

# The Passing Away of a Legend : Hakim Ahmad Shuja'

## Riffat Hassan

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' died in Lahore on January 4, 1969. In the special programme broadcast on his death by Radio Pakistan, it was said that a light had gone out in the city of Lahore.

Stones and gravel do not constitute a city, but those rare souls which embody the essential spirit of its culture and heritage. Hakim Ahmad Shuja belonged to Lahore as few people have done. It is hardly possible to think of Hakim Sahib apart from the glorious city which was his birthplace once and is now his last abode.

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' was born in 1893 in Bazar-e-Hakiman, inside Bhatti Gate. His father, Hakim Shuja'-ud-Din Muhammad, was a well-known physician, philosopher and writer of his time. In 1890, Hakim Shuja'-ud-Din Muhammad founded the Urdu *Bazm-e-Musha'ira*, for the purpose of encouraging the growth of Urdu poetry. Bazar-e-Hakiman, it may be pointed out, was the centre of the higher literary circle of Lahore, and it was here that Allama Iqbal too found inspiration for his first great poems. Hakim Ahmad Shuja' mentions in his autobiography *Khun Baha* that he was born the same year that Iqbal wrote his famous couplet:

Taking them to be pearls, the Glorious One  
gathered what were the fallen tears of shame.

Twenty years later, Hakim Sahib recounts, Iqbal said to him one day: "You and my poetry are of the same age; may the youth of both be eternal."

## Only Brother

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' was the only brother among eight sisters, only one of whom was younger than him. He remained to the end of his days a deeply generous and loving man, far more conscious of his duties than of his rights and giving far more than he received. It was unfortunate for him that he lost both his parents when a mere child. His father died when he was two-and-a-half years old, and his mother when he was fourteen. But he was looked after very well by his sisters, in particular his eldest sister and her husband (also a first cousin) Hakim Amin-ud-Din - himself a famous patron of art - gave to the young Ahmad Shuja' all the love and care he needed.

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' matriculated from the Central Model School, Lahore, in 1909. After studying for a while at the Government College, Lahore, he migrated to the MAO College, Aligarh. In 1914, he graduated with Honours in ancient history. Hakim Sahib had a passion for poetry and drama during his college days and produced plays and acted in them. He also translated and staged the plays of Kaishro Chander Chatterji, who was then Principal of the Law College. Three of these plays were "Meena," "Tara" and "Mantosh."

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' was a versatile writer. There was hardly any form of writing over which he did not have mastery. He wrote plays, poetry, short stories, essays and speeches many of which will pass into history. Amongst his plays perhaps the most famous is *Baap ka Gunah*, which is one of the acknowledged masterpieces of Urdu literature. Amongst his other well-known books are *Khun Baha* - an autobiography and a collection of poetry, *Husn ki Qeemat*, a collection of short stories, and *Gard-i-Karavan*, a collection of poems.

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' was a scholar of the Qur'an. He finished reading it for the first time at the age of six and he continued to read it almost every day of his life. He worked with great zeal and devotion on his translation of the Qur'an into Urdu. In the last years of his life, he began to devote more and more time to a study of the Holy Book. Hakim Sahib had an over-whelming love for the Prophet of Islam and his eloquence would reach its zenith when he spoke of the Prophet Muhammad (p. b. u. h.) He named his three grandsons after the Prophet – Ahmad, Muhammad and Mustapha.

### **A "Faqir"**

In the years to come, many students will study the works of Hakim Ahmad Shuja'. They will diligently make their way through his writings and papers and seek to understand the man that he was who made such vast contributions to Urdu literature and language, the stage, the film industry, the radio and television, and who was such a loyal servant of the State. To us today it seems that his death has created a vacuum that no one can fill. He belonged to a school which has almost passed out of existence. Like Iqbal, Hakim Sahib was a man who cared naught for worldly things. He was a "faqir" who believed in the truth of Iqbal's immortal verse:

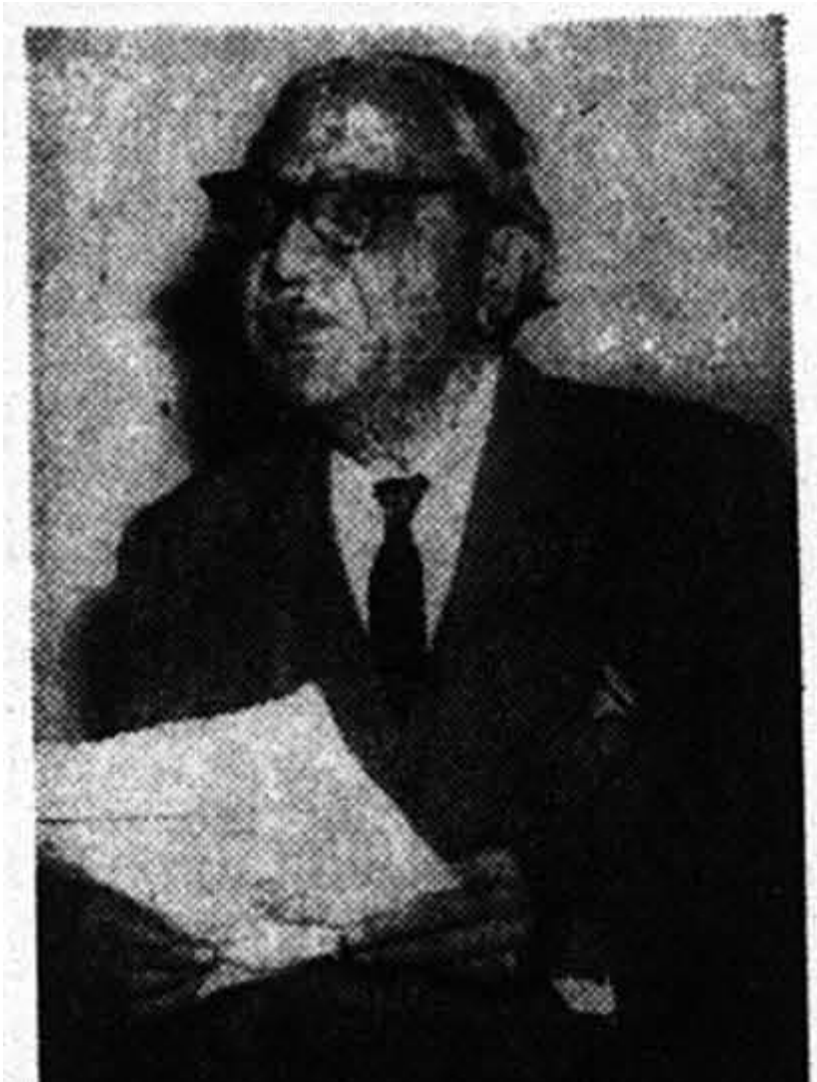
My way lies not in being rich but in being poor,  
your selfhood, do not sell, in poverty win renown.  
(*Bal-e-Jibril*, p. 198.)

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' was blessed with rare good looks, a personality whose magnetism was quire irresistible, a mind which was possessed of great

clarity and depth, a power of speech which was almost miraculous, a soul which knew at the same time the greatest pride and the greatest humility.

His passing away is the passing away of a legend. I pay him this homage not because he was my grandfather whom I adored, but because he was the person - who above all others - inspired me to seek what I consider to be the most precious verities of life.

Hakim Ahmad Shuja' is no longer with us but all of us who knew and loved him know that his name will never be forgotten. His greatness was not of the flesh but of the spirit and that which is of the spirit knows no mutability.



"The Passing Away of a Legend: Hakim Ahmad Shuja'," in *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, Pakistan, January 1969