh Cherisher of these weak, seed-pushing creatures,³⁷ we are devoted to You. From every side came the call of 'Eternal One', and 'Almighty'. Here the cry of 'There is only one God'; there the cry of 'Mighty is the Creator'. The birds in the sky were captivated, the deer in the woods entranced. The jungle lions were roaring in their caves.

33. Usually the nightingale sits alone on a tree. hezār may also mean 'nightingale' (= hezār dastān - the bird that tells a thousand stories).

34. The word order is zehr-e-gwlsen-e-zehra jo ab ke xwahan the... zehr - an extremely unusual word (of Arabic origin) meaning a small yellow flower (here = the men of Husain). There is an obvious play on words with zehra.

35. I.e. the soldiers gather around Husain.

36. hegge syrrehw - words imitating the song of the dove.

37. dana-keś - an epithet of the ant.

18. On one side, amid the thorns were the flowers of the garden of the Prophet; and from their fragrance the length and breadth of the desert was like Paradise. The glory and adornment of the world, the house of the pious Lady Fatima. This was the garden which the Prophet had planted with his own hands. It was cut down in the first ten days of the month of mourning.³⁸ It was cut down in the desert by the hands of traitors.³⁹
19. Ah God, those days of autumn, the springtime of this garden. The rosy-cheeked sons of Muhammad could not contain themselves for joy. They had become (like) bridegrooms,⁴⁰ but death was their garland of flowers. They had been awake all night. Ah! the intoxication of sleep. All roads were fragrant with the perfume of their bodies. When they smiled the buds burst open in joy.
20. That desert, the glory of the russet coloured tent.⁴¹ It was as if a fresh sky had been erected over the earth. Its canopy was the highest heaven (which required) no tent-poles for support. This ancient house, the city of the faith, the life of the world. Under it were the loved-ones of darling of Allah. Under it were the stars of the empyrean of the Almighty.
21. This desert land boasted and put on airs before the firmament. The seventh heaven declared that it was a tenth sky.⁴² The curtains (of the tent) were the envy of the veils of the eyes of the most beautiful

38. aza 'mourning', 'grief' - especially the mourning for the death of Husain, which takes place during the first ten days of Muharram.

39. bay, bayī - an obvious play on words.

40. The comparison of Husain to a bridegroom is found several times in this marsiya.

41. I.e. the early-morning sky which served as their shelter.

42. After the seven heavens come the kwrsi (the crystalline heaven) and the erf (the empyrean - the throne of God). Thus there are nine heavens in all. The tent of Husain is thought to be even higher than the ninth heaven (erf).

women. The sky plucked its stars from this threshing-floor.⁴³
When it saw the light on this dome (which was as high as) the
court-yard of Saturn, how the morning laughed at the disc of the
sun.⁴⁴

22. Suddenly, the white line (of the light of the dawn) appeared in
the sky.⁴⁵ The great king (i.e. Husain) took his place to lead
the prayers. Prayer-mats were spread out behind the lord of men
and Jinn (Husain). The moon-faced Ali Akbar gave the call to
prayer⁴⁶ in the tone of Hasan. Everyone's eyes were flooded with
tears. It was as if the voice of the Prophet fell upon their ears.
23. The birds were silent; the trees rocked in ecstasy. The leaves
and the flowers, the buds and the fruit magnified God. The soil,
the vegetation, the wilderness and inhabited places were all
engrossed in praise. The beasts of the ocean raised their heads
from the waters. Was it a miracle or was it the voice of the
darling of Shabbir?⁴⁷ From land and sea, there came the cry of
'God is great'.⁴⁸
24. The women of the king in the tent were weeping piteously.⁴⁹ In the
court-yard, the renowned Bāno, was standing silently.⁵⁰ Then giving
her blessing,⁵¹ Zainab repeated: 'I devote myself to those who are

43. Lit. 'from the stars, the sky was the plucker of ears from this
threshing floor'.

44. keyvan - 'Saturn' is considered to be in the seventh heaven. The
dome of the tent is thought to be as high as the court-yard of Saturn.
Note janab - here used in its primary meaning of 'court-yard'.
gwl-e aftar - may also mean 'sun flower' (surej makhfi).
gwl hona means to be extinguished. Thus it is implied that the sun
was extinguished by the light emanating from the desert where Husain
stood.

45. The light of the true dawn (swbh-e sadyq) - the time for morning-
prayer.

46. ezan - the announcement of the time of prayer, usually called by the
mwazzyn from the minaret. Hasan was noted for his sweet voice.

47. I.e. Ali Akbar. Shabbir is a title of Husain.

48. takbir - 'saying allahw akbar', cf. tasbih - 'saying swbhan allah'.

49. nāmus (masc. pl.) implies the women and children (i.e. ahl-e herem).

50. Bāno, the wife of Husain, usually taken by marsiya writers to be the
mother of 'Alī Akbar.

51. belaerj lena lit. 'to take the evils (of someone upon oneself'.)

- praying; I sacrifice myself to the muezzin.⁵² They are calling out the praise and glory of the Lord Almighty.⁵³ Oh people! Hear the call to prayer of my nephew who is as beautiful as Joseph.
25. 'Those fine accents, that reading of the Quran, the force and power of his speech! Indeed, his grandfather⁵⁴ was the greatest of orators. It sounds like the strains of wise King David.⁵⁵ Oh Lord, keep that voice in the world for all eternity. The melodious tones of his voice are like the petals of the flowers.⁵⁶ A nightingale is chirping in the garden of the Prophet.
26. Let someone bless him on my behalf. May God protect you, my child, from the evil-eye.⁵⁷ That fine speaker whose eloquence would please the hearts (of others). For two days he has not been able to drink even one drop of water. In strange lands⁵⁸ this misfortune has befallen Husain. This is the third (day of) hunger for my darling, the light of my eyes.
27. When the call of 'Make ready for worship,⁵⁹ was given in the ranks, the prayer was begun and the King of Creation (Husain) arose. Those ranks of light; the leader of the prayers who possessed the qualities of the angels! The path of salvation would have rubbed its eyes on his feet.⁶⁰ Husain's radiance went up to the empyrean on high. Was it a tablet of the Holy Quran⁶¹ or was it the prayer-mat of Husain?

52. I.e. Ali Akbar.

53. zwljēlal, lit. 'possessor of glory'.

54. jēd(d) - 'paternal grandfather' (dada), i.e. Ali.

55. David, the singer of the psalms, was renowned for his sweet voice.

56. ṣoba - a technical term of music meaning 'the different qualities and tones of the voice'.

57. ayn-wl kamal - a euphemism - lit. 'the eye of excellence'. Praising someone excessively may bring the evil eye.

58. ywrbēt - here in its primary meaning 'foreign land', 'exile'.

59. qēd qamēt ws-salat - lit. 'the prayer is instituted'. These words mark the beginning of the service.

60. qēdmōj rēr ankh malna - an act of great humility.

61. mwshef - 'a page', esp. of the Quran, hence the Quran itself, cf. v.28. lōwh refers to the ornamental title page of the Quran.