

**Review Article**

## **The English Poetry of Nizam Jung**

***Syed Munir Wasti***

Nizamuddin Ahmad [1871-1955], known by his titles of Nawab Sir Nizam Jung, was one of a remarkable collection of extremely talented nobles, scholars and civil servants that adorned the court of the Nizams of Hyderabad Deccan during the heyday of British colonialism in the South Asian subcontinent. Some indication of the vast reservoir of extraordinary abilities that existed in large princely states like Hyderabad Deccan has been given in a previous essay dealing with Syed Husain Bilgrami<sup>1</sup> in which references to the latter's attempts at writing English verse have also been examined. In this essay, Nawab Sir Nizam Jung will, for brevity, be referred to simply as 'Nizam Jung'.

Nizam Jung had a brilliant academic career being awarded the degrees of B.A. and LL.B. from Cambridge, where he studied at Trinity College. He was called to the Bar from the Inner Temple – thus completing his education by 1896. His subsequent career as judge in the High Court of Hyderabad, the conferment of the titles of O.B.E. and C.I.E. by the British government, and his retirement in 1930 have been detailed in his life-sketch by Zahir Ahmed.<sup>2</sup>

Zahir Ahmed is also the collector and compiler of Nizam Jung's poems in English which were written over a period spanning several decades. This was a labour of love meriting appreciation for it is very likely that, given the ravages of time and the tempestuousness of the age, Nizam Jung's poetry would not have survived. Most of Nizam Jung's extant poetry first appeared in the pages of the well-known journal, *Islamic Culture*, but the tracing out of poems from issues over fifty years old is a very arduous task. The early poetry, in the form of sonnets, came out in a private edition in Britain during World War I.

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<sup>1</sup> Syed Munir Wasti, 'Syed Husain Bilgrami: Scholar and Statesman', *Pakistan Perspectives*, 5:2 (July-December 2000), pp. 97-104.

<sup>2</sup> Zahir Ahmed, *Life's Yesterdays: Glimpses of Sir Nizam Jung and his Times* (Bombay: Thacker & Co, 1945).

Later, a collection of Nizam Jung's verse under the title *Islamic Poems* was issued by Zahir Ahmed in 1935 comprising 22 poems.<sup>3</sup> Most of these were written in a state of spiritual elevation during the performance of Jung's pilgrimage to the holy places in Arabia. This book has a valuable introduction by Abdulla Yusuf Ali – the well-known translator of the Holy Quran. The definitive, or final, edition of Nizam Jung's poems appeared in 1954 [edited by Zahir Ahmed] shortly before Nizam Jung's death in 1955. This volume comprises most of Nizam Jung's poems combining in it the earlier volume of sonnets. It has a foreword written by Lord Hailey [for the final edition]. The various other poems on different subjects and in different modes has a foreword by Lord Wavell, the ex-Viceroy of India.<sup>4</sup> In this large volume, eleven poems out of the earlier twenty-two Islamic poems have been retained and the others omitted. The names of some poems have been changed and some have also been combined into larger units. The editor has also categorized them according to his personal choice and judgement without giving any reason or mentioning whether the poet gave his concurrence for this. The date of composition of the poems has not been given though some can be arrived at on the basis of internal or external evidence [as in the case of the elegies for famous persons]. This lack of 'dating' does not facilitate examination of the 'growth of a poet's mind' in its constant evolution and search for greater creativity. Another aspect is that the poet may have, in later life, no longer adhered to those positions that he held in his earlier days. But the seemingly haphazard arrangement of the poems gives no clue to all this.

In the 'final' edition of the poems which has brought together the great body of the poet's earlier poetic corpus [which presumably was all the poet wished to save], we observe that the editor has sub-divided the text as follows:

Part One: Lyrical poems further sub-divided into: *Of Nature and Meditation* – 19 poems; *Of Mystic Aspiration* – 8 poems; *A Breath of Persian Poetry* – 10 poems; *Visionary Gleams* – 31 poems; *Myth and Truth* – 9 poems; *Occasional* – 19 poems; *Foretokens of War 1936-38* – 6 poems; *Islamic and Arabian Poems* – 34 poems. This makes a total of 134 poems in Part One.

Part Two has a general heading, *Rudel of Blaye and other Poems* and includes 12 poems. In another heading, *Pro Rege et Patria* [ for King

<sup>3</sup> Zahir Ahmed [ed.], *Islamic poems by Nawab Sir Nizam Jung Bahadur* (Hyderabad Deccan: Government Central Press, 1935).

<sup>4</sup> Zahir Ahmed [ed.], *Poems by Sir Nizam Jung*, n.d. [c. 1955], n.p.

and Country ] , there are 4 poems. A third heading, *The Peasant*, has one unfinished poetic dialogue. This makes a total of 17 poems for Part Two.

In Part Three, *Sonnets*, there are the following sub-categories:

- i. Sonnets of Mystic Love and Beauty – 26
- ii. Sonnets of Meditation – 18
- iii. The Realm of Faith [8 sonnets and 1 poem] – 9
- iv. Sonnets of the spirit – 26
- v. Sonnets of persons and places – 22

This is followed by a rubric, *Miscellaneous Poems*, further sub-divided into:

- i. Glimpses – 19 poems
- ii. Impromptu verse – 2 poems
- iii. Humorous verse – 4 poems.

This makes a total of 126 poems for Part Three.

Part Four consists of 'translations [some specimens] chiefly of the Urdu verse of Mir Osman Ali Khan VI' [13 poems], one long piece from the *Shahnameh* of Firdausi describing the battle of Cadesia [sic]. At the very end, there is a short poem entitled *Adieu* indicating knowledge of the poet's approaching death. This makes a total of 15 poems for Part Four.

Thus, the total number of poems in all the four parts in the 'final' edition comes to 292. These do not include the 11 omitted poems from the earlier *Islamic Poems* [1935]. These poems have been arranged by the editor, Zahir Ahmed, according to a peculiar classification. On the whole, they present a wide-ranging spectrum of topics covering many aspects of a rich and intellectually inquisitive mind, of a person familiar with diverse cultures, languages and literatures, of an acute visionary capable of expressing deep emotions in verse in a foreign tongue [English] which had so imbued his consciousness that it became the vehicle of his personal feelings rather than his first language, of a poetic practitioner familiar with the craft of words, of rhyme, metre and the strictures of prosody. Nizam Jung's three-fold personality – as a Muslim, as a Hyderabad, as a British subject – emerges in this collection. He also comes through as a person learned in Islamic history, familiar with the classical Islamic texts [in Arabic and Persian] and as a student of Latin, English and other European literatures. As a political observer, he possessed a keen insight into the various fluctuations of Indian politics and the mindset of India's leaders.

If one were to study Nizam Jung's poems, it would be convenient to classify them under the following heads:

- i. Personal

- ii. Philosophical
- iii. Political
- iv. Historical
- v. Literary [including translations]
- vi. Religious.

This is not a water-tight division for the contents of one easily spill over into the other.

### **i. Personal**

Among these poems, one finds those that express Nizam Jung's innermost thoughts, fears, doubts and aspirations. Nizam Jung was a bachelor living in a replica of an English stately home – which was named Hillfort – all by himself and his servants. As this was too large for him, it was purchased by Nizam Osman and given to his son.<sup>5</sup> Nizam Jung was thus unencumbered by family responsibilities or disturbed by tumultuous happenings. His personal poems are a sensitive record of his impressions and improvisations that indicate his mindset. The only element lacking is the personal touch of affection, of romance, of 'thoughts that lie too deep for tears'. Rather, there is the feeling of a cultured intellect living in a rarefied atmosphere of splendid isolation. In his poem, *A Confession*, he admits that:

I longed in rural bowers to pass my life  
Where Nature's voice attunes the Poet's rhyme.

His various poems dealing with the beauty of nature and rural life are inspired by Wordsworth and reflect a similar concern with the simplicity of poetic diction expressed by Wordsworth in his *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*. In spite of his apparent freedom from care, the sensitive soul of Nizam Jung was receptive to pain and pathos – as seen in this apostrophe to himself:

O sorrow-laden soul! For thee  
What joy save in Eternity?  
But this is all transcended by a rich feeling of  
contentment:  
Indifferent to Fortune's frown or smile  
It scorns her fickle favours that beguile.

Certainly the impulse from the vernal wood has taught the poet more than all the sages could – to paraphrase Wordsworth.

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<sup>5</sup> Narendra Luther [tr.], *The Nocturnal Court: Durbaar-e-Durbar. The Life of a prince of Hyderabad by Sidq Jaisi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. xlv.

## ii. Philosophical

In his philosophical poems, Nizam Jung appears in a more mature, more mellow, more profound mood. Clearly, he had ample opportunity to reflect upon life's great mysteries and abstractions and he has tried to probe the darkness to bring forward such answers as could satisfy his restless soul. He investigates the nature of life in two poems:

I've watched thy wandering course on land;  
Now watch thee join the sea,  
Led onward by the guiding hand  
That holds Eternity.  
[The River of Life]

and:

Life's beauteous dream!  
God's grace doth seem  
To fill Creation's plan,  
And from the height  
Descends like light  
Into the soul of man,  
[A Vision of Life]

Similarly, death brings forth these lines:

The atoms of Nature  
With God's breath combining  
Are hid in her bosom  
As living, not dead...  
[A Vision of Death]

Cosmic concepts in their permutations are thus described:

There shines a light beyond the stars  
In its eternal prime;  
Beyond the mystic gate that bars  
The fateful flight of Time.

In like manner, abstractions such as hope, illusion, nature, spirit, memory and immortality have been analysed in the context of a larger universe beyond man's limited range of sense-perception.

In his sonnets, Nizam Jung uses the Petrarchan [octave + sestet] rather than the Shakespearean form [3 quatrains + 1 couplet]. Here he probes further into the ideas of beauty, love, joy, faith and soul using an extensive gamut of symbology to explore their meaning. The tone and mood is that of an active intellect seeking out answers to queries on the nature of existence *per se* within the limits of epistemology. Although Nizam Jung did not have any formal

philosophical training, his alert and inquiring mind led him to examine the rationale of existence and the creation of the cosmos. He understood that causality did not provide the answer to these, but that a teleological process was at work in the universe. This transcended the limits of sense-perception and empiricism. This conclusion gave peace to his soul as nothing else. As Nawab Sir Amin Jung Bahadur writes, 'A [mystic/fakir/sufi] is one who is one with nature as he conceives her or whose heart beats in unison with the world-spirit as he perceives it.'<sup>6</sup>

### iii & iv Political & Historical

His political poems exhibit his sage observations on the nature of politics and the role of diverse politicians that dominated the spectrum of Indian politics. In fact, many of Nizam Jung's political poems have passed into the realm of history and thus bear a historico-political texture. For example, there are five poems on Napoleon alone – expressing admiration for the great conqueror and sadness at his fate. There are elegies on those who have passed away such as Queen Victoria, King George V and Mir Mahboob Ali Khan.<sup>7</sup> On the last, he writes:

He ruled by love, his scepter of command  
Was but a symbol of his heart of love...

There are profound reflections on those who left their impact on the world – as diverse as Alexander, Aureng-Zebe, Socrates, Noor Jehan and Hannibal. These reflect his extensive knowledge of world history and the appreciation of persons of merit everywhere.

Certain poems were written for special occasions such as the silver jubilee of Nizam Osman in 1937, the outbreak and conclusion of the two World Wars and events related to them – such as *India to England 1914*, *Belgium 1914*, *Indian troops going to war 1914, 1917-18*, *The Armistice 1918*, *On the admission of Indian troops to the British army*, *To England 1938*, *To England 1939*, *Greece 1941*, *The Turks 1941*. In the last-mentioned poem, Nizam Jung writes through the persona of a Turkish soldier:

We stand with faith in God alone;  
We stand as Turks on Turkish ground.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Amin Jung Bahadur, *The Philosophy of Faqirs* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> The present writer recalls with fondness the many conversations he had with Nawab Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, Agent-General of the State of Hyderabad to Pakistan on 'the days of the beloved' Mir Mahboob Ali Khan and his son, Osman. Nawab Mushtaq passed away in 2005 at an age over 100.

Relations with the Turks are highlighted. In *Turkey under Mustafa Kamal*, the poet gives credit to the founder of modern Turkey thus:

He bade her rise triumphant o'er her foes  
And wrest from Fate the honours that shall last.  
An elegy written on the death of Mustafa Kamal goes thus:  
A hero fired with patriot pride,  
Who scheming Europe's powers defied  
When Turkey at their mercy lay  
And hope within all hearts had died.

A bearer of the Prophet's name,  
His darkest deeds God's mercy claim,  
Who gave him power to save once more  
A Muslim nation's honour, fame.

It is clear that Turkey loomed large on Nizam Jung's consciousness and he recognized the pivotal role it had to play in the international political arena.

There are elegies of persons known to Nizam Jung as friends, guides and mentors to whom he paid tribute in verse [sonnets]. He made an acrostic of their names using the first letter of each line which shows his great skill in poetic craftsmanship. The first panegyric is addressed to a fellow-Hyderabad, Muhammad Bahadur Khan better known as Bahadur Yar Jung – a fiery orator and thundering voice of the Muslims, known for his sincere devotion to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Titled *A Lost Leader*, the poem forcefully describes him:

A brave and righteous leader sent  
By Providence men's hearts to guide;  
Not his the voice of power and pride,  
But of great deeds and high intent.

The famous 'Nightingale of India' and fellow-poet, also fellow-Hyderabad [of Bengali origin], Sarojini Naidu receives posthumous bouquets from Nizam Jung. Sarojini Naidu wrote the preface to Jung's biography, *Life's Yesterdays*, in which she appreciated his manifold talents thus:

I am happy to be given this opportunity of offering a just meed of praise to this old and valued friend, this gifted man of wide intellectual attainments and distinguished personality whom we esteem so highly for his proud integrity and independence of character, this brave and pious devotee of Islam whom we so deeply honour today for his allegiance to the lofty spiritual ideals which have inspired him, in the late autumn of his years, to

choose a life of voluntary poverty, in a quiet ecstasy of renunciation, yielding up all worldly possessions for the benefit of the needy and the destitute in Medina, holy City, beloved of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>8</sup>

It was unfortunate for Nizam Jung that his friend, admirer and co-votary of the muse should have predeceased him on 2 March 1949. In an acrostic poem, he recalls her with affection and admiration thus:

Ne'er in that heart of yours was guile or hate –  
A poet's glowing heart with love elate;  
Intrepid, you pursued your chosen course,  
Disdaining selfish craft and artful force;  
Undazed by fame – the promised gift of fate.

It will be seen that the first letters of each line combine to form the word, Naidu. It may be mentioned, *en passant*, that the distinguished father of Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Chattopadhyay, was the first Indian to obtain a Ph.D. in chemistry from Edinburgh University as early as 1875. He was a great admirer of Turkey on the grounds that Turkey was the only Asian country to hold territory in Europe. Sarojini Naidu, born and bred in Hyderabad, was totally imbued with Indo-Persian culture in all its fineness and was a paragon of tolerance.

The death, on 19 May 1936, of a great Muslim of English origin, viz. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall [the famous translator of the Holy Quran] was a great blow to Nizam Jung. Jung had had a long and fruitful association with Pickthall chiefly due to their stay in Hyderabad and their links with the journal, *Islamic Culture*, issued from Hyderabad, of which Pickthall was editor and to which Jung contributed so many of his poems. Jung's elegy on Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall was printed in *Islamic Culture* in an issue of 1936.

Soldier of faith! True servant of Islam!  
To thee 'twas given to quit the shades of night  
And onward move, aye onward into light,  
Thy soul confirmed, thy heart assured and calm.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, when his old friend and admirer, Abdulla Yusuf Ali died in 1953 when both of them were in their eighties, Nizam Jung felt the blow of his going severely. Decades before, Abdulla Yusuf Ali accepted Zahir Ahmed's request that he write an introduction to the

<sup>8</sup> Sarojini Naidu in Introduction to *Life's Yesterdays*, *op.cit.*, p.xi.

<sup>9</sup> These lines were reproduced in Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's biography by Peter Clark titled *Marmaduke Pickthall: British Muslim* (London: Quartet books, 1986), pp. 68-9.



*Islamic Poems* edited by him in 1935. Abdulla Yusuf Ali wrote in that introduction:

Here are a few choice morsels from the soul of one who has played many worthy parts in life, but none worthier than of a practical man who finds peace in poetry, wealth in the stores of History and Imagination, consolation in the message of Religion and serene beauty in the personality and mysticism of the Preacher of Islam....<sup>10</sup>

Nizam Jung wrote of his old friend thus:

Ay, you have played in life a noble part  
Before your God in the service of mankind;  
Desiring nought but good within your heart,  
Undaunted by the ills before, behind.

When the subject is great, there is greatness also in the subject-matter. The death of the Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on 11 September 1948 brought forth this spontaneous expression of loss and grief:

Master of righteous will and daring deed  
Of self-devotion in the cause of Right,  
High-souled and steadfast in the hour of need –  
A selfless toiler walking in God's light!

The Indian government immediately afterwards launched 'Operation Polo' to seize the state of Hyderabad and merge it into the Indian Union. It was the Quaid who had prevented this ignoble act as long as he lived.

#### **v. Literary** [including translations]

It has been stated at the beginning that Nizam Jung was very widely read and that his reading comprised a broad-based spectrum of study related to diverse subjects such as religion, history, literature, philosophy and politics. He was in his person able to combine the intellectual traditions of the East and the West into a repertoire of harmony – to enrich his mind and heart. His literary studies gave him immense satisfaction and reinforced his intellect. His study of literature was wide-ranging covering that of ancient Greece and Rome, England and Germany, Persia and Arabia. As a Muslim, he was involved in studying the Islamic classics and seeking inspiration from them.

<sup>10</sup> This elegy was referred to on the death of Abdulla Yusuf Ali. See: *Searching for Solace: a biography of Abdulla Yusuf Ali, interpreter of the Quran*, by M.A. Sherif (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2000), p. 233.

An early poem, *Sappho and Aphrodite*, indicates his easy familiarity with Greek literature and mythology. The influence of the Greek poetess, Sappho, is seen in another poem in which the poet apostrophizes her thus:

Sappho! Who could immortalize  
The passionate heart of love,  
Couldst thou not bid love's passion rise  
Into the light above...

The scene shifts to Rome in the old days in his *Tribute to Horace*, the Latin poet famous for his *Odes*. Nizam Jung acknowledges his debt to Horace thus:

Me, dweller in a distant clime,  
Thy Roman voice has made more strong  
Even for the strife  
Of worldly life  
By maxims woven into song.

Jung's poem titled *The Death of Socrates* is in 40 stanzas of 6 lines each making a total of 240 lines. It gives the account of that philosopher's death following a trial by the elders of Athens. Our poet is still engrossed with this thinker in his sonnet *Socrates* and praises him thus:

The noblest of the soul's high gifts was thine,  
That Hellas gave to after-ages....

This is followed by a sonnet to Plato, the famous disciple of Socrates:

He lived with beauty mirrored in his soul.  
It was the beauty and the majesty  
Of this fair earth, the vast and solemn sea..

The next subject of a sonnet is Marcus Aurelius the Roman Emperor and author of *Meditations* which give the key to his mental makeup, his trials, his hopes and fears. Certainly, Nizam Jung sees in Marcus Aurelius the ideal philosopher-king of Plato and he cries out in praise:

O, but grant to me  
The godlike attributes of power, your own:  
Truth, mercy, justice in impartial sway...

This love of philosophers is seen in another sonnet *Epictetus* celebrating an early Roman philosopher born a Greek slave:

A slave! And yet no monarch on his throne  
Could claim a mind as firm, a heart as free...

A poem *Diogenes* recounts the famous meeting of that philosopher-cynic with Alexander. This leads to *Alexander the Great* in

*Persia* which is a powerful address to the gods by Alexander describing his victories in Persia, Egypt and India.

A sonnet on the Roman epic poet Virgil – author of the *Aeneid* – approbates the poet's empathy with suffering:

Yea, thou hadst tears for human suffering;  
Thy soul could trace beneath man's changeful lot  
The dim dark thread of iron destiny.

The Romans and their achievements are further celebrated in sonnets such as *Palace of the Caesars*, *Rome, Capitolium Fulgis* [= 'the bright capitol'], *Roma Fuit* [= 'Rome fled'] and *Pompeii* written during a visit to Rome in 1896.

Nizamat Jung's attachment to the great English poets also manifests itself. In his sonnet on Shakespeare [himself among the great sonneteers in English], Jung writes:

Despite his 'little Latin and less Greek'  
The pen of Shakespeare had the magic art  
To probe the secrets of the human heart  
In darkest depths their hidden founts to seek...

The reference in the first line is to the elegy of Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's great contemporary. Nizamat Jung refers to Desdemona, victim of the cunning Iago, in the tragedy *Othello* in the sonnet. He also makes mention of Hamlet, the character. The sonnet concludes:

His voice was for all time, not for an age.

This is a paraphrase of Ben Jonson's line in the same elegy on Shakespeare. The only other English poet mentioned in a separate sonnet is Shelley – whose life matches the action in his poetry.

[He] soared sublime  
On aerial wings to pierce the region where  
The spirit of the Universe lays bare  
The secret of her beauty.

This is a partial paraphrase of the famous verdict of Arnold on Shelley which goes: 'Shelley is a beautiful, ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain.'

One genre in which Nizamat Jung was proficient to an extraordinary degree was translation. He himself was adept in several languages and his early education comprised the usual study of the Holy Quran, the *Hadith* and other Arabic books. This was followed by a strong grounding in Persian [especially the poetry of the great poets Rumi, Saadi, Hafiz, Jami and Indian Persian poets like Amir Khusrau] and to a lesser extent in the religious, literary and historical material present in Persian prose. Nizamat Jung chose English as the vehicle of his poetic expression but was also eager to enrich it with the literary gems present

in other languages. In this area, Nizamat Jung held a facile pen and was able to put into smooth-flowing English the florid Urdu of the *ghazals* of his suzerain, Mir Osman Ali Khan. These translations were called 'perfumed ghazels' by D.F. Karaka<sup>11</sup> as they did not appear to be translations but original works. These contain some severely strained Christmas poems in imitation of Christmas carols [by Osman].

Nizamat Jung's great love of Persian poetry is seen in the oriental use of figurative language that saturates all his translated verse. His original sonnet to Hafiz records his poetic indebtedness to the great Persian poet:

Then in new worlds of rapture and of light –  
All nameless yearnings found in Love a name,  
All voiceless passions found a voice in Song.

His compatriot, Sarojini Naidu, wrote to him once asking: 'Have you never felt in your blood the glorious heritage of your race? You who have all the ecstasy of Hafiz, the wine of Omar, the mystic intoxication of Ghalib, the supreme abandon of Rumi as your own, you who have the burning sands of the Arab deserts and the mystic roses of Persian gardens as your own inheritance?'<sup>12</sup> As if to reply to this challenge, Nizamat Jung wrote a section of poems called *A Breath of Persian Poetry* but by the time it was printed Sarojini Naidu was no more and the sad poet dedicated these poems to her memory. The translation preserved in the final edition of his poems is that made from Firdausi's great epic, *Shahnameh* [Book of the Kings] describing the battle of Qadsiya – one of the great early victories of Islam that destroyed the empire of the Persian Chosroes. The original verses [selected] go as follows:

*Ba juyim bulandi wa farzanagi*  
*Human razm wa tundi wa mardanagi*

Literal: I seek eminence and wisdom

In all battles, toil and masculine vigour.

N.J.: Be it mine to seek wisdom and greatness and height  
And the pride of a warrior in manhood and might.

Original: *Za-nam-ast ta javedan zindeh mard*  
*Kih murdeh shawad kal bad zir-i-gard*

Literal: [That] man's name will be eternal and living  
When dead his body will be in the dust.

N.J.: Immortal the man who doth live in his fame  
When mouldering in dust is his lifeless frame.

<sup>11</sup> D.F. Karaka, *Fabulous Mogul: Nizam VII of Hyderabad* (Lahore: Progressive books, 1975), p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> In *Life's Yesterdays*, *op.cit.*, p.265.

Original: *Chih nekubuwad shah ra dad wa din*  
*Za-nam-ash zaban-ha pur az afreen*

Literal: How good is that king in justice and religion-  
 [when] his name on tongues is said with acclaim.

N.J.: How well faith and justice a monarch adorn  
 When on tongues of acclaim are his praises upborn.

Original: *Bar a-nam kih zindeh bashad tan-am*  
*Bin beekh bad az Jahan bar kunam*

Literal: I wish that as long as there is life in my body  
 To make the world free of the seeds of evil.

N.J.: Until life's in my limbs be it ever my will  
 From the world to uproot every seed-root of ill.

Nizam Jung does not take poetic licence too far and gives a truly poetic rendition of the simple Persian in similarly suitable language.

The above is one example of Nizam Jung's talent for translation. It is unfortunate that the great mass of his translations should not have been preserved. Nizam Osman praised his efforts at translating his own poems [not of a high quality] in these words:

I appreciate the devoted manner in which you are translating the poems of my *Divan*. Certainly there is no one else at present who can do it equally well.<sup>13</sup>

#### vi. Religious

It is the religious poems of Nizam Jung that truly reflect his study, understanding and attachment to his faith. As he grew older and wiser, Nizam Jung apprehended to a greater degree the universal truths of Islam and their civilizing influence in an all-too-troubled world. Some of his 'Islamic', 'mystic' or 'religious' poems [the adjectives are interchangeable; there is nothing mystic or religious outside Islam] were composed at one time or other during his four pilgrimages to perform the Haj in Arabia. Such poems reflect the immediate impact of that experience on the poet. Others were written in times of questioning and reflection.

As mentioned earlier, Zahir Ahmed edited 22 Islamic poems of Nizam Jung in 1935 and he wrote a note which stated: 'The skeptical times we live in demand an acceptable interpretation of the appeal of Islam – a fact much misunderstood and often misrepresented. It was left to Sir Nizam to give expression through the vehicle of English verse to the spirit of Islamic nationalism without making his poems a thesis.'<sup>14</sup> In

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>14</sup> In Islamic poems, *op.cit.*, p.1.

his foreword, the famous translator of the Holy Quran and ex-Revenue Minister [1921-22] of Hyderabad State, Abdulla Yusuf Ali wrote:

That the Holy places of Arabia should inspire so sensitive a nature was to be expected. That he should clothe his thoughts in choice and faultless English and present them to the modern youth of Islam in India is the good fortune of the modern youth of Islam in India.<sup>15</sup>

In our study of Islamic poems, we have taken into account all the poems included in the 1935 edition as well as the other poems in the 1954 edition. Although Nizam Jung's fervour for his faith runs through most of his poems even in those on diverse subjects, the especial and potent attachment he has for Islam shows itself best in the 'religious' poems. These generally appeared intermittently in the journal *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad.

The first poem in *Islamic Poems* is *Spirit of Light* in which the poet apostrophizes the spirit in these words:

Spirit of Light, from starry mansions straying  
Whose flight is o'er this world of woe and strife,  
On, on thy course, to mortal hearts conveying  
God's meaning of the mystery of life.

As light is the dominant symbol in this poem, it is logically carried forward to the famous 'Light Verse' in the Holy Quran [24:35] in which Allah has been called 'the Light of the heavens and the earth.'

*The Spirit's Paradise* takes us above the world of sense-perception to 'far beyond the reach of thought' where 'life is love divine' and 'the promised bliss is thine.' *A Sensuous Paradise* also pursues the same theme viz. that the paradise of Muslims though described in 'sensuous' terms is way beyond the reach of the senses.

In this volume of 1935, there are five poems related to the poet's spiritual experiences during the Haj. In *A Prayer at the Prophet's Shrine, Medina*, Nizam Jung writes:

O mighty spirit, pure and true  
Ordained to bear His trust....  
A mortal thou, yet born to bear  
The weight of earth and heaven...

The reference is to the great 'trust' offered to the heavens, the earth and the mountains who could not bear it but it was borne by man.[Quran 33:72].

*Round Mecca, At the Haj, In the Kaaba* describe the physical environment of the Haj. *The Road to Medina* is also intended to support

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.iii.

the construction of a road between Mecca and Medina at a time when only camels transported the pilgrims between the two cities.

*A Quranic Hymn, An Islamic Hymn, A Lesson out of the Quran* and *Lailat-ul-Qadr* are poems based on certain texts of the Quran – the first being a paraphrase of the *Sura Fatiha* and the last of the *Sura Qadr*.

*The Miracles of Islam, Omar [after the conquest of Persia], The Empire of Islam, The Arab Chaunt* are poems that trace the meteoric rise of Islam and its assumption of paramountcy in the world.

*The Great Caliphs of Islam* is a tribute to the early Caliphs of Islam and their efforts in its cause. It concludes thus:

‘Twas theirs the hallowed path to find,  
That once their Leader trod,

And in the guidance of mankind,  
The way that leads to God.

It was this stanza that was quoted by Abdulla Yusuf Ali in his foreword with admiration.

*The Votary* is more personal as it contains a passionate and powerful address to the Holy Prophet:

To thee I come sin-stained in thought and deed,  
A prey to passion, wandering aimlessly.  
Here in your shrine from life-long travail freed,  
I hail the dawn of immortality!

*The Mystic* is a personal poem in the third person so as to distance oneself from one's experience and to assess it dispassionately.

Such was the variegated, thoughtful and profound wealth of spiritual experience that was related to Islam and prompted mostly by Jung's pilgrimage to the Hejaz.

In the final edition [1954] of the poems, we find the rubric *Arabian and Islamic Poems* in which eleven have been kept and eleven dropped from the edition of 1935 and a number have been added. Some of the earlier poems have been renamed – which appears to be the work of Zahir Ahmed the editor.

The opening poem *Recantation* is interesting in that it shows the poet-pilgrim's progress from a fascination with the literature of the West to graduating to the superior eastern literature.

From fading dreams of Greece and Rome,  
Art's splendour, pomp of power  
My fancy turned to find a home  
Where stood the muses' bower.

Finally on reaching his 'celestial city' he is able to reminisce with satisfaction:

A purer heaven before me lies  
 Than Hellas' sages knew;  
 A grander earth and grander skies  
 Than where Rome's eagles flew.

A short yet simple poem, *Islam*, compresses in it a world of meaning:

All Nature breathes the spirit of Islam-  
 A glad submission to the Maker's will.  
 Her heart is pulsing but her face is calm;  
 Her mighty forces work in silence still.

*The News from Persia* is linked with the earlier *Omar* [after the conquest of Persia] and tells of Caliph Omar who ran by the side of the mounted messenger to receive news of Muslim armies in Persia. *The Entry into Jerusalem* tells of Caliph Omar walking while his slave was mounted – to receive the surrender of Jerusalem.

*The Quran and the Sword* is a refutation of malicious propaganda that Islam was spread by force. The spirit of Islam is:

'Twas tolerance of every creed,  
 'Twas faith tow'rd friend and foe,  
 'Twas righteousness in will and deed  
 That Islam came to show.

The same theme is continued in *The First Soldiers of Islam*.

A group of other poems record Jung's impressions of certain holy places in the Hejaz visited by him such as Quba, the Quba Mosque, the Kiblatain mosque – all of which spark off feelings of exaltation and humility. In *The Call of Medina*, Nizamat Jung writes:

Islam's centre is Medina,  
 Hallowed seat of sovereign power;  
 Treasure-house of glorious memories  
 And of Faith's celestial dower.

A more personal note is struck when the poet visits the grave of a fellow-Hyderabad, Nawab Wali-ud-Dowlah in Medina.

*My Poverty is my Pride* is an explication of a famous *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet. *The Muslim's Paradise* is based on another *Hadith* which states that paradise is beneath the feet of mothers.

*A Mirage in the Arabian Desert*, *Jedda*, *The Haram Towards Mecca* are separate pieces that come under the broad rubric *Impressions of the Haj Journey*. Keeping in view the powerful stirring of emotions that the journey has caused, the poet abandons the strictures of rhyme to use a powerful blank verse.

A short poem *Solace* describes the inner peace that followed the poet's discovery, study and mellow understanding of Islam:



Nor in the philosophic mind,  
 Nor in the poet's art  
 Could I that secret solace find  
 Which soothes the troubled heart.

But in the spirit of Islam,  
 Which could lost faiths redeem  
 I found the 'soul's marmoreal calm'  
 Of Plato's cherished dream!

The reference to Plato indicates the poet's dissatisfaction with earthly philosophies.

The section *Realm of Faith* contains a poem in three parts consisting of three sonnets on the Holy Prophet. There are three new poems: *Medina*, *Pax Arabica* and *The Voice from Palestine* – the last dealing with the Crusade of Peter the Hermit and the resistance offered to it by Muslims.

The above is a broad assessment of the more prominent poems of Nizam Jung after classifying them into seven categories.

There is no doubt that Nizam Jung is a versatile versifier often attaining great heights of poetic fancy, force and expression. In fact, we observe his 'progress of poesy' through many lands, many ages and emotional states. The culmination of his mental and spiritual development appears when he reaches a climax in the city of Medina and in the presence of the tomb of the Holy Prophet. It has been a long journey from student, seeker, rationalist, scholar to the apogee as Muslim mystic and thinker maintaining all the while the humility of a pilgrim and the sincerity of a seeker of truth. This peak of attainment was his true destiny which he obtained as few are destined to obtain in this world. He follows with supreme attachment and breathless ardour 'the caravan of Islam' – as Sarojini Naidu puts it. In raising his intellectual level, Nizam Jung raises the level of his poetry and frees it from the clogs of human limitations making it a rapt and luminous experience in which earthly consciousness is lifted to the state of contemplation of the sublime.

Nizam Jung is remarkable for his felicitous use of English for poetic purposes. He has a vast vocabulary and a repertoire of figures of speech. His turn of phrase is excellent and he is able to make the language rise to the level which adequately expresses his emotions. The composition of poetry in a language that is not one's native one is a formidable task but one which Nizam Jung has performed with great skill and proficiency. He made the proper choice of using English for his verse, as English was emerging as a universal lingua franca. The purpose

of his poetry was to address the large body of non-Muslims in the world and present Islam in its pristine purity. A few of his usages are now obsolete. This does not devalue the thought-content of his verse – which, dealing with timeless issues, remains itself timeless.