

KATIB I KUN FA YAKUN

HAJI DIN MUHAMMAD LAHORI

THE CALLIGRAPHER

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Very few people know that Allama Iqbal, our National poet was also a great connoisseur of the art of Calligraphy. He himself could write *Shikasta* style in a good hand. His talent as a calligrapher was overshadowed by his pre-eminence as a poet and remained hidden from the general readership.¹³¹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the traditions of Calligraphy were deep rooted in the Punjab especially in Lahore, Sialkot and Gujranwala Districts.¹³² During this period learning of Calligraphy by young children was a part of the curriculum of their education. As the result of this process Allama Iqbal appears to have acquired proficiency in Calligraphy. Due to his keen interest in this art he always selected a master Calligrapher for composing his poetic works. The renowned Calligrapher of Lahore *À«jà Dân MuÁammad* was one among them, who also held the title of *Ra'is-al-kebaÇÇ«Çân*.¹³³

The expertise of *À«jà Dân MuÁammad* in both the *Naskh* and *Nasta'liq* scripts was up to the mark. *À«jà Dân MuÁammad* was a follower of saint Mian Sher Muhammad of Sharqpur who himself was an eminent Calligrapher of high class. The Son of *À«jà Dân MuÁammad* named Ghulam MuÁammad was a good artist, calligrapher, engraver, *sangs«z* and also a block-maker. He died at an early age. Due to his sudden death, *Dân MuÁammad* remained under the spell of melancholy and died.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta, "Iqbal – The Connoisseur of Calligraphy," *Iqbal Review*, 40:3 October, 1996 Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, p.77

¹³² Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta, "KhaÇÇaÇâ ke Froogh Mein Lahore K« ÀiÄÄa", Ph. D thesis, History Department Punjab University, 1998. P. 144

¹³³ Ali Ahmed, "Lahore kü KhaÇÇ«Ç", *Nuqush*, Lahore No, Idra Farogh i Urdu, Urdu Bazar Lahore, 1992, P.

¹³⁴ Muhammad Ikram al-Haq, *Dabistan i Khattati*, Aiwan-e-Kahtatan-e-Pakistan, Lahore 1976. P. 6.

This artist designed the poster regarding Allama's election campaign in 1926 from the Shafâ' League's platform¹³⁵ for the viceroy's Council. During this campaign, the Calligrapher was required to design the poster in a very short span of time. Dân MuÁammad was closely associated with Allama Iqbal and was much influenced by latter' ideas and philosophy.¹³⁶

Iqbal selected him for composing his poetic works after having examined his calligraphic specimens in the form of several epigraphs, cenotaph, epitaph posters, books, etc. On the same occasion Dân MuÁammad did the calligraphy for Iqbal's poetry and distributed free of charges to the citizens for infusing the spirit of freedom among the Muslims of South Asia. He had also designed a number of posters of the heroes of the Muslim Ummah.¹³⁷

À«jâ Dân MuÁammad was also an enthusiastic supporter of Allama Iqbal. As already stated, in the election for the membership of Punjab Legislative Council in 1926 À«jâ Dân MuÁammad himself stated that Sir Sh«di L«l successfully persuaded Malik Muhammad Din to fight this election against Allama Iqbal. A bold and odd size poster was pasted on the walls of Lahore city from the supporting side of Malik MuÁammad Dân. After seeing this poster of the same size on behalf of the Allama Iqbal's supporting side. By the very next day À«jâ Dân MuÁammad, Calligrapher, had it ready and it was done really very well. He also got it pasted in the whole area of Iqbal's constituency during the same night. When Allama Iqbal learnt about the quality and promptness of Dân MuÁammad, he was much impressed and awarded the Calligrapher the title *K«tib-i-kun Fayak«n*.¹³⁸ كاتب كن فيكون¹³⁷

À«jâ Dân MuÁammad had performed Haj at the age of 23.¹³⁹ During the Pilgrimage he visited Egypt, Iran Saudi Arabia where he did calligraphy on a number of Mosques and signboards without charging a single penny for his

¹³⁵ Abdullah Malik, *Tabrik i Pakistan*, Lahore 1976. P.396.

¹³⁶ Syed Tahir Ali Rizvi, "À«jâ Din Muhammad Khusnavis", in *Daily Mashriq*, 7th August, 1971.

¹³⁷ See item under Accession No.1977-542 (Documents Section), Allama Iqbal Museum Lahore.

¹³⁸ Javed Iqbal, *Zinda Rud*, Vol. III, Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, Lahore, 1984, P. 298.

¹³⁹ Syed Tahir Ali Rizwi, *op. cit.*

services. After his return to Lahore, he also did calligraphy for the poetic works of Allama Iqbal.¹⁴⁰

During his work on Iqbal's Poetry À«jâ Dân MuÁammad always kept in his mind the glorious tradition of Islamic Calligraphy especially in the City of Lahore. He was greatly impressed by Iqbal's attachment with the Prophet ﷺ as expressed in *Armagh«n i Áij«z*. Syed ñ«hir Rizvâ writes:¹⁴¹

Occasionally, I contacted À«jâ Dân MuÁammad for the Calligraphy of some *qiÇ«t* and *Çughr«s*. He used to be seated on floor with a cushion. The kashmiri tea was being server to his guests. Kashmiri *sm«w«r* was located just near him. He enjoyed reading the poetry of Iqbal in Persian and Urdu and telling the meanings of the Quatrains of Iqbal's poetry to the audience of the meeting.

À«jâ Dân MuÁammad wrote the epigraph on the face stone of Javid Manzil, now Allama Iqbal Museum, Lahore. It reads as:

جاويد منزل 1354ء كته دين محمد

He also did the calligraphy for the tombstone of Allama Iqbal's mother at Sailkot. Other work of his penmanship are the face stone of which is today the National College of Arts, Lahore in *Naskh* style it reads:

كسب كمال كن كه عزيز جهان شوى

and two Arabic quatrains which are now exhibited in the Faqâr Jalk-ul-Dân Collection in the Lahore Museum which read as:

بلغ العلى بكماله. كشف الدجا بجماله. خسنت جمع خساله. صلوا عليه واله.

The number of specimens of his calligraphy can be seen in and around Lahore with different families who had an interest in the Art of Calligraphy. One specimen of his calligraphy was Dân MuÁammadi Press, Bull Road Lahore which after the demolition of the concerned buildings, has now disappeared. It was in *Nasta'laq* and *ñughr«* styles in bold at least with a *qalam*

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

(pen) of 12 inches wide. Once upon a time Malik Dân MuÁammadowner of Dân MuÁammadi Press wanted to proceed to an anniversary procession of Saint Â«bir Piy« of Kalyar Sharif in India. He required calligraphy of an introduction of a book consisting of 48 pages which were to be distributed to the participants of the same procession. The same book was written out by Â«jâ Dân MuÁammad in a night under the light of a lamp and handed over it to Malik Dân MuÁammad¹⁴² as he was considered a *zâid navâs* (fast scribe) he had also written in Urdu كرنال شاپ Karnal Shop in new Anarkali which was very much appreciated by his contemporary calligraphers. The Urdu letter *pe* پ of Karnal Shop measured some 35 feet long and about 18 feet wide.¹⁴³ A residential area inside Delhi gate was also named after his name and till to day is called “Kêch« Munshâ Dân MuÁammad.” In the Art of Calligraphy Dân MuÁammad was a disciple of Â«fii Nêr Ullah¹⁴⁴ and Munshâ ‘Abdul Ghanâ Nathê a renowned *k«tib* of Lahore.¹⁴⁵ He followed the style of Nathê K«tib in *Nasta‘lâq* for writing several cenotaphs’ and a number of titles of various books he was famous for bold calligraphy in a minimum space. This great Calligrapher died in 1971 at the age of 92 at Lahore and buried in the graveyard of Miani Sahib.¹⁴⁶ The author was fortunate to meet him in 1970 when he was breathing his last days.

¹⁴² Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta. *op. cit.* P.145

¹⁴³ Ali Ahmed *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁴ Hafiz Noor Ullah who has introduced the Lahori style of Nastaliq in Lacknow with Qazi Naimat ullah Sahri.

¹⁴⁵ Syed Ikram-al-Haq. *op. cit.* P6

¹⁴⁶ Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta, *op. cit.* P.145