Localism and Trans-regionalism in Punjab: Inception of Muslim Modernism in Sir Fazl-i-Husain

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The province of Punjab has often been described as the political powerhouse for Pakistani state and in post-1947 perspective it has often registered varying views based on adulation, or sheer demonisation. Punjab’s political transformation from a bastion of regional identity as espoused by the land-based Unionist elements to a vanguard of a modernist Muslim nationalism is certainly of immense historical significance. Even long before the communal sundering of its population, the province held the forte for Raj, and despite passing through harrowing experiences of migrations and ethnic cleansing, it soon opted for a larger-than-life dispensation. The Unionist view of trans-communal but strictly regional preferences could not stop the historical juggernaut of trans-regional utopianism. This duality between regionalism and Muslim nationalism with some similar parallels in Bengal’s experiences are not new and should not be seen merely within the prisms of surely the powerful processes of provincialisation, communalisation and partition.1

Of course, the tumult in Pakistan’s history and geo-politics can be largely explained in reference to its enduring problems of governance owing to the elite’s failure in steering the country towards participatory and durable politics. But it can be equally understood in reference to the age-old history of invasions, migrations, internal convulsions and assimilations that the Indus Valley went through.2 These processes did not stop with the consolidation of the British Raj; in fact, it inherited the earlier Frontier policies of Ashoka, the Delhi Sultans and the Mughals where guarding the Western reaches and harnessing a more durable relationship with Afghanistan and Central Asia had been the centrepiece of what came to be known as “the Great Game”. More like emperors Akbar, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, the
British India’s bureaucracy and military remained surreptitiously embroiled in “forward”, “watchful neutrality” and “alliance-based” phases until in 1893 the Durand Line was consummated allowing a porous border straddling across the Pushtun territories and further up and down. Earlier, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh’s interregnum did not have a ‘settled’ frontier nor were his successors able to obviate the ever-present security threat from a fluid border. The formation of a separate Frontier province under Lord Curzon further bifurcated into settled and tribal agencies was a familiar imperial strategy of calibrating buffers and segmented entities, whose lack of shared ethos would disallow any united front.

Other than these historical and geo-political dimensions of Punjab’s political career all the way from the Dravidian, Aryan, Persian, Greek, Turkic, Afghan, Sikh, British and Pakistani phases, the province’s integration southwards and eastwards has been a steady reality. In a sum, Punjab resisted as well as assisted the historical currents impacting the northern sub-continent and instead of a lone bystander or a mere gateway it assumed an acculturative role. In the Muslim era, the Arab political conquest might have augured the beginning of political Islam in India, but it was the subsequent Ismaili, Ghaznavid and other Turkic dynasts such as Qutb-ud-Din Aibak whose otherwise predominantly mountainous kingdoms flourished mainly owing to the resources that the upper Indus Valley put at their disposal.

As a consequence, the development of Islamicate, Persianate or Indo-Islamic Culture as such occurred due to activist contributions of this region. Punjab’s localism is thus curiously contrasted with its extra-regional pursuits which should not be merely juxtaposed strictly within the domain of security and geopolitics. During the British period, restructuring of the local societies unleashed several responses including a deeper sense of insecurity among the Muslims of upper India. Irrigation canals, the ideological constructs such as the theory of martial races, induction of modern education both by the missionaries and the government began to regiment an obliging landed aristocracy while simultaneously allowing the semblance of an increasingly vocal middle class. The rural nature of Muslim populace—now itself divided into smaller landowning peasants and some
landlords in western regions—solidified localism and greater dependence on the state apparatus. This patronage-based politics flourished both in the hydraulic and arid regions and engineered similar patterns among Muslims and Sikhs. On the contrary, the Hindu communities, more like their counterparts in Sindh, took to commercial and other urban professions and thus found a quick route to “gentrification”. A smaller section of Muslims, following the harrowing years of 1857, was inspired by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and pioneered anjumans to initiate reformist revivalism. More than the colonial retaliatory coercion and co-optation, it was the role of this very state as an arena of competing and even conflictive communitarian interests which underpinned Muslim apprehensions not just in urban Punjab but manifestly in the UP, Bengal and Bombay as well. Sindh and other areas followed these regions in the early twentieth century with class formulation underwriting parallel communal tensions. Thus the interplay of economic and cultural forces led to regenerative efforts amongst all the three communities, who sought newer and often India-wide defence mechanisms while faced with modernity, colonial hegemony and a vigorous evangelicalism. In fact, other than the above historical reasons, these were the major factors that drove quest for extra-regional interface and it is not surprising to note that Sir Syed’s programme received such a significant support in Punjab and then in trans-Indus regions.

This India-wide Muslim consciousness catapulted Punjabi Muslim groups into a larger Muslim context. Here, Arabia, Africa and the Ottomans—other than the sporadic contacts with Southeast Asia—created a suitable atmosphere for Pan-Islamic sentiments. Thus it would be safe to suggest that both Sir Syed and Syed Jamal-ud-Din al-Afghani offered two extra-regional dimensions and outreach to this alert Punjabi Muslim section which was certainly urban and not too extensive. Here, Urdu and Persian facilitated these trans-regional contacts. Syed’s modernism and Afghani’s reformism did not cause any ideological chasms among Muslim anjumans and instead Punjab proved a melting pot for them. Justice Shah Sin, Sir Muhammad Shafi, Nawab Muhammad Hayat Khan, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Munshi Mahbub Alam, Syed Mumtaz Ali and Sir Fazl-i-Husain saw no conflict in their respective roles as Muslims.
Indians, Punjabis and members of a global Muslim world. Even Muhammad Iqbal’s invitation to Syed Abul Ala Mawdudi to establish his organisation in Lahore—similar to his invitation to Allama Yusuf Ali to head Islamia College-- and his parleys with other Muslim revivalists did not contradict his own views on Muslim nationalism based on modernist reformism where East and West could confidently meet each other. Modernists and revivalists have become polarised more so only in recent years whereas political Islam, aggrieved over successive political and economic problems and retreats, has begun to offer itself as an alternative to modernists. 

Our deliberations should allow us to look at this plural ideological and intellectual heritage that the Indus Valley inherited with all its dynamics and tensions and then to seek out the responses to the forces of reformism, modernism and revivalism while defining its own role within the local and extra-regional praxis. Thus Muslim political consciousness in South Asia during the early half of the last century certainly owed to numerous personalities of vision and activism and had been anchored on the redefinitional efforts of the preceding centuries. Decades before the formation of Pakistan were characterised by a complex and competitive array of views and postulations though they aimed at politico-cultural regeneration by seeking out different pathways and strategies. Colonisation of the entire Muslim world, especially after the dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate with Britain well-ensconced in India provided the backdrop to this quest for identity. Certainly, the status quo was unacceptable but a better future had to be carved out from an empowering past and a debilitating present where Euro-centric modernity reigned supreme.

At this juncture the All-India Muslim League and Indian National Congress and likewise the Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Hind, Hindu Mahasabha and the Communist Party of India focused on High politics whereas the Unionists, Krishak Proja, and the Red Shirts aimed at spearheading regional but trans-communal trajectories. Situated between these two mainstreams lay an open terrain of an undefined nature where religio-political parties such as the Majlis-i-Ahrar and Tehreek-i-Khaksar tried to offer their own unique blend of political Islam,territoriality and personality-centred trajectories. 

Fazl-i-Husain (1877-1936)
found himself amidst this ideological and transformative maelstrom and tried to offer his solutions to formidable challenges while embodying regionalism both as a Punjabi and as an Indian Muslim nationalist.

Six decades since independence and in the wake of more cognisance of pluralism it is imperative to revisit leaders such as Sir Fazl-i-Husain, Mian Muhammad Shafi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, H. S. Suhrawardy, G. M. Syed, Abul Kalam Azad, Husain Ahmed Madani, Abul Hashim, H. S. Suhrawardy and many more who were, in most cases, relegated to the margins of history of Islam in South Asia. By focusing on the early, formative years of Mian Fazl-i-Husain, we may be able to study the emergence of a modern Muslim middle class—neither apologetic nor aggressive—yet confident of its own heritage and also genuinely imbued with the change for collective welfare by undertaking regional and national initiatives. While there has been some mentionable research on Allama Iqbal though focusing generally on his poetry and less on his political and philosophical ideas, Fazl-i-Husain, Mian Muhammad Shafi, Mumtaz Ali and Justice Shah Din still remain neglected from a serious scholarly discourse.

For younger Pakistanis, either Husain remains an unfamiliar personality, or some knowledgeable people may cursorily incriminate the founder of an ill-reputed Unionist Party that had the temerity to confront the Quaid-i-Azam in Punjab. In the same vein, Sikandar Hayat Khan is largely acceptable—though not that known either—despite his counterpoise with the Khaksars in March 1940, yet his successor, Khizr Hayat, is posited as the other in the mainstream historical discourse on Pakistan Movement. Unlike Iqbal’s Muslim separatism, Fazl-i-Husain’s co-optive ideal lay in helping Muslims through education, jobs and local self-government, as, to him, the institutional power emphatically lay with the British and Hindus while Muslims largely stayed inflicted with fragmentation and indolence. Instead of pursuing confrontation towards post-1919 provincialisation of politics, Muslims, according to Husain, must initially secure socio-economic groundings, and that is why, religio-political activism of the Ahrars and Khaksars was not palatable to him. Iqbal, on the other hand, had felt that without forging stronger linkages with the Muslims in other provinces,
Punjab’s Muslims and likewise their other co-religionists, would always remain vulnerable and atomised. As his lectures reveal, according to Iqbal, political redefinition, intellectual awakening and a self-empowering historical consciousness were needed to steer Muslims out of what W. C. Smith had called the third and perhaps the most serious crisis in the history of Islam.\footnote{11}

To Husain, Punjabi Muslims, by and large, were not only underprivileged, their overwhelmingly rural demography equally posed a serious impediment towards their collective welfare. Despite his own strong urban biases and imburement in Western modernity, Husain tried to engineer a block of rural and land-based clusters—over and above their religious identifications—and used it to counterbalance urban primacy. Initially, Iqbal also associated himself with Husain—his former class fellow-- but then delved into larger issues until his address at Allahabad in 1930 offered a new and substantive vision. Husain’s ill health and medical problems from an early age would always impact his life, especially at a stage when he had engaged himself in several political pursuits—not just confined to Punjab. His death in 1936 at a rather early age of 59 left many of his projects—especially India-wide—incomplete and certainly allowed the Muslim League a breakthrough. In his foreword to Husain’s only biography, C. Rajagopalachari observed a few months before the dissolution of the British Raj: “Had Fazl-i-Husain not become a sick man at an early age and breathed his last at the age of fifty-nine, in spite of his great desire to live a little longer so that he might initiate and build up provincial autonomy in the Punjab, the fortunes of the Unionist Party and probably the history of Muslim politics in India would have been very different from what they have been”.\footnote{12}

In the following pages, by focusing on the early career of Fazl-i-Husain especially during his education in Britain we locate the interface between Islam and modernity which, in its early phase, has been called Islamic modernism in India. Here, in his early formative ideas, we may locate both Islam and India within their own realms besides their impact on each other where an emerging Muslim intelligentsia—rooted in traditional and modern instruction and mores—undertook to redefine Indian Muslims. Their intellectual quest is certainly anchored on reformism and initially entails cultural domain before launching
itself into a diverse raft of political programmes. The Raj, to these intellectual and reformer, provides an impetus as well as a formidable challenge in a plural India though the former vacillates between preserving its own imperial interests and transforming India in a highly considered and restrictive way. The Indian modernists—not just the Muslims among them—cooperate as well as pinprick the Raj to nudge it to more conducive and holistic policies before their future generation begins to aim for complete independence. In this context, our study of modernists such as Husain provides us a completely new terrain of inquiry since the academic focus so far has been on landed intermediaries while the complex and maturing role of a more responsible middle class has not been fully investigated.

Punjab’s centrality in understanding Muslim political articulation is quite crucial especially following its annexation in 1849, though it was the early tanzims and anjumans that garnered a regenerative ground work among the urban Muslims. The Urdu Renaissance in Lahore and Punjab’s crucial role in supporting and financing Sir Syed Ahmed Khan proved vital developments until these urban-based Muslims became more vocal. Their associations varied from the Muslim League and Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam to religio-political parties though several of them were not comfortable with the Indian National Congress. Some of these elements were critical of Husain’s supra-communal politics and sought Allama Iqbal’s support to neutralise the Unionists. Husain’s single-minded preoccupation with the Unionist victory further alienated this urban Muslim group while, during the 1930s, the Shahidganj issue and the Ahrar-led campaign against the Ahmadis only decreased Husain’s following among Lahore’s Muslims.

However, his influence on the government as well as his meticulous organisation of the Unionist Party had certainly ensured a brilliant victory for his party though he did not live to see it. It is no wonder that following his death, Iqbal and Jinnah both tried to co-opt the Muslim Unionists, because without them the League was unable to make any decisive inroads. Punjab’s localism was soon overtaken by trans-regionality in the form of Pakistan after having been duly replenished by the Syed-Afghani dualism though tensions between an undefined political Islam
and a powerful modernist instrumentation also assumed newer velocity.

Certainly, one finds parallel trends in identity configurations of various communities where both the pulls towards localism and trans-regionalism existed. It is certainly true that defining various Punjabis or for that matter South Asians only on the basis of their religion, caste, clan, class, or regional concentration may be problematic but ignoring these determinants could be equally ahistoric. Irrespective of the fact that the terms such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians may conveniently overlook the diversities within these larger communities owing to several variables yet this religion-based distinctness—not necessarily antagonism—did exist in the province as it did elsewhere. Muslims and Hindus could be both Rajputs and Chaudhars, the way Tiwanas could be Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, whereas Kathris in western Punjab would certainly mean the moneyed classes from amongst the Hindus. Irrespective of this complex milieu of criss-crossing configurations, a sense of collective identity often anchoring on religion and region did exist, especially among those who had been the beneficiaries of canalisation, migrations, education and professionalisation.

These processes, often let loose by the colonial state, were further augmented by official documentation through census reports, surveys, gazetteers, court proceedings and popular print material both on religious and mundane themes besides the growing role of cultural organisations which often used religion and language as two major components of this self-ascriptive identification. The post-1857 codification of identities both by the state and by cultural associations allowed the salience of an emerging intelligentsia that sought better education and then material gains by using its closer affiliation with the colonial authorities. This mutual interdependence though largely ascribed to landowning classes did not stop ambitious elements of all the four major communities of Punjabis from benefiting from urban education and professions whereas Muslims and Sikhs often took to the police and military services which still allowed more mobility, improved economy and better prospects for education of their next generation. Emphasis on education mainly to ascertain better jobs and social status became the preoccupation
of an emerging Muslim middle class in and around Lahore, and Mian Fazl-i-Husain’s life testifies to the maturing of that process especially in central Punjab.

Here, we focus on his early life and education in England which played a crucial role in the his formation as a modernist Muslim, who found himself both at ease with India and the West while espousing more political empowerment through education and cooption and not through confrontation. His attitudes towards women certainly change especially following an increased socialisation in Britain though like Jinnah, he still remains a lonely figure when it comes to seeking closer friendships and personal circles.

Fazl-i-Husain: Early Encounters with the Local, National and the West:

Fazl-i-Husain was born in Peshawar in 1877 where his father, Mian Husain Bakhsh, worked in the revenue department and harboured higher goals for his only son. His ancestors came from a Muslim Rajput family that had migrated to east Punjab during the time of Emperor Babur and ever since had held important regional positions though had equally suffered during the Anglo-Sikh wars because of a pronounced role on the side of the Sikhs. Mian Husain Bakhsh, through his sheer work, had acquired respectable position in the British hierarchy and knew people like Sir Malcolm Lyall who were later on to interact with his son during his studies in London and Cambridge. Husain’s health often suffered owing to a chronic gastric problem which often recurred especially with the death of his mother while he was only eight. His step mother’s abrasive attitude only increased his reclusiveness, which he rather put to a formative use by becoming even more studious. His studies at government schools in Abbottabad and Peshawar followed with a four-year career at Government College, Lahore, where his teachers such as A. T. Arnold and Maulana Muhammad Hussain Azad groomed him in subjects such as philosophy, Persian and Urdu. Here, like Muhammad Iqbal—his class fellow—a young philosophy-oriented Ravian gradually discovered himself as a
competent debater and decided to travel to England for higher education. His father wanted him to appear for the Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination whereas Arnold had suggested Cambridge for a higher degree. Similar to the people of this emerging Muslim middle class—Fazl-i-Husain’s father provided the push factor for his career development and higher education abroad which would guarantee him better job and higher status in a growingly competitive South Asia. Like Gandhi, he had been married at nineteen when still in Lahore to a cousin who was just fifteen and both did not get enough chance to spend time together. Husain left on his voyage confronted with worries and uncertainties of a young man embarking on a new and curious journey.

The young Husain is a man of strong views when it comes to his opinions about the far-away yet seductive West or the local communities around him with whom his contact has so far been minimal. In the former case he is more like a curious and slightly unsure seeker while in his interface with the latter he is nebulous to the extent of being a plucky Orientalist who is being sent to a “country where purity is a scarcity. I have formulated certain principles in for my own guidance, I need not put them to words, for being constantly in mind, I need not be afraid of their slipping away”. Other than his awe and curious fascination with the English society, very much in line with what Gandhi and other Indians had felt, Husain is determined to work diligently without feeling homesick. In August 1898, on the eve of his journey abroad, his father served at Dera Ghazi Khan a city of “good historical significance…and on the bank of the Indus, but now the ferocious river is encroaching upon the premises of this dirty city”. Amidst the monsoon floods, he is reminded of the inhabitants of the city divided into Baloch and non-Baloch sections with former being “of some fibre and of certain principles which they will better die than violate…They are brave courageous, even cruel. To a certain extent they are hospitable. But then their chief and favourite occupation is robbery, which is not held in very great ill-esteem. The non-Beloochees, they are men of no principles, they are mean, and would do anything to save their life and wealth. They are detestable creatures, always flattering their superiors and injuring their inferiors.” He blames the Nawabs of Hoti and Rujhan—two
local chieftains— for not standing up with the fellow Baloch as this territory had been secured from Balochistan by the British through the efforts of Sir Robert Sandeman.\( ^{15} \) He feels emotional while leaving his father, sister and other close relatives but tries to suppress his emotions; and a boat journey brings him to Sher Shah to embark on a train journey to Karachi. Here, again a westernised Husain is not happy with the crowding on the train and abhors the management, nor he is quite fond of his fellow companions including an English young man from Lucknow on his way to Karachi on vacations. His mischievous fellow passenger initially annoys all yet a scenic journey across the Indus lands absorbs Husain until he is safely lodged at his hotel at Karachi. He finds contemporary Karachi “bigger than any of the Punjab {cities} and more fashionable too. The buildings are grand and stately, generally made of stone in two or three stories. The roads are broad, shops well furnished and bazaars wide and clean”.\( ^{16} \) He may have his own issues with the fellow Indians in terms of dress habits and socialisation but would not allow a European “to look down upon the natives. There is no doubt that it is to some extent due to the carelessness and negligence of the native gentleman. But I think the other party is not quite blameless”.\( ^{17} \) This particularly incident on the ship had involved a fellow student, Abdur Rahim, who was dressed rather carelessly and thus had been on the receiving end of satirical jokes by the British passengers. Here, Husain’s own nostalgia for valorous Rajput comes back to confront European abrasiveness, as he notes in his diary on 11 September: “These Englishmen, well they are proud no doubt and look down upon every other nation. Alas for the old Rajput chiefs, those valorous knights, strongholds of truth and purity, their bloody swords would have opened the arteries of pride and hate of the foreigners. But we, we degenerated sons of those noble men, are powerless. Let God regenerate us, for he is vengeful and cannot brook the proud, loves the pious”.\( ^{18} \)

Like Nawab Sikandar Begum of Bhopal on her pilgrimage to Arabia, nearly half a century earlier, Husain is reminded of his distinct and confident Indian Muslim identity which does not brook any closer affinity with the usual crowd gathered by his steamer at Suez.\( ^{19} \) He is accosted by propositioning women at Port Said and is not enamoured by their
bawdiness since they bore “a spectacle which wounded my sense of honour of humanity…” 20 Husain’s moral unrighteousness is rooted in his own background and is not comfortable with a free mixing of men and women on the ship which he finds a bane of Europeanness with its own ramifications for the entire society. As an old-fashioned young man—quite typical of his age and class—he is rather blunt, since to him, “the European system of liberty for women affords a great deal of facility for the corruption of morality. I am of opinion that it cannot produce a single good result while there is no limit to its possible defects. It comes to be regarded almost as a refreshment to have a flirtation. No, it is to pave the way for the success of evil propensities. Again, those women who have been crying for liberty must be worse than males. They must remember that very few of their sex bear such comely faces as to court general admiration. How, if a woman who can lay no great claims to general admiration and gets herself married, she must always be in fear of a comelier and lovelier rival especially when she grows older. But if the Purdah system is enforced then every such anxiety is removed. As for the force of this argument ask a lady who is suffering from this same heart-rending disease and she will open her heart by cursing the advocates of liberty for women”. Needless to say that Husain represents his age and finds demand for women’s empowerment as a kind of frivolous liberation which, to his uncertain generation, appeared immoral. More like many of his contemporary Indians, he sees in purdah a symbol of separate gender roles and is not enamoured of women sharing work place with men. His views are certainly of the early modernist Muslims who were still hesitant to let their women assume professional roles though here Sir Muhammad Shafi may appear ahead of his times when he allowed his daughters to study along with assuming more public profiles. Thus, on the one hand, this small, emerging class of urban and somehow westernised Muslims is not at ease with several rural and tribal traditions nor are they totally comfortable with the prevalent educational system in India, yet on women they feel quite defensive. Even if they agree to women’s education, the ultimate role is to be domestic and certainly not public. It is interesting to note that a strong section of this Muslim middle class, despite their own strong rootedness in their traditional values, strongly
espouses modern education for women. Here Maulvi Mumtaz Ali seems to be far ahead of his time though contemporary worries about educated Muslim women “going the western way” did persist as was articulated in *The Bahishti Zaiwar*, or in the poems of Akbar Allahabadi.

Where Husain is appreciative of Europe’s broad streets, well-built multi-storied houses, he is equally uneasy with the dirt on the streets or people urinating at public places in otherwise endowed cities such as Marseilles. However, the train journey, rural scene and the beauty of Paris deeply impress him though he keeps comparing French towns with London, which itself has its own share of clever people often prying on gullible visitors.

It was in Kilburn area of London that Husain meets Muhammad Ali Johar (1867-1931), since both stayed as paying guests in the same house, which was owned by the Becks. Husain writes favourably of Johar: “He is a gentleman, graduate of Aligarh College, resident of Rampur. He is now a student of the Oxford University, preparing himself for the I.C.S. He is quite at home with the family.” Husain’s diary does not include his letters to his father, Professor T. W. Arnold and others though it will be interesting to know his contemporary views and impressions of Britain, western women and Indian expatriates in London. Husain’s instruction in Britain was mostly in liberal arts inclusive of history, English, politics, literature, law and Arabic and for his ICS, he was enrolled with Wren & Gurney, who coached the candidates especially from India for this competitive examination. In his diary, Husain offers interesting details on his learning to ride a bicycle in London yet states to be camera shy despite persistence from Muhammad Ali Johar, which again may be due to his not feeling quite well owing to recurrent cold or stomach problems.

Husain’s traditional views on women might have been the reasons for his critique of their exposed bodies by the sea, both at Marseilles and in Bournemouth. One wonder whether his critique is largely within the context of his perceived notion of Western civilisation or is largely owing to his own traditional outlook which certainly was not out of sync with the prevalent views amongst the Indians of a similar background. His greater exposure to western women gradually brings about several attitudinal changes and, gradually, he shows more appreciation
for their values and confidence. For instance, when on a journey to Swanage, Mrs. Hilliers, his hostess, loses her bracelet, he is struck by the innocence of her spontaneous expressions about her husband, when she observed: “What will he think—he will say I have been so very neglectful of his present and did not appreciate it”. This statement strikes Husain as a genuine sentiment soaked in traditional values, as he records: “That artlessness defied the best of the artists. I only wished I could find it for her. Her pure innocent fears, her childlike misgiving and thousands of anxieties opened to me quite a new aspect of her character, an aspect I thoroughly appreciated, It was so pure, so innocent, so artless, all the very qualifications, which are becoming scarce everyday with the progress of civilisation. More than once before I have noticed that although living and moving in the world, still there is something very natural about her”.27

Husain devotes a major undated section of his diary on man-woman relationship especially marriage, and here dwells on the diversity of experiences not just between western and eastern women but also within these two broad—and ambivalent—categories. It appears that with the passage of time in England he is becoming more reflective, and instead of his early impressions especially of European women, he is gradually accepting their own autonomous choices. However, he views marriage as the proper bond and perhaps the only channel for conjugation and is thus not fond of marriage that may carry an iota of love yet is anchored on material gains or has been contracted for other social reasons. He notes: “It is all very well to talk of western civilisation embodied in their mode of contracting marriages. However, if you begin to think of it, it is as bad as any. Roughly speaking, in the middle classes marriages are of two kinds—firstly wise and democratic, secondly unwise and foolish. The latter, they say should not be contracted and encouraged...Again, marriages in advanced ages presume that she had made the most of her time during the period of her maidenhood; in fact enjoyed life, while marriage on the contrary means more sober and more restricted life….In the East, it is just the reverse. A girl is supposed to wear her air in such a way that she need not look especially attractive; she is not supposed to loiter about, though when married she gets more licence to do so. She is not to adorn
herself or put her beauty to its best advantage—no, all this deferred till marriage. During maidenhood, she is simplicity personified—she is unconventional, pure and simple. To be attractive is not within her objects, on the contrary, she would conceal her pretty looks lest she becomes the object of rude staring. An English girl, on the contrary, would do her best to show off her hair, arms and ankles”. This is a different Husain, who a year earlier, had idealised purdah but is certainly not comfortable by both the eastern and western models and romanticises something else, which may appear quite in line with Rousseau’s natural man: “Amidst all this vanity and frigidity of manner, by contrast, my mind runs back to that primitive land of hills and mountains which are not yet so corrupt and debased as the lowlands of India. In those strong holds of nature live those simple but charming and natural people who act because they feel”.

Husain, in another long entry in the summer of 1899, remembers his own early life where he defines himself unconventional in the sense that he never took pride in his descent or family wealth and instead socialised with the humble and ordinary. He discovers an adorable rebel in himself in the colds of London who is close to nature and human sensibility instead of being too fond of individualistic lifestyle. Here, Husain appears more like a typical Shakespearian hero whose own uncertainties collate with the rawness and curiosity of the opposite sex and in the process Indian wilds get romanticised through a poem. He is not repentant of being careless towards the vagaries of comfort and fashionable clothes and instead feels happy over accumulating “the treasures of un-spanable knowledge”. However, he has not divested himself from his native India, as he notes: “But I learnt something more—more worth knowing and still least necessary for the peace of mind of an Indian slave especially if he has tender feeling. I learnt what independent nations call ‘Liberty’ and understood, yes even understood the distinction between Freedom and Slavery. When attending lectures on History and Politics, I felt the perspiration of shame trickling down my forehead. Alas, the shame was irremovable, irremediable the disease and irreparable the loss”. His self-awareness launches him into the role of a nationalist who seeks equality and respect in liberty and this is to be
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achieved through knowledge and cross-cultural experiences since he can afford a comparative perspective both on India and the imperial power. This awoken nationalist emphatically asks himself: “What did I want? Endowed with more than average intellectual capacities and ennobled with more than average noble blood and descent, not lacking moral upright and practice, not standing in want of tolerable symmetry of physique—am I an inferior simply because I am not English born? Am I to be a slave because I am an India? Little though I find admirable in the Indian life or morals, still I am not ashamed of the land. Inseparably connected with it I am, I cannot disavow the bonds of two or three years, which connect me with the land”.

He is cognisant of the fact that even in his utopian and past India, there was disunity and often disorder but still he finds that to be the golden age which needed to be retrieved and solidified into a federation of these autonomous units. “During the days of territorial sovereignty there was no united India, nor ever there will be any unless it is under the sway of a ruler, a foreign militant ruler. But in that independence, that sovereignty of the Rajas there was social bliss, moral purity, and religious candour. What was wanted? Only a political tie to keep these independent Rajas together—a federal union. In short federalism was the cure, but bad luck and corruption could scarcely face the marauding bands which poured into India from the North Western Frontier”. 30 His romantic attachment to India yet with a commitment to its freedom and reorganisation through a federation took place at a time when Husain was unable to secure a pass in his civil service examination, and as an alternative opted for Bar. At this stage, he strongly dislikes the legal profession which, to him, will render him into a dull, chair-bound figure while he wanted to achieve more. He appears to be brimming with self-confidence and after his hard work and experience over two years in England he has “got insight into modern politics and into the political right and wrong, political diseases and cures—but knowledge is not power, if I am powerless. Shall I unburden my heart before the crowds which will have no sympathy with me?”31

Cambridge offered a timely respite as well as a proper social solace to a gloomy Husain as he prepared to participate in debates and some sporadic sport activities. At Cambridge, we
find a different Husain whose views about women have changed considerably and rather he seeks out closer friendship with some of his friends and their families. Copious records of his visits to Folkestone, Cheshire, Shropshire and Liverpool offer entire vistas of his personal relationship with English girls, their mental and physical attributes and the issues of farming in North-eastern England. When his civil service result came out he was in Folkestone, the coastal town in Kent amidst “a jolly company and that the disappointment of the exam did not affect me in the least”. Other than tennis, his friendship with Miss Stringer and Miss Markham appeared to divert his worries from his results. In Cheshire, he again catches up with the Stringers and then familiarises himself with the countryside. He offers his own interesting perspective on communal dances though find this Christmas activity monotonous and keeps himself busy exploring the old mansions in the border regions. However, his interesting encounter with Abdullah Quilliam are worth noting given the contemporary and a continued interest in this early English convert to Islam. One of the earliest and well-known British Muslims, this busy lawyer had often travelled to the Muslim world and had been quite close to the Ottoman Sultan who had designated him as a *Sheikhul Islam* for the British Isles.\[32\]

Based in Liverpool, Abdullah Quilliam had designated a part of his office space as a mosque and had opened up a safe house for local orphans, besides issuing two magazines: *The Crescent*, and *The Islamic World*. Imbued with curiosity, Husain was eager to meet this well-established Victorian British who had accepted Islam at a time when most, if not all, of the Muslim world had been colonised by countries like Britain, France, Holland and Russia. After several attempts, he was able to meet this “unassuming sort of man, one whose appearance is not that of an enthusiast or one who would carry out wholesale changes, or one born to change the state of affairs. There is no fire in him. His appearance is not imposing and majestic”. His unassuming demeanour went well both with the Muslim land the British public yet for a young Husain he did not repose a drive that one might otherwise find in a new convert. He did appreciate his “untiring energy—work and work” who, other than his own legal practice, found time to write books and publish magazines.
“Besides this, he possesses one virtue—common sense. And it is this unique and rare virtue which has secured him his large practice and his prestige”. Husain was not impressed by the level of cleanliness of his office premises and the austerity of the mosque at 8, Brougham Terrace, though he could see the prestige and leadership qualities in Quilliam. He was perhaps expecting an exclusive building with some uniquely familiar architecture of a mosque but did not fully appreciate the multipurposefulness of the facility. His visit to the orphanage was not inspiring either, as he noted: “Then I went to 4 Shiel Road; the house is called Medina House—an orphanage. Fatherless children are taken and brought up as Muslims. But I do not suppose the Medina House maid knew anything of the principles of Islam. Then I went to see the Printing Press which also was in an awful state of uncleanness”.

The smallness of Muslim community in Liverpool and the austerity of the contemporary infra structure might have surprised Husain, yet it gave him an idea to form an association of Muslim students at Cambridge, which he did on 18 January 1901 though he claims to have been already reading books on Islamic history. Quilliam might have been a pioneer in his own local way, yet a century later, amongst the host of movies and writings, his name and contributions would find frequent citations including the formation of a foundation. The Quilliam Foundation in London was formed in 2007 following the spotlight on Britain’s Muslims and a revulsion against purism amongst some of the former activists such as Ed Hussain and Maajid Nawaz, one time supporters of Hizbul Tahreer.

Husain’s tripolar interests in socio-political activities at Cambridge, socialisation in the British society at large and his immersion in India and Islam are the results of that process which began with his growing up in an educated Muslim family and matured in his cross-cultural experiences in England. His forays into western learning and exposure to the western societies allowed him to gain greater confidence in ascertaining a prospective leadership role along with cementing his own ambitions for a professional and political profile in India. Transformation of a rather shy, sea-sick and often naïve Husain had already taken place as he embarked on his journey back to India and reached Marseilles to board an India-bound steamer in
January 1901. Like Nehru in Cambridge trying to avoid “Indians”, a visibly Anglicised Husain found himself sharing voyage with some fellow countrymen, as he noted: “There I had the ill luck to find five or six Indians to my great disgust—five constituted a band of merchants, one was my fellow Cantab. Those five misbehaving ill-starred men were a continuous torture to the Anglo Indian passengers, and a nuisance to me”. He further goes on expressing his annoyance emphatically where it becomes more than a mere discomfort: “The voyage proved conclusively to me that it was impossible to hope for increase in the intimacy between the English and the Indians. Each nation has its own prejudices and traits and characteristic features and looks at those of others with sincere disgust and hatred and not at all feigned or put on.” Coming back to the issues of gender again, he notes: “English ladies of good information and education have expressed their truly felt abhorrence at the idea of eating with your own fingers. Could they do so even now is an exception not unknown to the Indians abroad in Europe. Not to go very far, the real English do not try to conceal their abhorrence at the mode of eating prevalent on the Continent especially the way in which tea is taken. Firstly they cannot form good companions—what one party exalts as highly pleasing the other loath as annoying and obnoxious”. Here, Husain appears to be speaking with the authenticity of knowing several cultures and finds these differences real and not just confined to the Indians and the British though his annoyance with his fellow Indians did not let him forget intra-European anomalies. To his biographer son, Husain remains critical as well as appreciative of the traits of both the Indian and Western cultures, as he noted: “It is remarkable how Fazl-i-Husain though deeply influenced in certain directions by life and thought in England, did not imbibe an uncritical enthusiasm for the West which dominated the later half of the life of Sir Syed”.36

Fazl-i-Husain, after his visit to Peshawar and family reunion, returns to Sialkot in September 1901 and establishes his practice in a town which he found “famous for its climate”. He was helped by Justice Shah Din (1868-1918) and especially by his old literary friend, Sheikh Abdul Qadir (1874-1950) who had felt that this town did not have a single Muslim legal practitioner and Husain could be the pioneer. 35 His practice did not catch up
right away and he lived a rather lonely and frugal existence until he was firmly established but that was a tedious process especially at a time when most of the people were fighting the epidemic of plague across India. He witnessed the inception of Ahmadi-Sunni conflict soon after his arrival on Sialkot when the imam of a mosque disallowed its use by non-Ahmadis and the court tried to arbitrate while Husain counselled for co-existence. Soon, he began to advocate the case for a Muslim association in the town which could resolve such issues through negotiations and eventually a branch of Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam was established in Sialkot. The early months of 1902 saw plague spreading to almost all the districts of Punjab and he even thought of shifting to Peshawar with better prospects for his legal practice. Husain, in the meantime, busied himself in building up social contacts including participation in the special prayers at the Eidgah seeking reprieve from plague and gradually the community began to come closer. Husain’s contributions to Abdul Qadir’s Makhzan reveal a deeper sense of history mingled with pathos over the Muslim loss of interest in creativity. In one piece, Husain talks about lack of inventiveness among non-western people like Indians largely because of the absence of the genre of critical evaluation—*tangleed*—which could prove a mainspring for creativity.

The literary style of this piece published in the February issue of 1902 is fluent and reflective of Persianised Urdu but not too difficult to follow. The style is critical yet not satirical and one notices a strong element of freshness in it. It witnesses the fact that the author, despite his absence abroad, has remained in touch with Urdu writings. Here, he uses the plural Urdu pronoun “*hum*” which literally means “us” and might signify Indians in general and Muslims in specific. Another piece, is devoted to human nature and how it is characterised by traits such as aesthetics though by its inclination it is predominantly political. Husain offers examples from Punjabi romances and admiration for European women among educated Indians to show that the criterion for beauty keeps changing but still it is in the eyes of the beholder and not just in the object itself. This reflective piece is certainly an interesting and rather humorous comparison between East and West, where the author finds himself ideally poised. His confident situation renders him authentic enough to
take liberties with both the cultures when it comes to highlighting his personal likes and dislikes. He may not have a high opinion of Qadir’s literary magazine but feels positive about its prospects in one of his early diary notes on 13 November 1901, where he observes: “I have nothing to say against it, and much can be said for it. Of course it falls short of my ideal Magazine. I should like it to contain descriptive, Humorous and Character Sketches separately, and to devote a part of it to Reviewing and Criticism. However, it is a good start, and I wish it a brilliant success with all my heart. In fact, I hope to devote some time in getting ready some subject for it”. His diary ends here and then resumes with effect from the first of April 1931. One wonders about his future development of ideas in any other such writings hitherto unknown since Husain’s legal and eventually political pursuits were soon to transform his life from a small-town barrister in Punjab to a country-wide statesman leaving very little time for diary and periodic literary essays.

Fazl-i-Husain’s speeches in the Punjab Legislative Council during 1916-20 and 1920-25 and his addresses to the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State, during 1930-35 and the diary entries for the last phase of his political career offer a host of information on his ideas on Punjab, communalism, India, Islam, party politics and intra-Muslim relationship. His correspondence with a wide variety of Indians and Europeans also reveal diverse and equally evolving dimensions of his personality and political career. Husain is neither a demolition man when it comes to the formative forces and values of tradition and modernity, nor he is divorcing himself from his Punjabi roots and trans-regional identities as an Indian and a Muslim. Often this interplay of plural identities causes various inter-personal tension such as relationship with the League, Congress and the Ahrars and in some cases it may assume some personal nature especially in the closing years of his life when rifts such as the Ahmadi-Ahrar controversy, Shahidganj issue and the League-Unionist dissension on the eve of elections in 1936 engage him emotionally. However, his leadership acumen is proven by the fact that his Unionist Party emerged as the strongest and equally cohesive group in the most plural province of India and was able to withstand internal and external
tensions for quite some time. Despite his strong determination, professional integrity and sagacious disposition, Husain always remained a lonely person whose “capacity for feeling strongly made him suffer in isolation and silence. The various barriers and restraints he had imposed on himself made an intimate friendship almost impossible. He was extremely sensitive, and his acute critical ability led him to judge men with a severity which left little place for emotional attachment. Men, generally speaking, were to him mere pawns which he moved with his deft fingers across the political stage. He had no taste for social entertainment which would have given him an opportunity for developing friendship. His family life did not afford him much comfort amidst a world abounding in human viciousness and pettiness. His relationship with his eldest and youngest daughters had a peculiar tenderness, and a greater part of the little time he gave to his family was spent with them; otherwise, there was hardly anything to distinguish his behaviour towards his family than towards remote relations or friends”.44 His interest in art, poetry, literature and sport or religion had dwindled radically though he loved the countryside yet his long-time health problems and a lonely life finally caught up with him. His party’s strength and brilliant performance in 1937 owed to his astuteness but like his own personality it equally suffered from its internal contrasts. And, while faced with powerful national forces including the League and its demand for Pakistan, the rural and non-ideological form of bonds featuring in the Unionist cadres fell apart to turn Punjab into a vanguard of larger-than-life struggles.45

Notes and References

1 For a historical overview, see Ian Talbot, Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947, Delhi, 1988. I have also referred to the competitive and even often conflictive tensions between regional and India-wide positions in a chapter devoted to the Khaksar leader. See, Iftikhar H. Malik, “Regionalism and Personality Cult? Allama Mashriqi and the Tehreek-i-Khaksar in pre-1947 Punjab”, in Ian

2 In a section of my forthcoming book, I have tried to dilate on Pakistan both as an Indus heartland and also as the eternal border state. See, Pakistan after Musharraf: Democracy, Terror, and the Nation Building, London, 2009.

3 It is quite enlightening to seek out the contemporary anthropological and strategic observations on the Frontier societies by the British generals and political administrators since the military and political service here was viewed as a prestigious challenge to gain respect among the colleagues. For a useful samples see, Field Marshal Lord Frederick Roberts, Forty-One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief, Vols. I & II, London, 1897.


5 An excellent contribution in Urdu on this subject has been made by Professor Ahmed Saeed who has brought forth the literature on these associations in Lahore and Amritsar. See his, Anjuman-i-Islamia Amritsar, 1873-1947, Lahore, 1986; and, Islamia College Lahore Ki Sadd Saala Tarikh, 1892-1992, Lahore, 1992.

6 For a pertinent comparison of these two leading Muslim reformers, see S. M. Ikram, Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan, Lahore, 1969.

7 For more on Muslim/Islamic modernism, see Aziz Ahmad, Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment, Delhi, 1999.
8 Seeking out the roots of such parties during the 1980s which vacillated between localism and trans-regionalism, see Aslam Malik, *Allama Inayatullah Mashraqi: A Political Biography*, Karachi, 2000.

9 The earliest and perhaps the only detailed volume on Husain has been by his son, Mian Azim Husain, which came out in 1946. In 1947 the latter opted for India and retired as a foreign secretary spending his retirement in London—away from South Asia—and undertook the publication of his father’s diary which had not been included the other two volumes earlier published by the Research Society of Pakistan, Lahore. For the earliest and perhaps the only biography of Sir Husain, see Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography*, Bombay, 1946.

10 Certainly, there have been some copious references to these two scions of a Lahore-based Muslim family along with some initial works by students, yet full-fledged biographies are still awaited. Muhammad Shafi was not only a barrister-politician, he was an author as well, who among his several writings, left a pioneering work on Islam in Africa. His daughter, Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz certainly wrote a persuasive biographical work which also offers searchlight on Muslim politics both in Punjab and India. See her, *Father & Daughter: A Political Autobiography*, Karachi, 2002 (second edition)


12 Azim Husain, *op. cit.*, pp. iv-v. Certainly Azim Husain found it challenging to write about “the life a man who held an imposing place in India’s national life…”. P. vii.


16 30 & 31 August, 1898, *ibid.*, 21-3.


19 Similar impressions were recorded by the Nawab of Bhopal when she went on a pilgrimage to Arabia. See, Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, (ed.), *A Princess’s Pilgrimage: Nawab Sikandar Begum’s A Pilgrimage to Mecca*, Karachi, 2008.

20 He further notes: “They are some Muslims, but you will find many Englishmen there. In fact, there is no religion except that of deception, cheating and debauchery. Here the evil effects of commercial place are most prominent”. 12 September, 1898, *Glimpses*, p. 29.


22 Allahabadi (1846-1921 )found a great cultural threat in westernisation and used his poetry and humour to frown upon what he considered to be turning away from one’s own genteel culture.

23 *Glimpses*, pp. 35-6.

prepared students for ICS exams and also helped him in several other matters related to his settlement in London.

25 Professor of Philosophy at Government College, Lahore (1895-7). Other than Fazl-i-Husain, his known pupils included Allama Muhammad Iqbal. The Arnolds in London often hosted the Indian students at their home and Husain occasionally records such get-togethers. Arnold’s mother was well-informed on India while his sister, according to Husain, is “very well brought up and pretty well educated. She is of a good cheerful temperament, laying claims to no very particular talents but very entertaining. But she has, I fear, narrow, imprudent prejudices which are the common lot of the English ladies”. *Ibid.*, p. 45

26 He does not like their being obese and short and somehow finds them more looking like men, as he notes: “It was lovely on sea-shore {in Bournemouth}. Ladies falling themselves down on the sand showed a good sight. But I have marked one thing and that is that there is a majority of ugly intolerable women. Pretty ones, of course, are in scarcity, but the pity is that even tolerable ones are wanting”. *Ibid.*, 54.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7. Later on, sometime in 1899, he moves into a boarding house and is even appreciate of men and women trying to be social to one another.


29 *Ibid.*, 63-4


31 Husain is understandably disappointed and does not want to become a barrister but still wants to help his family as he owes gratitude to his father for his efforts.
He, however, does not see himself as a successful lawyer and finds himself in a Hobbesian situation, as he noted on 25 August 1900: “...Hobbes’s theory is the most accurate description of what has happened. In fact, my individual prospects are by no means pleasant. To have a good practice is a matter of luck more than anything else. I might succeed fairly well, but I do not feel interest in it. I have to lower myself to its level—it is demeaning”. P. 66.


33 His discussion with Abdullah Quilliam focused on his magazines, role modelling of Liverpudlian Muslims for the rest and the lack of unity among world’s Muslims. The latter showed interest to visit Cambridge if the former were to form a society. *Glimpses*, pp. 85-7.

34 For more on the objectives and programmes of this foundation and its founding members, see: http://www.quilliamfoundation.org

35 *Glimpses*, pp. 92-3.


37 *Ibid.*, 94-5. Sheikh Abdul Qadir, who himself had been a graduate of F. C. College, Lahore, before being called to the Bat at Lincoln’s Inn. Abdul Qadir worked as a judge and then as a member of the Viceroy’s Council and was knighted for his services. Justice Shah Din was a doyen of a known family in Lahore which acquired and promoted modern education among Muslims. He was a Bat-at-Law and then a judge of the Lahore High Court.
38 It is interesting to note that he often uses the terms such as ‘Mohammadans’ and ‘Mirzais’.


41 Waheed Ahmad, (comp.) Diary and Notes of Mian Fazl-i-Husain, Lahore, 1977, p. 2.


