

world methods in an age dominated by new influences, but one circumstance particularly helped them in this respect. The greater part of their lives was spent at Rampur, in Rampur State, in the midst of surroundings which were peculiarly favourable to the preservation of their old notions, where they were, for a long time, away from contact with Western education or scholarship. Dagh went from Rampur to Hyderabad (Deccan), where again he had the advantage of breathing in an Oriental atmosphere. About the end of his career he must have come across a large number of men in Hyderabad who had received modern education and adopted Western ways of life, but he was then too old to change and he lived and died as a fit successor of Mir and Zauq.

Nawab Mirza Khan, better known by his *nom de plume*, Dagh, was the son of Nawab Shams-ud-Din and a grandson of Nawab Ahmad Bakhsh Khan, a family distinguished for its military as well as literary traditions. His education was on the same lines. Nawab Mirza read his Persian with Maulvi Ghias-ud-Din, the compiler of the popular Dictionary, called the *Ghias-ul-Lughat*. He learnt calligraphy from two of the best calligraphists of his time, Syed Amir Panjakash and Mirza Ibadullah Beg. He took a course of training in fencing, in horsemanship and marksmanship and became in early life an accomplished youth according to the standard obtaining in those days. The art of writing verse was also regarded as a necessary accomplishment for the nobility and he became a pupil of the

famous poet Zauq of Delhi, who counted the heir-apparent of the then King of Delhi among his pupils. This gave Dagh not only the advantage of the guidance of an undoubted master of Urdu verse, but also brought him into contact with the heir-apparent, who had a great talent for poetry and was devoting himself to it. Dagh found admission, while still a lad, to the poetical contests that used to be held inside the palace and were attended by the best poets of the day. In one of those contests, at which the King himself was present, he read a verse which so pleased the King that he kissed his forehead. It was soon discovered that in this young man they had a poet, who had received poetry as a gift from nature and was not resorting to versification simply as an art or an accomplishment. Though Zauq's fame was at its height, and Ghalib, who was at first known as a writer of Persian poetry, had also made a great mark as an Urdu poet, it is remarkable that about 1857 Dagh too was a poet who counted, though he was only six and twenty at the time.

The tale of the Mutiny and the wreck and ruin that it brought in its train are too well-known to require any repetition. Many a scholarly man in Delhi was obliged to leave his house and home and to migrate to other parts of India. Unfortunate as this was for Delhi, it was perhaps the means of spreading the light of old Delhi throughout the land. Many poets wrote elegies on Delhi as ruined by the Mutiny and the following lines of Dagh, from a *Musaddas* of his, on the subject will show what his feelings must have been.

زمین کے حال پہ اب آسمان روتا ہے
ہر اک فراق مکین میں مکان روتا ہے
گداؤں شاہ و ضعیف و جوان روتا ہے
غرض یہاں کیلئے اک جہان روتا ہے

- (“Heaven now weeps over the condition, to which the earth has been reduced.
“Every house weeps (in lonely solitude) for its denizens, who have departed.
“(The misery is so universal) that the mendicant and the King, the old and the young, all weep alike.
“A world, in short, is weeping over the ruin of Delhi”)

It may be mentioned in this connection that the heart of the poet, though naturally mourning the misfortunes of his beloved town, was not without a prophetic gleam of hope, as unlike many others, he ended his poem with a prayer :

الہی پھر اسے آباد و شاد دیکھیں ہم
الہی پھر اسے حسب مراد دیکھیں ہم

- (“May we see it prosperous and happy once more ;
“May we see it as we desire.”)

Though Dagh lived to catch occasional glimpses of the re-inhabited Delhi, that was not enough to satisfy one who had seen better days in the metropolis of India, and he died in a distant part of the country, which was his last adopted home and where he reached the height of his success.

Before we come, however, to the story of his life in the Deccan, we have to say something about the best part of his life spent at Rampur. The

rulers of this hospitable State have been known for their literary taste and their patronage of literature. Dagh found an asylum at Rampur, after the revolution at Delhi, in the time of Nawab Yusaf Ali Khan and continued to reside there happily till the time of Nawab Kalb-i-Ali Khan, who succeeded Nawab Yusaf Ali Khan. He was appointed a Superintendent of the State stables,¹ which sounds extremely unpoetic, but the Nawab thereby found a way to provide a decent living for a self-respecting man. It may also be remembered that Dagh's old love for horses and his horsemanship would fit him for this work, and yet the duties of his office would not be so heavy as to leave him no leisure for his favourite literary occupation. It is said he performed his duties to the satisfaction of everybody and held this position as long as he was there.² He enjoyed also the position of a companion of the ruler of the State. The Nawab liked his company very much on account of his literary talent.

At Rampur poetical contests were not uncommon, as the Nawab had quite a galaxy of *ghazal* writers around him, among whom Taslim and Amir may be specially mentioned. The latter was a formidable rival to Dagh as a poet. There has been a great controversy between the partisans of the Delhi School and the Lucknow School over the relative merits of Dagh and Amir, into which we need not enter, as most people are now inclined to acknowledge both of them as

1. Dagh-i-Dehlawi by S. Muhammad Faruq, Page 6.

2. Dagh-i-Dehlawi by S. Muhammad Faruq, Page 7.

masters of Urdu *ghazal* in modern times, each having his own distinguishing features. This view would find support from the attitude, which both these masters maintained towards one another. Unlike many others who shut their eyes to the merits of their rivals in poetical reputation, these two respected each other and remained life-long friends, so much so that their remains rest close to one another to-day in one and the same grave-yard at Hyderabad, as those of the two best representatives of their age in the domain of Urdu *Ghazal*.

The chief event in the life of Dagh at Rampur, from a literary point of view, was his contact with Amir. Without such a strong competition, probably the best in him would have remained dormant. In competition both the poets had to strain every nerve. Of all the collections of Dagh's *ghazals*, I think, on the whole, the best and most characteristic specimen of his writing is the *Gulzar-i-Dagh* composed during his stay at Rampur. He shines in it at his best. It is full of *ghazals* depicting various phases of love with a masterly psychological analysis. The *ghazals* are most of them admirably fitted for being sung with the accompaniment of music and have found great favour with the musicians and singers in the country. This fact, has, no doubt, contributed, to a considerable extent, to Dagh's great popularity and has made his name a house-hold word. Some people attribute his fame to this and say that if the singers had not taken up his *ghazals* he would have been less of a general favourite. They are of opinion

that to some extent this is derogatory to his dignity as a literary man and a poet. I do not think this view is correct. It is no demerit if he is favoured by musicians and singers. His *ghazals* appealed to them as likely to catch; they tried them and found they were universally liked. There is thus the seal of popular favour on his verses, and they combine simplicity of style with effect and, in their own way, are true to nature and depict phases of life and love with unerring exactness.

Dagh continued to live at Rampur after the death of Nawab Kalb-i-Ali Khan. Certain retrenchments in the expenditure of the State necessitated the reduction of the posts occupied by poets and literary men, including Dagh, and thus when he was above 45, he once more found himself left to his own resources and without any reliable means of income. He came back to Delhi and after a short stay there he made up his mind to go to Hyderabad Deccan. The late Nizam, Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, *Asaf*, was on the throne. He was very fond of poetry and was himself a talented poet. It was, however, not easy to find access to him and whoever desired to get into his Court had to wait fairly long for this privilege. Dagh first went to Hyderabad in 1888, but came back to Delhi without having secured an interview with the Nizam. However, he was called soon and appointed to guide and help the Nizam in his poetical compositions. He started with the salary of Rs. 450 a month, which rose eventually to about two thousand rupees per mensem, a scale of pay, which has not been known before or since in India, as a salary for a man of letters as such.

This munificence of the late Nizam not only freed Dagh from care as to his means of livelihood for the rest of his life, but made him the envy of a large number of his compeers. His unique success and good luck produced many opponents and detractors, who began to find fault with his writings and to grudge him his popularity, but they could not do him any harm. His reputation had been already too well established to be shaken by such attacks and his position in the Court of the Nizam did not depend on any extraneous influences.

Living at Hyderabad in assured affluence, Dagh retained his old-world simplicity of life and his gentle suavity of manners. His work, during the last eighteen years of his life spent in Hyderabad, could divide itself into three heads, and was hard enough for a man who embarked on it at a time when many people retire from life. First and foremost came the amendment and improvement of the *ghazals* of his royal master. This he used to call *Kar-i-Sarkar* or Government work. The Nizam's *ghazals* would reach him from time to time in sealed covers and it would be expected that he would return them as early as possible with his suggestions. Those who know how difficult it is to improve another's composition, with due regard to the retention of the characteristics of the author's style, would realise the difficulty of this task. Add to it the fact that the author who sent his manuscripts in this instance was no less a personage than the Nizam, who was himself possessed of a fastidious literary taste, and it would be clear that this part of Dagh's

work must have considerably taxed his brain. His hours of leisure, from what may be called his official literary work, were devoted either to his own poems or to the correction of those of his numerous pupils throughout India, most of whom sent their verses to him by post and got back corrected manuscripts from him. This was a very heavy duty, which the amiable and good-natured poet took on himself most selflessly. It grew into a regular institution and with the rise of his name and fame the number of his pupils became very large. Some of them had never set their eyes on him. They became his pupils by correspondence. He maintained an establishment, honorary as well as paid, for coping with this vast correspondence under his supervision. He read the letters of his correspondents, dictated replies to them, amended *ghazals* enclosed with them, where necessary, and those which he found not requiring any corrections had to be returned all the same to the authors with necessary remarks. If owing to other work or indisposition the replies to letters or the amendment of *ghazals* were delayed, the correspondents sent reminders, sometimes bitterly complaining of being neglected. However such was his sweet nature that he often sent apologetic letters in reply, instead of simply declining to perform this honorary work if it was to be made a hard task for him.

I had the privilege once of seeing Dagh at Hyderabad, when I paid a short visit to the Nizam's capital and made a point of having an interview with the famous poet of the Deccan Court. He was quite pleased to see me when he

came to know that I was connected, as I then was, with journalism. Referring to this work of correspondence with numerous poets who applied to him for guidance, he said to me :—

“ *Ek main hun aur Sara Hindustan lipta hua hai.*”

i.e., “ Here am I, one solitary individual, and the whole of (literary) India is clinging to me.”

He inquired eagerly about Iqbal, who in his student days had got into correspondence with Dagh. The poet naturally felt proud of counting Iqbal among his pupils. Iqbal's fame as a poet was then rising, though it had not yet reached the height it subsequently attained. Dagh said he had found great promise even in the early *ghazals* of Iqbal, but the new line that he had struck for himself under the influence of his Western education was entirely his own and should be a revelation to the older generation.

About that time Dagh had written a *Qasida*, as a eulogy of his august master. A writer in a Punjab newspaper adversely criticised that poem, taking it up line by line in several issues of the paper and tried to show that there was hardly a line in the whole poem which was free from defects of composition, or grammar or idiom. I asked Dagh if he had seen that criticism and what he thought of it. He smiled and said: “ It would have been worth something if the critic had found fault with some of my verses and admitted others to be correct enough, but the fellow has not the sense to see that an old man who has spent all his life in writing verses, cannot have them all wrong.”

Syed Ali Ahsan, of Marehra, who is one of

the foremost pupils of Dagh and a great admirer of his, has written a short biography of the poet, known as *Jakwa-i-Dagh*. I wish he had attempted something more detailed, but so far as it goes, it gives a very good account of the work of Dagh during his last years. Ahsan was staying with him at Hyderabad, with the definite object of compiling a small Urdu dictionary, called "*Fasih-ul-Lughat*", which would illustrate the use of Urdu words and idioms by verses of Dagh. He gave it this name, as the title of *Fasih-ul-Mulk* had been conferred on Dagh by the Nizam and he was commonly known by this title. This gave Dagh an extra work. Whenever a verse from those of his works, which were already extant, was not to be found, a verse had to be improvised to illustrate the use of the expression in question, in order to complete the task of the lexicographer. By this work, however, I think both the master and his disciple rendered an appreciable service to the Urdu language. They have given us material which the lexicographer of the future will find helpful.

The collection of Dagh's poems, which was published as the result of his literary labours in Hyderabad is known as the "*Mahtab-i-Dagh*". It was neatly printed on fine paper and had the impress of the Deccan on it. Opinions differ as to the relative merits of the three best known Diwans of Dagh. The *Gulzar* (or the Rose-garden), as we have already seen, consisted of the effusions of his youth, when love was not a mere play of fancy and imagination to him, but a reality, presumably felt and experienced. The *Aftab* (or the Sun) too

belongs to pretty nearly the same period as the first collection and is resplendent with shining and bright word pictures of mental conditions. The *Mahtab* (or the Moon), while lacking the over-powering fragrance of the garden and the brilliant lustre of the Sun, is true to its name and sheds the mellow and cool light of the moon, betokening the calm atmosphere of a happy and contented old age. You see, however, in this latest publication the mature touches of an acknowledged master, and it is not wanting in any of the essential and characteristic beauties of Dagh's *ghazals*. While this was the last publication for which the poet was himself responsible, two more collections have seen the light, since his death. One is the "*Yadgar-i-Dagh*", collected as a result of Ahsan's devotion to the memory of his master, and another, collected by the enterprise of Lala Siri Ram, M. A. This collection is added by Lala Siri Ram to a neatly got up reprint of the *Mahtab-i-Dagh*. Another collection called *Diwan-i-Dagh* was published by the Anwar-i-Muhammadi Press, Lucknow, which consisted of selections from Dagh. The importance of these later collections, to my mind, mainly consists in completing the known stock of *ghazals* of the famous poet, as numerous admirers of Dagh all over the country would like to preserve the whole of his work; otherwise they can add but little to the reputation established by the three well-known Diwans of Dagh. Talking of the collection, known as the *Yadgar-i-Dagh*, it may be mentioned that this book is not to be confused with another small book of the same name, published at Agra by Muhammad Akbar Ali Khan, *Afsun*,

which gives a short sketch of the author's career and extracts from his works. Of the short, sketches of Dagh's life, the booklet known as "*Dagh-i-Dehlavi*" by Sayad Muhammad Faruq, gives a readable account of Dagh's life and work in a short compass.

This notice of Dagh's work will remain incomplete if we do not mention the "*Faryad-i-Dagh*", (or the *Plaint of Dagh*). This is a continuous poem, written in the style of a *masnavi*, dealing with an episode of his life, on which, I notice, all three writers of his biographical sketches, to whom reference has been made above, have tried to draw a veil. The reason is that the episode relates to a period when Dagh felt drawn to a lady-singer of Calcutta, who was not only well-versed in her art of singing, but was possessed of culture and literary taste and wrote verses under the name of *Hijab*. It seems the attraction was mutual. There was nothing strange and unnatural about this attraction, whatever verdict may be pronounced on it by convention. *Hijab* as a singer must have been familiar with the *ghazals* of Dagh, so admirably suited to music. Possibly in her own verses she was imitating him as a model. I believe he first saw her at Rampur in a fair. He went subsequently to Calcutta and they saw one another again. This contact disclosed to both the points of affinity between the two spirits whose lot had been cast so differently. During his stay at Calcutta, Dagh seems to have developed familiarity with her and to have received a lasting impression on his mind, of which he sings in the "*Faryad*," in such a frank way, that no one can or should

misunderstand him. He hints more than plainly that *Hijab* made it clear to him that it was not his dark complexion or his ordinary features that she admired, but she admired him as an artist in words. On the other hand Dagh was not quite a youth to be enamoured of her personal appearance. He too admired her capacity to appreciate literature and her desire to cultivate the acquaintance of talented men. This acquaintance proved short-lived and they parted when Dagh's brief sojourn at Calcutta came to a close. Nothing more came of it till the very end of Dagh's life, when, I am told, *Hijab*, as an aged lady, came to pay her homage to her ideal poet, when he was about seventy. Looking at the episode in this light, I, for one, do not see anything, of which the poet or his biographers need feel ashamed, and I have thought it necessary to mention this, as some of the allusions in his verses cannot be fully understood without knowing something about this story. The *masnavi* dealing with this, affair, it is said, did not take the poet long to write. Fresh from his first impressions of the incident, it was easy for him to give vent to his feelings. He does so with a simplicity, which it is difficult to excel; and yet in the few simple words of which each short line consists, you see a good deal of feeling and sense compressed. There is no trace of any effort in the whole poem. It is an effusion, pure and simple. Even the part of it, which is formal and would ordinarily be very dry, has a ring of originality about it. For instance it is a common usage for poets to begin their works with some verses in praise of their literary patron,

whom they call the *Mamduh* or the person eulogised. Here Dagh had to write in praise of the Nawab of Rampur and of his capital, where he had spent so many happy years of his life.

The following simple lines of the poem offer a vivid contrast to the exaggerated praise, which is generally associated with Oriental eulogies :—

ہم عجب شہر مصطفیٰ آباد اسکو رکھنا میرے خدا آباد
سب اسے رام پور کہتے ہیں ہم تو آرام پور کہتے ہیں
خیر نواب کی مناتے ہیں جسکا کھاتے ہیں اسکا گاتے ہیں

("Mustafabad (Rampur) is a wonderful city,

"May God keep it flourishing.

"People give it the name of Rampur,

"I call it Arampur (Full of Aram, *i.e.*, comfort).

"I pray for the welfare of the Nawab,

"And, as the proverb goes, 'We sing the praises of him who feeds us.'").

The lines in which Dagh deals with عشق (love), are so pretty that it is difficult to find a parallel to them in the writings of any other contemporary, in simplicity, in force and in their flowing melody.

I do not think it is possible for me, in the limited space at my disposal, to dwell at length on the *Faryad* or to give a detailed criticism of it. I would recommend it to those, who are not familiar with it already, to read it. My own estimate of it, as I have indicated above, is very high, and I think that this brief effusion of Dagh would

have been enough to give him a title to fame as a writer of Urdu poetry, even if he had not left three fairly big Diwans behind him.

As a master of Urdu idiom and as one capable of stringing together the simplest words with the greatest effect, it is difficult to find any one in modern times, who has excelled Dagh. His verses, while retaining the best features of Zauq's style, are more brilliant and original in their forms of expression.

Mir is regarded on all hands as the most gifted among the ancients in writing touching and pathetic verse and Sauda as the most talented in writing the most piquant style. In many of his verses Dagh combines the excellences of both the old masters. His desire to make use of idiomatic expressions sometimes leads him to use slang, which is not worthy of his position, and which has often been made the object of adverse criticism; but there is so little of this weakness that it does not deserve very serious notice. Similarly there are some verses in his Diwan, which cannot be approved of by the puritan and the moralist; but when it is remembered that he never professed to write didactic poetry and never took up the role of a teacher, this defect can be overlooked. Even after eliminating verses to which objection may be taken, there remains sufficient material in his Diwans which is preservable and full of literary merit. Verses, in which he either analyses, with rare success, the working of the human mind or embodies in pithy and telling words the results of human wisdom and experience, abound in his writings and will for ever be the delight of the readers of

Urdu verse. The three Diwans of Dagh may be read with advantage. In him and Amir the reader would see the *ghazal* at its best. Dagh's eminent position in the domain of *ghazal* was recognised by all the best writers of his time. Hali says in a *ghazal* mourning the grandeur of old Delhi:

داغ و ماجروح کوسن لو کہ پھر اس گلشن میں
نہ سنیگا کوئی بلبل کا ترانہ ہرگز

Amir, in a *ghazal*, in which he paid Dagh the compliment of writing in the same strain in which Dagh had written already, gave him a fine tribute in the *Maqta*. He says:—

امیر اچھی غزل ہے داغ کی جسکا یہ مصرع ہے
بیہویں تندی ہیں خنجر ہاتھ میں ہے تن کے بیٹھے ہیں

It will be difficult in modern times to find many examples of such devotion to literature as Dagh displayed throughout his life. He lived and died as an Oriental poet. Born on the 25th of May 1831, he died on the 14th of February 1905, at Hyderabad. His death caused a universal mourning in literary circles throughout the country and very large number of elegies were written on his death. The most impressive of these was written by Dr. Iqbal, who says that the power of subtle analysis of the workings of the human mind is the most distinguishing feature of the poetry of *Dagh*. In the following beautiful words, Iqbal alludes to the pictures of love drawn by the last poetical genius of Delhi:—

ابھینگے آذر ہزاروں شعر کے بتخانے سے
مے پلاٹینگے نئے ساقی نئے پیمانے سے

لکھی جائینگی کتاب دل کی تفسیریں بہت
ہونگی اے خواب جوانی تیری تعبیریں بہت
ہو بہو کھینچینگا لیکن عشق کی تصویر کون
اٹھ گیا ناوک فگن ماریگا دل پر تیر کون

(Thousands of Azars¹ will arise from the idol-house of verse,

New Saqis will distribute wine in new cups,

Many commentaries will be written on the book of the human heart,

There will be many interpretations of the dream of youth,

But who will paint faithfully the picture of love?

The master archer is gone.

Who will now pierce the heart with his unerring darts.)

1. Azar was the reputed father of the Prophet Abraham. According to some he was the uncle of Abraham and had brought him up. Azar was a maker of idols, but the youth brought up by him realised the unity of God and became the "Father of Prophets."