



ĀZĀD BELGRĀMĪ

ĀZĀD BELGRĀMĪ, MĪR ĠOLĀM-‘ALĪ B. MOḤAMMAD NŪḤ ḤOSAYNĪ WĀSETĪ, major eighteenth century Indo-Muslim poet, biographer, and composer of chronograms, also known as Ḥassān-al-Hend (fl. 1116-1200/1704-86). Born into a family of scholars in Belgrām, he studied with his maternal grandfather, Mīr ‘Abd-al-Jalīl Belgrāmī, a noted scholar and poet of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Hindi, and his maternal uncle, Mīr Moḥammad Belgrāmī.

In 1142/1730 Āzād left for Sehwan in Sind where his uncle Mīr Moḥammad was *mīr baksī* and *waqā’e-negār*. He worked in Sehwan for four years as a deputy (*nā’eb*) to his uncle. In 1150/1737 he set out on a pilgrimage to the Ḥejāz and remained there for the next two years, studying the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Boḳārī under Moḥammad Ḥayāt Sindī (d. 1750). On his return from the Ḥejāz in 1152/1739 he went to Aurangabad and spent the next seven years of his life in total seclusion at the tomb of Shah Mosāfer Ġojdovānī. Soon after emerging from seclusion, he met Nawab Neẓām-al-dawla Nāṣer Jang, the second son of Neẓām-al-molk Aṣafjāh and the future nizam. They became fast friends. It is likely that Āzād received stipendiary support from the nizam, but he never accepted any service at court. Neither did he ever compose panegyrics for the king of Deccani nobility; he reserved this kind of poetry for the praises of the prophet and saints, which in fact earned him the title Ḥassān-al-Hend (after Ḥassān b. Tābet, the panegyrist of the prophet).

Āzād also had a very close friendship with the prime minister of Hyderabad, Ṣamṣām-al-dawla Shah Navāz Khan. When in 1170/1757 Ṣamṣām-al-dawla fell from grace, it was Āzād who took an active role in restoring him to favor, and



it was Āzād again who recovered most of the unfinished manuscript of Šamšām-al-dawla's *Ma'āṭer al-omarā'*, after he had been assassinated and his house plundered. Āzād later published this work, though in a fragmentary form. He died in 1200/1786, and was buried at Rawza (or Koldabad) near Dawlatabad (See T. W. Haig, *Historic Landmarks of the Deccan*, Allahabad, 1907, pp. 56-58).

Āzād wrote in Arabic, Persian, and reportedly Urdu. His Arabic writings comprise a commentary on the *Šaḥīḥ* of Boḳārī, an Arabic *dīvān* consisting of more than 3,000 couplets, a Sufi *maṭnawī* titled *Maḳzan al-barakāt*, a commentary on Motanabbī's poetry, and the *Sobḥat al-marjān fī āṭār Hendostān*, a compilation of three books originally written as independent works and later put together as the four chapters of *Sobḥat al-marjān*. Later, Āzād made a Persian translation of the fourth chapter under the title *Ġeẓlān al-Hend*. The first and second chapters were also later translated into Persian by Shah Wāreṭ 'Alī Ḥasanī Ḥosaynī Banārasī at the request of the Raja of Benares, Mahārāj Īšarī Paršād (Storey, I/2, p. 860).

Āzād's Persian writings include, besides the above mentioned *Ġeẓlān al-Hend*, a *dīvān*, a few *taḍkeras* (see below), two rather long *maṭnawīs* (*Maṭnawī be-jawāb-e maṭnawī-e Mīr 'Abd-al-Jalīl Belgrāmī* and *Maṭnawī-e sarāpā-ye ma'šūq*), and some letters written in a simple elegant style. His Persian *dīvān* is a good specimen of the eighteenth-century post-Bidelian (see Bidel) style of Indo-Persian poetry; Āzād makes skillful use of rhetorical devices and employs traditional images in a highly broken and intellectualized fashion—a trend common to all Indo-Persian poets of the eighteenth century and later; it was transferred to Urdu poetry as part of the enduring legacy of Bidel. In the Persian *dīvān* of Āzād one comes across many images and expressions borrowed from Bidel whom Āzād knew personally.

His biographical works include: *Ma'āṭer-al-kerām tārik-e Belgrām*, a book divided into two chapters dealing with the lives of about 150 saints, mystics, and savants connected in some remote sense with Belgrām. *Sarv-e āzād*, considered as the second volume of the *Ma'āṭer*, likewise consists of two chapters and is principally devoted to the lives of 143 poets who were born in India or visited India after 1000/1591-1592, including some from Belgrām. Chapter two of *Sarv-e āzād* provides an account of eight *rēkta* (Urdu) poets. *Yad-e bayzā'*, the most protracted of Āzād's Persian *taḍkeras*, contains the lives of 532 ancient and modern poets, arranged in alphabetical sequence. Originally begun at Sehwan in 1145/1732 when Āzād was working for his



uncle, it was later enlarged twice, first in Allahabad in 1148/1735 and then again after his return from Mecca in 1152/1739.

By far the best known and most valuable *taḍkera* of Āzād, from a literary, historical, cultural, or sociological perspective, is *Kezāna-ye āmera*. Written in 1176/1762-63, it contains alphabetically arranged notices on about 135 ancient and modern poets. But the major importance of *Kezāna-ye āmera* rests on the preliminary section of the book where Āzād details the biographies of Āṣafjāh together with his sons, Nāṣer Jang and Moḡaffar Jang, and then gives an historical overview of Āṣafjāh, Aḡmad Shah Dorrānī, and the Marathas. The result is a uniquely valuable historical document for the study of eighteenth-century south India, especially since Āzād personally knew the people about whom he talks in the book, and was an eyewitness to many of the pivotal events he narrates. Also included among Āzād's Persian works are two relatively short *taḍkeras*: *Šajara-ye ṭayyeba*, a brief account of the pedigrees and lives of the shaikhs of Belgrām, and *Rawzat al-awlīā'*, a recapitulation of the lives of ten saints buried at Rawza (Koldābād).

Āzād lived at a time when Urdu was rapidly displacing Persian as the major literary vehicle for Indo-Muslim culture, and he is said to have authored a book in Urdu, which has not survived.

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