

In Memory Of

Dr. Agha Mahdi Hussain

—Prof. K. Ali

Dr. Agha Mahdi Hussain is no more with us. But his ideals and ideas would make him immortal. He was unforgettable, because of his selfless service to his community. His contributions to the cause of learning particularly in the field of historical research are valuable treasure for the students of history as well as to general readers.

Dr. Agha Mahdi Hussain was one of the few distinguished scholars and reputed historians of the Sub-continent. Devotion and dedication to learning were the salient features of his character. His constant thought of life was to bring into light facts about the Muslim rulers of the Sub-continent. To him "there can be no greater service in historical research than the re-writing of the history of medieval India with a view to removing the misunderstandings that are still being perpetrated."

Born in 1898 in a respectable Muslim family of Delhi, Agha Mahdi Hussain son of Late Hamid Ahmed Raza, started his early education in a local school. He completed his secondary education in his native city. He took his B.A. degree with honours in Persian from the Punjab University in 1918 and obtained his M.A. degree in History from the same University in 1919. After completing his University education Agha Mahdi Hussain began his teaching career as an assistant Professor of history at Agra College in 1920. But his thirst for knowledge could not confine him there for a long time. He left for London in 1933 for research works. He had a special attraction for history. He wanted to place the past glory of the Muslims and the true picture of their rulers before the world. The European historians have tarnished the characters of

the Muslim rulers for their own interest. Many of the Hindu scholars followed in the footsteps of the European scholars and repeated parrot-like and with great relish all the calumnies heaped upon the memory of Muslim rule. Their hatred for the Muslim rule touched the heart of Agha Mahdi Hussain very deeply and made him restless to rectify the actual history of the Indian Muslims.

According to Agha Mahdi Hussain "Muhammad bin Tughluq is perhaps the most important of all the Muslim rulers in India and certainly one of the most grossly misunderstood." Some say "he was a mad ruler" and others say "he was the most learned and accomplished." The character of Muhammad bin Tughluq influenced the mind of Agha Mahdi Hussain greatly. He ran to the famous University of London and engaged himself in research works on Muhammad bin Tughluq. The result of his research work was 'The Rise and Fall of Muhammad bin Tughluq' for which he obtained his Ph. D. degree in 1935. His analytical review of Muhammad bin Tughluq opened the eyes of the prejudiced chroniclers and historians. This unique research in the history of medieval India created a great sensation throughout the world. The most controversial character in history has been put on a proper place and the misunderstanding about the great ruler has been removed by the unchallengeable works of Dr. Agha Mahdi Hussain. In 1936 he was again awarded a doctorate by the University of Paris for his published thesis entitled 'Le Gouvernement de Sultanat le Delhi'. It was no small credit for Dr. Mahdi Hussain to get two doctorates in two consecutive years.

On coming back from abroad Dr. Agra Mahdi Hussain again

started his teaching career at Agra College and continued this job till he joined the Calcutta University in the Department of Islamic History and Culture in 1944. He spent nearly 23 years in this University and it was here I had the fortune to come in close contact with him in 1945 as a student. I was very much impressed and influenced by his personality and erudition. He was deeply absorbed in the pursuit of knowledge and had a wide range of research in the field of history. His love for Islam and the Muslims knew no bounds and he inspired his pupils to know and live in accordance with the tenets of Islam.

Besides Urdu, his mother tongue Dr. Agha Mahdi Hussain had mastery over eight languages namely: Arabic, Persian, English, French, German, Sanskrit, Hindi and Bengali. These languages helped him collage and corroborate facts with ease and accuracy. During the tenure of his service in the Calcutta University Dr. Agha Mahdi Hussain learnt Bengali and later in life wrote a book named 'Itihashe Galpo' (published by Bangla Academy) in Bengali. He had to his credit a large number of scholarly and authoritative publications of which 'The Rise and Fall of Muhammad bin Tughluq', 'The Sultanate of Delhi' (in French), 'Hindu-Muslim Problems', 'Cultural Aspects of Indo-Iranian Contacts', 'Rehala of Ibn Batuta', 'Bahadur Shah II' and 'Tughluq Dynasty' deserve special mention. 'FUTUUS-SALATIN' is another remarkable book of Dr. A.M. Hussain. It is a poetical history composed during the lifetime of Muhammad bin Tughluq by Isami and dedicated to Sultan Alauddin Hasan founder of the Bahmani Dynasty a re

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bel against Emperor Muhammad bin Tughluq. 'Futuh-us-Salatin' is an important source of information not only for the history of Muhammad bin Tughluq but also for that of Medieval India upto 1349 A.D. Dr. Mahdi Hussain has translated this important source of early Medieval Indian History with a commentary. This learned commentary is very useful for the students and general readers.

In 1970 Dr. Agha Mahdi Hussain came to the then East Pakistan. He joined the Dacca University in the Department of Islamic History and Culture as a supernumerary professor in 1971 and continued this service till January, 1975. He was then awarded a fellowship by the University Grants Commission for research works which he continued till 1977. Scholarly minded as he was Dr. Mahdi Hussain continued his pursuit of knowledge even after his retirement and in fact till the last