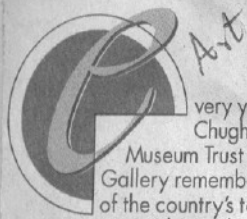


by Sajid Abbas



Every year the Chughtai Museum Trust Art Gallery remembers one of the country's topmost artist, Khan Bahadur, the

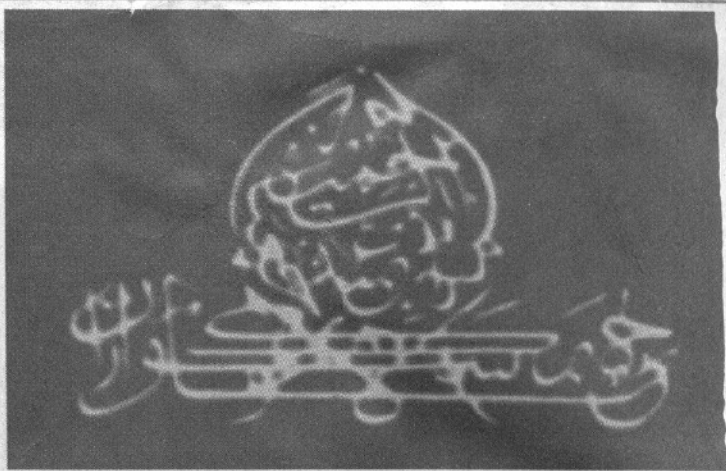
late Muhammad Abdur Rehman Chughtai. Thursday before last the Chughtai Museum Trust invited a number of people of Lahore to enjoy the display of a number of articles and paraphernalia, which once were in the possession or use of the late artist and which are now on show in the Art Gallery dedicated to his memory, in Mian Saleh Mimar Lane.

A number of photographs, water colours, photographs of manuscripts and deeds and other memorabilia were displayed in the two exhibition rooms of the Gallery. There were thirteen photos showing the late Chughtai at different ages of his life, from boyhood to times when he had almost become a legend, another five were hung in the adjacent room, showing him with his family, in what probably was his house in the walled city, a charming old place i.e. City of Lahore.

Other memorabilia included half a score manuscripts, rather photographic reproductions of age old manuscripts, shedding light on the history of the artist and his family and, perhaps, some of the customs of olden days, for, there was the reproduction of a sheet of paper or a page from a notebook said to have been scribed on the occasion of a wedding. The page seemed to be an account or a list of guests making the traditional gift of 'slaamee', which both the bride and the bridegroom received from their blood relations, relatives and close friends. The amount was religiously and duly noted down, for, it had to be restituted when the child of the relative or friend got married. The custom is still in vogue, though, some sort of variance seems to have crept in.

Amongst other photos of manuscripts were those by Ataullah Rushdi and Hamid Meymar, the later's dated 1044 Hijri, in the times of Shahjehan, when the Mosque of Wazeer Khan was constructed. One wonders if Hamid Meymar participated in the building of the famous masterpiece, after all it was a big event.

One had the good fortune to see a miniature of Nadir-ul-Asar, Ahmad Meymar Lahoree, too, or maybe a copy of it. Readers may like to recollect that Ahmad Meymar



Chughtai's anniversary



Lahoree, was the architect of the Taj Mahal of Agra, the mausoleum in marble of Mumtaz Mahal, known for its splendour the world over. The Chughtai family claims descent from the well-known architect.

On show was a delicately illuminated and splendidly ornamented copy of the Holy Quran, flawlessly scripted by Raheem Bukhsh Lahoree in 1839 and embellished by Mian Umar Deen Naqqash. The piece illustrates the quality of the work carried out in those days. That priceless article, though not the work of the artist was his most prized possession.

Another article that was not the

work of the artist but was in recognition of his talent and the work he did, was the 'Sanad' or the warrant of the Title of honour bestowed upon him by the Government of the day. The late Abdur Rehman Chughtai was created a 'Khan Bahadur' on the first of January, 1934. The Sanad was signed by the then Viceroy and Governor-General.

One could get an idea of what the late artist used to do and how did he go about his business by looking at the sketches and unfinished or 'experimental' water-colours that were put on display, but there was quite some thing that

one missed. One could neither find the paintings of the Sikh or the earlier Moghul times, of which the late artist had acquired a large variety, nor one came across any thing of his legendary collection of the Rajput or Pahari masterpieces. None of his part of accumulation of Japanese woodcuts or Rembrandt etchings or paintings of European Masters could be seen on display. Can one ever enjoy seeing his personal collection of art from other corners of the world?

Khan Bahadur, the late Muhammad Abdur Rehman Chughtai, was born in Koocha Chaabuk Sowaaran, in the enchanting old city of Lahore in the end of the nineteenth century, (the family says on the 21st of September, 1897, while others mention different dates). He passed away on January 1975.

The late A. R. Chughtai, had during his lifetime, gathered a large following here and abroad. His work, though reflecting the mood of his times was highly imaginative. A perfect draftsman with an inborn sense of colour and design he gave his works his own peculiar hallmark.

Apart from being an artist par excellence he was a printmaker of repute. Readers may like to know that he studied printmaking as early as 1932 and 1936 when he visited Europe and the United Kingdom. Incidentally he was recognised as the most skilful and proficient printmaker of his time east of Suez.

A. R. Chughtai was a man of many fine qualities. He seemed to have a special relationship with the world of literature. Many a man of letters was amongst his close friends. Himself a short story writer and a poet, he along with his brother produced a literary cum art magazine. He even attempted to produce a motion picture in the hope that it will be a guide for local film-makers to make good movies and raise their image in the eyes of the society.

Nevertheless, the late Chughtai is remembered for a revolution that he created in the world of printing in the South Asian Subcontinent. In 1928 he is said to have produced his *Muraqqa-e-Chughtai* in his own printery and on his own press. The work featured illustrations of the poetry of Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, the leading luminary of Urdu literature of his time, perhaps, all time. The work was hailed as a masterpiece by both the book trade and the art world of those days.

The *Muraqqa-e-Chughtai* was followed by *Naqsh-e-Chughtai* (1935), a less expensive version of the former. Another work Chughtai's *Paintings* (1940), were paintings without text. Then the world saw his most memorable work the *Amal-e-Chughtai* (1968) illustrating the work of Allama Iqbal and depicting a number of figures from the history of Islam.

The exhibition was a proper way of making people remember a great artist who worked to glorify the great moments of our history and laud our culture. ☞