

MUHAMMAD IQBAL

ON RIVER RAVI'S BANK

Evening's calm descends.
The river absorbed in its song,
I can't express what I feel.
The water music, like a litany,
carries me along,
enticing me to kneel
down and pray. The world appears
a holy place to me.
Although I stand
beside the river
I have lost my bearings.
I don't know where I am.

The hoary sky's trembling hands
can't hold the cup. The red wine spills
and stains the evening's dress.
The fleeting day
passes into nothingness.
The twilight hues resemble flowers
like wreaths laid upon the setting sun.
In the distance the slender towers
of the Mughal king's
stately tomb confer magnificence
upon the lonely scene.
Imperial vestiges which remind
how ruthless time has been.
I see all this as if on the pages
of a book which belongs
to the former ages.
The place conveys the sense
of an almost stilled serenade
and the trees arrayed

in an impassive muster.

A swift boat moves
along the river's surface.
The boatman toils
to cope with the rush of water.
It moves at a clipping pace,
just like man's vision
which can reach in an instant
what may be extremely distant.
The boat soon goes out of sight.
In a similar fashion
the vessel of man's life
rides the sea of infinitude,
appears and disappears.
It meets with no rude shocks,
nor does it founder.
Although it may vanish from our view
it will never perish.

—*Translated by Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman*