

IV

PERSONALITIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

DR. MUHAMMAD ABDULLAH CHAGHATAI

by

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Archaeology in the subcontinent of Pakistan and India was initiated by non-professionals who were otherwise busy in their official or other duties. It is on their efforts that the British Government was persuaded in the last century to set up Archaeological Survey in India with Major-General Alexander Cunningham as the first Director. Since then the Government Department has contributed a lot to the discovery and preservation of the archaeological heritage in the country. Outside the Government service there emerged a group of scholars who continued to take keen interest in the archaeological studies. Men like Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, Bhaudaji and Pandit Bhagvanlal Indrajī stand out prominently in the field, who have made solid contribution to the advance of archaeological research. From among the Muslims Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Chaghatai ranks with these devoted men of calibre. Without due recompense or recognition Dr. Chaghatai has pursued a solitary career of devoted study throughout his life to the understanding and interpretation of Islamic art and archaeology. It is, therefore, fitting that when he is among us, we give his biography a due place in the pages of this journal.

Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Chaghatai (See pl. II, No. 2) was born on 23rd November, 1896 at Lahore. He comes from a well-known family of artists and architects, among whom his brother Abdul Rahman Chaghatai is the famous painter of Pakistan. He acquired the family tradition from his own father Mistri Karim Bakhsh, and keeping in line with this family profession, he was sent to the Government Technical School, Lahore, for his early education. Later he joined the Mayo School of Arts at Lahore and finally he qualified from the Thomson Engineering College, Roorkee. Throughout this period of technical education Dr. Chaghatai had kept himself in touch with the traditional knowledge and old lores that had come down in the family. The technical education qualified him for a profession but the family training inspired in him a love for Islamic history, culture and fine arts. Ultimately the family environment superseded his technical equipment, and over and above his professional career he became persuaded to choose a life of scholarly devotion to the cause of research. It is this persuading influence of the old Islamic background that is manifest in the works of Dr. Chaghatai, who has passed on to our generation not only a new understanding of the Islamic art and archaeology from the standpoint of European angle but also from the viewpoint of the traditional artists and architects. In his

contributions he has thus passed on to our generation the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors about Muslim arts and crafts, history and culture, literature and old learning.

In order to achieve this aim of the dissemination of knowledge Dr. Chaghatai opted for the profession of teaching. All along he has remained a teacher. He started his career by organizing in 1914 the Technical School of the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam Orphanage at Lahore. Later he served from 1915 to 1924 as a Headmaster of the D. B. Technical School, Ludhiana. From 1925 to 1933 he served as a lecturer at the Islamia College, J. A. V. Department, Lahore. During his early career Dr. Chaghatai has been mainly interested in teaching. But there was something which remained latent within him. This was an urge for research and original contribution to our knowledge. But this contribution must be in the new terminology evolved by the West. Before he considered himself competent to do this, he desired to have a first hand impression of the Western countries and understand their techniques by visiting their universities and their monuments. These frequent visits to the monuments, universities, libraries and museums as well as attending conferences have become a part of the habit of Dr. Chaghatai. At great personal cost he has gone on travels in search of knowledge.

For the first time in 1932 Dr. Chaghatai went to Europe and within a period of nine months he visited England, France, Germany, Vienna and Italy. In all these countries he met with the professors, examined works of arts in the museums and consulted libraries on Islamic History and Culture. It was natural for Dr. Chaghatai that he should first get interest in the art and architecture of Central Asia wherefrom his own ancestors, the Chaghatai Turks, had migrated. As early as 1934 we find him writing on "What India owes to Central Asia in Islamic Architecture". This article was a good beginning in the study of the Muslim architecture of this subcontinent because so far in the published works no one had approached the subject from that angle. Hereafter the Central Asian features came to be recognized more and more in the local architecture. At this early time Dr. Chaghatai was also interested in Muslim painting and the influences that it left behind on the later developments. In the same year we find him writing on "A few Hindu miniature painters of the 18th and 19th centuries."

In 1936 Dr. Chaghatai joined the University of Paris at Sarbonne for the doctorate in History of Art (Mediaeval) Department. In addition he undertook the courses of architecture at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts and History of Art in general at the Louvre Museum, Paris. In 1938 the University of Paris approved his thesis on the History and Architecture of the Taj Mahal at Agra and he was awarded the degree of Doctorate d' université des Lettres (D. Litt. with Honours). This is one of the two theses written on Taj Mahal by the Muslims, the other being produced by Dr. K.A.A. Ansari in Germany under the guidance of Professor Strzygowski. Dr. Ansari later became the Archaeological Engineer to the Government of India and was mainly responsible for the actual repairs to the Taj Mahal during the Second World War. Dr. Ansari's thesis dealt more with the engineering side of the Taj while Dr. Chaghatai dealt exhaustively from the point of view of the

development of design and art. His thesis was published in 1938 from Belgium under the title of *Le Tadj Mahal d' Agra*. Later an Urdu version of this book was published from Lahore. This study of the Taj aroused a good deal of controversy and Dr. Chaghatai followed with a series of articles as listed in the Bibliography (below). Dr. Chaghatai firmly holds that the designer of the Taj was the emperor Shah Jahan himself. While in Paris Dr. Chaghatai represented the University of Paris at the 4th International Reunion of Architects in 1937 and read a paper on the Indo-Muslim Architecture.

Second stage in the career of Dr. Chaghatai started after his return from Paris. He moved down to the Deccan and joined as a Reader for research on Mediaeval India at the Deccan College and Post-graduate Research Institute, Poona, and also worked as a Post-graduate teacher for the Bombay University in Poona. During his stay in Poona Dr. Chaghatai was intimately associated with the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and delivered lectures at the Osmania University, Hyderabad, Gujrat Research Society, Bombay, Forbes Gujarat Sabha, Bombay, Field Club, Bombay, and Government Mohammadan College, Madras. Till August, 1947 Dr. Chaghatai remained in Poona. All these years he devoted himself to the study of Muslim epigraphy and contributed papers on the Muslim inscriptions. He made a special study of the monuments and inscriptions of Ahmedabad and also undertook a town-wise study of the history and antiquities of Ahmedabad, Lahore, Poona, Sholapur, Bhera, Nagaur, Didwana, Jalaur, Somnath, Sodhra, and Khatu. His articles are published in the proceedings of the Indian History Congress and All India Oriental Conference, whose sessions he regularly attended. He is also a member of the Indian Historical Records Commission and since 1940 he has been contributing to its proceedings. All along he has been a great enthusiast for Muslim art and antiquities, and on many an occasion of these conferences he was instrumental in holding their exhibitions. In this period Dr. Chaghatai made a deep study of the history, art and architecture of the Muslims and tried to make his own contribution in the different fields.

The third stage in the career of Dr. Chaghatai began after 1947 when he left Poona and moved to his native city of Lahore but to his misfortune he has remained neglected by his countrymen. But this neglect has not unnerved Dr. Chaghatai. In this period he has been most prolific in study, travels and researches. In the beginning when he had no job, he developed the Nauras Kutab Khana at Lahore as a means of his livelihood. Subsequently he was able to get a part-time job of a lecturer in the Fine Arts and Islamic studies and History Departments, University of the Panjab. In December 1962 he joined the West Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, as a Reader in Architecture. But it is the Kutab Khana which is of utmost importance to us as it served as a means of publishing the researches conducted by Dr. Chaghatai. Most of the books produced by him after 1947 were published by this Nauras Agency. The publications include books on painting, architecture, minor arts like wood-work, jewellery etc, Muslim calligraphy and above all many unpublished Persian manuscripts. It is at this time that he made a complete survey of the history and antiquities of Lahore through the ages and further worked on "One Hundred Years of Painting in the Panjab" (1845-1947). Along with these studies and publications Dr. Chughatai availed of every

opportunity to go abroad and see the museum collections and visit the Muslim monuments in order to get first-hand impression. In 1957 he went to U.S.A. for the first time and made a detailed study of the collections of Islamic arts and crafts in the American Museums and Galleries. In addition he gave a number of lectures and further tried to understand modern trends in architecture with Mr. Walter A. Taylor, President of the American Institute of Architects. He also made two visits to all the Near and Middle East countries including the Holy Places which gave him opportunity of study on the spot. In 1959 he represented Pakistan on the invitation of the Ankara University at the 1st International Congress of Turkish Arts. There he contributed two papers dealing with "Turkish Architectural Ornamentation in Indo-Muslim architecture" and "Turkish contribution to the History of Islamic Calligraphy". In the second session of the Congress held at Venice in 1963 he contributed a paper on "Seljuq art influence on Pakistan monuments". While making a reference to these conferences, the idea is not to catalogue all of them attended by Dr. Chaghatai, but only to show the great interest that he has been taking in them and his fervent desire to trace the Muslim heritage on art and archaeology. Let it also be recorded that Dr. Chaghatai was for a time appointed by the Government of Pakistan as a consulting adviser on the aesthetic side of the Mausoleum of the Qaid-i-Azam now under construction in Karachi.

Among the contributions made by Dr. Chaghatai during this period special mention must be made of his writings on the life and works of many Muslim painters, calligraphers, artists and craftsmen. He has tried to collect the biographical accounts from several Persian texts and examined the merits of their works on the evidence of the extant examples. His attempt has been not only to throw light on the life of the old workers but also on the techniques followed by them and the many styles and designs invented by them and left to us as our traditional heritage. It is to the rediscovery of this forgotten tradition that Dr. Chaghatai has devoted his whole life in the hope that men of our generation may see something good in our own past. As his brother painter Abdul Rahman Chaghatai has been painting in the traditional style, Dr. Abdullah Chaghatai has brought to light other fields of arts and crafts in order to keep us in line with the traditional path of our ancestors. Quite obviously he has to walk on untrodden grounds and probe into problems rarely touched by other writers, e.g. his book on the *Painting during the Sultanat Period* is the first on the subject, in which he has tried to establish the unity in Islamic spirit as seen in the early Muslim Painting. But while he stresses on the Islamic tradition, he is not blind to other trends. His book on the *Fan-e-Ta'mir* is a lucid account of the architectural developments in the world.

In this period Dr. Chaghatai further sought to enlighten the general public of this great Muslim heritage by contributing a series of articles in the Friday Supplement of Pakistan Times, Lahore. The subject is invariably illustrated with photographs and sometimes also with diagrams, and it covers a very wide range. These essays have aroused a great interest in the common man who in the world of conflicting ideas to-day is still groping to find out his own personality. Dr. Chaghatai has been dinning into his ears the great historical heritage and placing before his eyes the image of the historic personality. Are

we going to keep ourselves wedded to our tradition and base our future on the foundations of old or are we going to forget the old and build a completely new structure? It is here that Dr. Chaghatai has played a definitive role by his contributions. He has devoted untiringly to the search of our lost traditional arts and crafts in order to make us aware of them. And whether we recognize it or not, our generation owes a great debt to Dr. Chaghatai for searching these lost threads of our tradition and passing on to us to use them and build our own future.

We wish Dr. Chaghatai a long and healthy life to carry on the work.

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10. 'A Manuscript of the Mirat-i-Sikandari' in Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute, Poona, Vol. V.

Note: Many articles on one and the same subject appearing in different languages have been included here only once. Some appearing in the little-known magazines have been omitted. There are quite a number of books and articles in the manuscript form, which remain to be published.