

Atiya Fyzee, Shibli, and Iqbal: English as a Social Butterfly

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Abstract

Taking an ‘analogical’ approach to the issue, this study reads the saga of Atiya Fyzee’s relationship with Shibli Nomani and Allama Iqbal as a plausible allegory of the transforming cultural relationship of the Muslims of the subcontinent with English (in what this term comes to mean as a language, as a discipline of studies, and as a synecdoche of Western culture). The history of this cultural interaction since the British colonization I have divided into three broad phases: the initial, the middle, and the present. The initial phase I earlier dealt with by exploiting Sheikh Muhammad Ikram’s analogy, later employed by Nasir Abbas Nayyar, that Shibli’s attitude towards English was the same as his attitude towards his step-mother at home. English, in other words, was a step-mother for Shibli, and for the generations represented through his figure in this early phase of cultural interaction of the Muslims of the subcontinent with the language. The present paper focuses on how one can analogically read in the personal histories of the representative figures of this culture the stories of how in the subcontinent the larger cultural reception of English gradually changed from being treated as a ‘step-mother’(and hence forging with her a relationship of cultural *exchange*) to being treated as a ‘social butterfly’ or a ‘social sweetheart’, as a symbol of liberal humanist high culture, and how such terms of cultural engagement with English were unacceptable to both Shibli and Iqbal. The paper closes on how even this image of English as high culture gradually dissolved with the cultural disintegration wrought by an ever-increasing and relentless consumerist culture in the postcolonial times.

Keywords: Atiya Fyzee, Shibli, Iqbal, English, Subcontinent Muslim Culture

بہید مرے کھولتی ہے
--- شاعری سچ بولتی ہے۔
--- قتیل شفایی

This series of essays that I started a couple of years back or so under the general rubric of ‘English and Pakistani Culture’ (the present one being

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the third in this series of essays), is based on a rather uncanny impression that history, just like the human mind or any other *text*, also has its conscious (say *logical*) and its unconscious (say *ana-logical*) aspects. Psychoanalytically, traumatic past events become a part of the unconscious, and are often expressed through displaced and condensed images in dreams. Poetry and literature, and even historical narratives, in a similar way, may be seen as reflecting the collective unconscious of a culture in metonymic and metaphorical ways, the figurative counterparts of displacement and condensation in dream work. This paper is part of a larger study that notes the uncanny and recurrent appearance of English (as a synecdoche signifying language, Western culture, modernity, etc.) as a feminine figure in the Muslim cultural discourse (literature / biography) in the subcontinent under the British rule and also in the so-called postcolonial period. The study follows an *analogical* methodology while trying not to be *illogical*. It argues that in various phases of its cultural interaction with the Muslims of the subcontinent, English analogically appears in various canonical texts of this cultural narrative as a feminine figure. This analogical / associational investigation into the unconscious of the narratives of Muslim cultural history in the subcontinent was initially spurred by Shibli Nomani's biographer Sheikh Muhammad Ikram's comment (later critically exploited by Nasir Abbas Nayyar) that for Shibli English was like his step-mother, whose marriage to his father was a trauma similar to the trauma of English usurping the position of Shibli's mother-tongue. The present paper, however, focuses on how the role of English changes from that of a step-mother to that of a 'social sweet-heart' or a 'social butterfly'.

Since the present essay is third in a series of essays, for the sake of continuity and in order to facilitate the reader, let me quickly summarize the gist of my earlier two essays—the work I have so far done in this analogical navigation.

A couple of years back, I started reading Shibli's biographies to sort out a somewhat personal problem (which I feel I have fair impression to generalize as a collective cultural problem in the Pakistani society): how to legitimately wed the West and the East in my hereditary hybrid sensibility? The idea of an analogical investigation into the relationship between English and the subcontinent Muslim culture, as I have earlier pointed out, was initially triggered in my mind by Sheikh Muhammad Ikram's comment on Shibli Nomani that perhaps for a student of psychology, Shibli sub-consciously had the same thoughts and feelings towards English as he had for his step-mother at home.

The analogy looked apt, and striking. Just like the step-mother had replaced Shibli's own mother, English replaced his mother-tongue. I

started on a study to relate the analogical with the logical, that is, to read Shibli's various biographical accounts to stretch the analogy to its logical limits. Nasir Abbas Nayyar's observation on Ikram's analogy of English as a step-mother, namely, that 'the boundaries between the personal and social lives of the one who plays an important role in the public life are diminished; (how) his unconscious complexity finds way into his scholarly life, or how the border of a personal incident melts into the social reality, encouraged me to generalize Shibli's personal case to a larger cultural conclusion. Nayyar raises the question whether for Shibli;

English was a 'pariah' just like his step-mother, which was forced upon by the rulers like his father. Did Shibli have the same love for his tradition, his mother-tongue, which he had for his real mother? Did Shibli also think that English, like the step-mother, had tried to replace the mother-tongue and culture? . . . The dilemma of Shibli's personal life was that despite disliking his step-mother, he was forced to accept the fact that she was his father's legitimate wife, and his mother. The collision of Shibli's personal feelings was with that 'reality' which was in a 'position' to prove itself as legitimate and rightly-placed in the social and cultural world. That is why the ambivalent attitude of Shibli was not just a personal, private matter—it was a cultural matter.¹

The results of my study were interesting, and seemed to explain a few things about the cultural milieu in the initial phase of the interaction between English and the Muslims of the subcontinent. Nayyar's comment above seems to endorse the idea that in its initial phase, the relationship the Muslims of the subcontinent sought to develop with English, albeit traumatic and complex, was a *legitimate* one—one that resulted in an attempt (regardless of the measure of its success or failure) at a genuine cultural exchange between the East and the West after the demise of the Muslim rule (analogically, the death of Shibli's father). Shibli's biographers note that after the death of his father while Shibli's own mother was still alive (he kept writing prose in Urdu and poetry in Persian), he sought the pardon of his step-mother (English!) for the social boycott he had earlier maintained towards her as long as the father was alive; on the grounds of sympathy and humanity shared his own share of his father's inheritance with his father's grandson from the step-mother's side (in which that grandson had no legal share), and in return of this humane attitude, the step-mother asked Shibli to sell her own

¹ Nasir Abbas Nayyar, *Urdū Adab kī Tashkīl-e-Jadīd* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 322-323 (English translation from Urdu is mine).

share of her husband's (Shibli's father's) property to allow Shibli to undo the 30000 rupees debt under which Shibli's father had died.²

Analogically speaking, this was the relationship of a potentially enriching 'cultural' exchange that looked to develop between English the woman, the step-mother, and the generation of Muslims of the subcontinent represented by the figures like Shibli, and perhaps culminated in the figure of Muhammad Iqbal. Such a relationship of cultural exchange could also be represented by the interaction between Sir Thomas Arnold, a mutual friend of Shibli and Iqbal, who earlier learnt Arabic from Shibli and taught him French at the Aligarh College, and later became a most beloved teacher of Iqbal at the Government College, Lahore, and who himself was deeply impressed by Iqbal's intellectual qualities. So, the step-mother was treated well while the mother was still alive. While Iqbal was responding to Dante with *Javīd Nameh* and to Goethe with *Payām-e-Mashriq* sitting in Lahore, R. A. Nicholson and A. J. Arberry were translating Iqbal at Cambridge to make him widely known to the Western world.³

But was the step-mother the only feminine face English showed to the subcontinent Muslims? While Shibli and Iqbal, and the generations represented by these culturally representative figures, were dealing with English as a step-mother, English appeared to them at the same time in the guise of another feminine figure—in the words of Daud Rahbar, 'the sweetheart of Shibli's *ghazals*,' and perhaps the 'rose' of the early romantic Iqbal of *Bāng-e-Derā*, who kept the younger Iqbal restless. It was an aspect of English with which Shibli and Iqbal themselves could not really get along well for long, but whose figure kept haunting our cultural unconscious till late in our cultural history—it was the aspect of English as a 'social sweetheart'.

What we have done so far in this analogical attempt to trace our cultural relationship with English is to see this relationship in terms of a relationship with a feminine figure — a step-mother in the case of Shibli—and have extended this mutually supportive and considerate exchange (between Shibli and his step-mother) to Iqbal by translating the dynamics of this cultural exchange into their relationship with a mutual friend, Arnold.

² For a detailed discussion, see my essay 'Shibli, English, and the Step-Mother' in *Pakistan Perspectives*, Vol. 23, No. 2, July-December 2018.

³ For a detailed discussion of Shibli's and Iqbal's relationship with Sir Thomas Arnold, see my essay 'English and Pakistani Culture: Shibli, Iqbal and Arnold or Ambivalence Revisited'.in *Tehseel*, Vol. 1, No. 2, January - June, 2018, 71–94.

But during this while it looks as if a transformation of our cultural relationship with English was already in the making—another feminine figure (that of ‘a social butterfly’, to use the words Dr. Daud Rahbar uses for Atiya) ⁴ as though about to replace that of the step-mother—another mutual friend to analogically redefine our relationship-to-be with English after the periods of Shibli and Iqbal. This image of English showed itself both to Shibli and Iqbal (and to many others of our notable cultural figures in their generation), but despite its apparent attraction could not as yet ensnare our cultural imagination represented through Shibli and Iqbal—analogically speaking, Atiya’s relationship with both finally turning rather acrimonious. It was left to the subsequent generations to romantically respond to the lure rather unscrupulously.

Dr. Saeed Akhtar Durrani, the then chairman of the Iqbal Academy (UK), in his 1991 address at the commemoration of Sir Thomas Arnold Day at the University of Birmingham, ‘incidentally’ shares what he calls ‘an intriguing sidelight to note a strange coincidence in the lives of two of Sir Thomas Arnold’s greatest pupils or colleagues,’ namely, Shibli Nomani and Muhammad Iqbal. Dr Durrani considers it a ‘strange coincidence that both their names are romantically linked with a beautiful young Indian Muslim girl, of noble extraction, who was one of the first Indian ladies to receive European education in England, namely Atiya Fyzee.’ As Dr. Durrani’s main aim in that address was to talk about Iqbal’s personal and scholarly links with Arnold, he shies away from further going into what he calls ‘this fascinating subject’—the ‘intriguing psychological puzzle as to why two of Sir Thomas Arnold’s best known pupils (or colleagues) should fall for the same lady’ as in Durrani’s opinion the issue has nothing much to do with Arnold’s ‘methods of research into the history of Islam’.⁵ Let us explore a little this ‘incidental’ mentioning of this coincidence for its possible significance.

وقت کرتا ہے پرورش برسوں
حادثہ ایک دم نہیں ہوتا

Time nurtures it for years,
The accident doesn’t happen at once.

⁴ Dr. Muhammad Daud Rahbar, [‘Atiya Fyzee’] A Poet’s Belated Amour’, in *Sir Muhammad Iqbal, A Modern Interpreter of Islam*, ed. M. Ikram Chaghatai (Lahore: Pakistan Writers Cooperative Society, 2017), 221.

⁵ Dr. S. A. Durrani (Guest ed.), ‘Sir Thomas Arnold and Iqbal’, in *Iqbal Review* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy), April 1991, 17-18.

Shibli's and Iqbal's coincidental relationship with Arnold and Atiya indeed may well be a 'psychological' puzzle, as Dr. Durrani calls it, and modern psychology has no doubt looked deep into the matter of explaining the significance of accidents and coincidences, what Carl Jung called 'synchronicities'. These incidents or events that are apparently not linked through any causality may reflect for Jung the dynamics of what he calls 'the collective unconscious'—an idea quite akin to what we are exploring in terms of our engagement with English in different phases of our cultural history. That is what gives me a feeling that the issue (of the rise and fall of Atiya's relationship with Shibli and Iqbal) may actually, or rather analogically, have even something to do with the apparently distant issue of Arnold's 'research into the history of Islam'—the two apparently disjointed 'incidents' whose 'coincidentalness' Dr. Durrani plays down. I feel that the faces of both Shibli and Iqbal *were turned away* from Atiya much in sync with the way in which both of them *turned their faces away* from the orientalist and colonialist aspects of Arnold. My use of the passive and the active modes of this turning away of Shibli and Iqbal in Atiya's and Arnold's cases respectively is deliberate, to suggest that since their relationship with Arnold was, though intimate, more of an intellectual rather than an emotional or a *romantic* nature, a deliberate and critical self-effort at a partial detachment on the part of Shibli and Iqbal was more possible, whereas in cases of a romantic attachment, pain usually accompanies the process of disillusionment, which is often difficult to self-inflict. Let me explain.

In the previous section of this study,⁶ I argued that the figure of Arnold could represent for Shibli and Iqbal that face of English with which they could negotiate certain terms of cultural engagement. This interface was acceptable in terms of a certain cultural exchange and intellectual enrichment, but in order to keep the relationship intact, they could afford to stop well short of fulfilling the condition of a fundamental cultural change, that is, both Shibli and Iqbal looked unwilling to compromise their feeling towards their own cultural histories and religious identities against the love they felt for Arnold and his intellectual and personal virtues. A relationship with Atiya had rather different demands—and in her case a smooth and successful relationship would have required a thorough revision of the terms of engagement—a task both Shibli and Iqbal could not undertake. Both Shibli and Iqbal, one could say *via* Ghalib, valued both their *dīn* (religion) and their *dil*

⁶ See my essay 'English and Pakistani Culture: Shibli, Iqbal and Arnold *or* Ambivalence Revisited'.

(heart), and hence understandably had to go through some pain in her alley:

جس کو ہوں دین و دل عزیز اس کی گلی میں جائے کیوں

As we are trying to look at the ‘tragic drama’—from its beginning, through its middle, to its ‘end’—of our cultural romance with English, there may yet be another angle, though not entirely non-psychological, from which we may explain these uncanny coincidences—I mean the poetic. ‘Coincidences,’ Aristotle tells us in the *Poetics*, ‘are most striking when they have an air of design . . . Such events seem not be due to mere chance.’⁷ Apart from the same feminine figure playing upon the imagination of Shibli and Iqbal, another coincidence that seems to have ‘an air of design’ is the fact that the scandalous saga of this ‘romance’ (that remained on the peripheries of the scholarly and cultural careers of both Shibli and Iqbal) captured the cultural imagination of the Muslims of the subcontinent much after the deaths of the two figures—became more relevant for the subsequent generation at a time when we were about to change gears in our cultural appropriation of English.

One last comment, one last ‘coincidence’ before we move into seeing how the plot of this tragic drama unfolds—how the step-mother becomes a ‘social butterfly’. What links our two methodological approaches to the problem, namely the poetic and the psychological—what makes both Aristotle and Freud relevant for appreciating our tragic cultural romance with English in its second phase and after that—is the infamous Oedipus Complex, a dynamic of influence drawn by Freud from a play that was also the model of a perfect tragedy for Aristotle. In that, we will keep an eye open for the oedipal undertones that may run through the transition from the generation of Shibli and Iqbal to that of Faiz and Rashid and Miraji, etc.

Atiya Fyzee-Rahamin (1877 - 1967) was one of the first ‘unveiled’ feminine faces of English in India. She was, according to various critics who have recalled her relationship with Shibli and Iqbal, an ‘able and excellent girl’ in her twenties (at the time of her meetings with Shibli and Iqbal) ‘intelligent and widely informed’, with whom Shibli was separated by a generational gap, and found it difficult to have a ‘compatibility of thoughts’ (S. M. Ikram). She was ‘extremely sensitive, refined in taste, knowledgeable’—one from whom Iqbal

⁷ Aristotle, ‘Poetics’, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams, (NY: Harcourtbrace, 1992), 55.

sought a ‘temporary emotional support’⁸ in his transitory period of frustration after his return from Europe (Javid Iqbal). She was ‘intellectually advanced’ in ways so as to consider a kind of freedom and liberty her right that could not fit in the ethical framework of Iqbal, hence a doomed love affair between the two (Muhammad Usman). She was a figure whom Iqbal could accept only as an intellectual friend, but not as a wife (Khalid Nazir Sufi). She was of those first female figures in India who were ‘prominent in the high society’, and ‘attended public events with their faces unveiled’. She was a ‘social butterfly’, ‘Forwarded of manners’, ‘unusually buoyant’, ‘utterly free from shyness’, who temporarily dazed both Shibli and Iqbal through her ‘power of infatuating’—one who ‘stunned’ Shibli by her beauty and ‘electrified’ him ‘by the touch of her hand’ when she extended it for a handshake at their first meeting in Lucknow. She was from a group of ‘liberated females’ whose ‘flirtatious companionship’ would become a source of enjoyment for the libertines ‘at night in the apartments of songstresses and dancing girls’ who were ‘admired for their alluring conversation . . . That is not to say that their conversation was of any intellectual caliber’. She was ‘the sweetheart of (Shibli’s) *ghazals*’ and ‘was not a harlot’ (Daud Rahbar). She was, analogically, and in short, ‘English’—whom Shibli desperately wanted to teach Persian and Urdu, and from whom both Shibli and Iqbal sought a marriage of true minds, but ultimately had to admit impediments.

Youngest of the three daughters of Hasan Ali Fyzee (1827 – 1903), an Indian businessman who remained in Turkey for some time where she was born, Atiya was the first Indian Muslim woman to be sent by the British government to England on a scholarship in 1906. In her own words in her travelogue *Zamana-e-Tehsil* (‘The Time of Education’), the purpose of the visit was for her to become an educationist and on her return to serve her fellow Indian sisters, but there she ‘fell ill’, and ‘came back with no achievement (*be nil maram*) after spending thirteen months of hardship in the foreign land’.⁹

There are good reasons to doubt Atiya’s own take on the purpose of this visit and its outcome. The account of the travelogue, written in the form of diary entries, largely comprises an attractive description of an inspirational period of sightseeing, musical concerts, tea and coffee

⁸ From Atiya to English analogically: Wordsworth also seems to have provided Iqbal a ‘temporary emotional support’ when he, in Iqbal’s own words, saved him from atheism when Iqbal was young.

⁹ Atiya Fyzee, *Zamana-e-Tehsil* (ed.), Muhammad Yamin Usman (Karachi: Idarah Yadgar-e-Ghalib, 2010), 23. English Translation mine.

parties, and the academic environment at the British universities—in short, an impressive exposure to the English culture in its full glamour and glory. These delectable tales were regularly sent back to her ‘Newspaper sisters’ (*akhbari behnen*) and were read with ‘great fondness’. It looks as if an academic qualification, to complete the two years degree in education, was never the main purpose of the visit, which she thought to be ‘her responsibility’—was never a problem for those who funded her, as she expressed her gratitude to the British government for not penalizing her in any way for not being able complete her course and rather sympathizing with her on her ‘failure’. ‘Anyways’, she settles, ‘whatever I have gained (through this visit), I hope from this that I would be able to serve my sisters, which is the desire of my heart’.¹⁰ It looks she was sent on a cultural ‘change’ rather than an ‘exchange’ programme, at least in the view of Shibli, who was already trying to catch this ‘social butterfly’ by trying to teach her Urdu before she went to Europe, and who thought that she had ‘progressed in English, but ruined (her) Urdu’ after returning from Europe.¹¹ Apart from wanting her to retain her Urdu while exposing herself to English, Shibli also wanted her to retain her religious bearings through her visit to Europe, and in that, too, he was no less disappointed. While Atiya was departing for England, Shibli sent her a farewell *ghazal*. In his later letter to Zuhra Begum, Atiya’s sister, Shibli points out that out of all the wishes he made for Atiya’s journey, he was most apprehensive of the following wish to remain unfulfilled:

بہ روی سوے پیرس و لندن
وز رہ کعبہ و حجاز آیی

(May) you go to Paris and London,
And return by way of the *Ka‘aba* and Hijaz.

Atiya, of course, came back to India directly from Paris.

The claim to the hardships of the stay also seems to be belied by the narrative. As the journey begins from the shores of Bombay, the separation from the loved ones makes Atiya realize that ‘Ah! It is not that easy to go to Europe,’ and that she ‘suddenly’ came to know ‘how

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹¹ Muhammad Amin Zuberi, *Khutut-i Shibli ba-nam-i muhtarima Zahra Begum Fyzee va ‘Atiya Begum Sahiba Fyzee*, (Bhopal: Zill-us-Sultan Buk Ejansi, 1930. Letter 13, dated 16 October 1908, 42.

difficult this lust was'.¹² But this realization seems to vanish as suddenly as it came, and gives way to a minute and detailed description of whatever is around the moment the loved ones who came to see her off disappear from her sight—a description that would run till the end of the story. The last entry in the narrative sums up the mood of the travelogue: 'So many days were spent in rest and luxury', and finally she takes leave from her 'sisters in civilization' with these words in Persian: 'The mind got exhilarated, and the weakened body was energized'.¹³ The trip was fulfilling, a sojourn 'That would be good both going and coming back,' in the sense Robert Frost talks about the boy who swings on birches: 'He learned all there was / To learn . . .'

He always kept his poise
 To the top branches, climbing carefully
 With the same pains you use to fill a cup
 Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
 Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
 Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
 (*Birches*)

As for the illness that Atiya cites as the main cause of her failure to complete her studies, it is generally thought that it was caused by the news of her grandmother's death, to whom she was deeply attached. Muhammad Yamin Usman refers to another possible reason for her failure: her social engagements caused by her widening circle of acquaintance. Atiya seems to have 'kept her poise to the top branches', 'climbing carefully' to the heightened companies of the likes of Abdullah Yousuf Ali, Sheikh Abdul Qadir, Mushir Hussain Qidwai, Syed Ali Bilgrami, Justice Ameer Ali, Dr. Ansari, and most conspicuously, of Muhammad Iqbal.

The rise and fall of Atiya's relationship with Shibli and Iqbal can become an analogy of the dynamic of the relationship between English and Indian Muslim cultural patrimony that was primarily preserved linguistically, apart from Arabic, through Persian and Urdu. It is an analogy of a romance that failed, but something that continued to haunt our collective unconscious through the second generation of our colonial past, and has since long seemed to threaten to fail us as a culture. This analogy reflects a dynamics of a power struggle of cultures, in whose first phase analogized through the relationship between Atiya, Shibli and Iqbal, English seems to resist to be overpowered by the impressive

¹² Atiya Fyzee, *Zamana-e-Tehsil*, 24 - 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 144.

aesthetic effect of Persian and Urdu. In the generation after Iqbal, Persian and Urdu seem to be losing ground and the infatuating memories of a face that, in the words of Faiz, ‘had made the heart an abode of fairies (*pari khana*)’ come back to haunt our collective unconscious.

If Atiya was the first unveiled feminine face of English that mesmerized our culture, Iqbal was the greatest and the most charismatic young poet of Urdu and Persian when they first met in England. In Atiya’s travelogue of her stay in Europe, a mirror in which she was to further refine the contours of a certain cultural figure she was to become, Iqbal seems to appear *under erasure*. She seems to constantly play down and resist the overpowering effect Iqbal may have cast upon her. One interesting speculation Siobhan Lambert-Hurley and Sunil Sharma make about the probable cause of Atiya’s illness during her stay in Europe is that the illness may have been ‘lovesickness’:

It is well known that he (Iqbal) and Atiya developed a close friendship during her stay in London in 1906-7, though he is rarely mentioned in her travelogue. It may be assumed that this self-censorship . . . was intended to protect her reputation in the eyes of her Tehzibi sisters. One can imagine that they might not have been too accepting of the frequent, even daily, meetings that went on between this young unmarried Muslim woman and equally unattached and unrelated man in London, Cambridge, and Heidelberg between April and August 1907. Iqbal is evoked in passing in two of Atiya’s published entries, but only in a very formal way as ‘a very learned scholar and also a philosopher and poet’. Yet, reading between the lines, one gets the sense that her indifferent health at this time may have been the effect of a more romantic liaison: a proverbial lovesickness. From Atiya’s later book of correspondence, *Iqbal*, published in 1947 . . . it is quite clear that she was quite obsessed with him during those years.¹⁴

Atiya’s health seems to have improved for two reasons, which she herself shares with her readers: her ‘acquittal’ from the college in London, and her moving to Germany after the ‘acquittal’. ‘Could it have been’, ask Hurley and Sharma, ‘on account of Iqbal’s near constant

¹⁴ Siobhan Lambert-Hurley and Sunil Sharma, *Atiya’s Journeys, A Muslim Woman from Colonial Bombay to Edwardian Britain* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57.

presence that . . . her health was so much better in Germany than in England?’¹⁵

We have previously discussed that both Shibli and Iqbal were wary of entering into any liaison with English that might force them into compromising their own cultural bearings, especially the religious. They could not get on with any aspect of English that may have been, in the words of Shibli, merely a ‘show-case of coat-pantaloon.’ It is possible that both Shibli and Iqbal may have been taken in by Atiya’s (to quote Rahbar’s words again) ‘power of infatuating’, but both seem to be unable to compromise their ‘true selves’ against the demands the romantic continuation of such a relationship made upon them. Atiya was demanding—and hurled accusations both at Shibli and Iqbal, of being timid (in Shibli’s case) and of hypocrisy and indifference (in Iqbal’s case) once she may have realized the ‘intractability’ of the two, both of them rejecting her accusations and in turn accusing her of not truly recognizing who they really were. Shibli writes to her:

You say I am not very courageous. There are two parts of my life, private and public—if I weren’t in charge of the public project then you would see the full extent of my courage . . . What do you know about my problems? You do not know that if I don’t pay attention to the people’s views in any way then an extremely important movement will be destroyed.¹⁶

Iqbal tells her:

You say I have no regards for your wishes! This is indeed strange for I always make it a point to obey your wishes and to please you in any way I can. But sometimes of course such a thing is beyond my power. The force of my nature impels me in a different direction.¹⁷

No! Don’t call me indifferent or hypocrite not even by implication, for it hurts my soul & makes me shudder at your ignorance of my nature. I wish I could turn inside outward in order to give you a better view of my soul which you think is darkened by hypocrisy & indifference.¹⁸

Common to the different contexts of Shibli’s and Iqbal’s responses to Atiya quoted above is ‘Atiya’s constant demands’, to use

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Letter 32, dated 19 August 1909, in Zuberi, *Khutut-i Shibli*, 65- 66.

¹⁷ Atiya Begum, *Iqbal* (Bombay: Victory Printing Press, 1947). Letter dated 17 July 1909, 50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Letter dated 30 March 1910, 58.

the words of Hurley and Sharma, ‘both in terms of time and behavior’, which becomes a probable cause of their strained relationships.¹⁹ The demands of Atiya (in the specific context of the above quotations, of having the foundation stone of the Nadwa laid by her sister in Shibli’s case, and Iqbal to visit her in Bombay and Janjira) could not be met because of Shibli’s prior concern for ‘an extremely important movement’ (the Nadwa) and Iqbal’s own ‘nature’ (dubbed by Hurley and Sharma as his ‘innate conservatism’), the significance of both of which Atiya seems to be unable to comprehend and come to terms with.

Their personal infatuation aside, just like Shibli and Iqbal seem to be dealing with English once it was here, trying to ‘domesticate’ it in terms of seeking some common terms of engagement with it, they also seem to be attempting, with obvious futility, to engage with Atiya by turning her social butterfly-ness into something more meaningful and productive, or by constantly trying to engage her with Urdu and Persian. Shibli, for instance, wanted her to be;

a speaker like one of those famous women among the British and Parsis who have become prominent, but in Urdu so that we too can understand. You have every bit of ability, you only need practice. We old-fashioned people do not like women to speak in public freely and to appear uncovered. But you are already in the public world, so whatever happens now should happen on a perfect level.²⁰

Similarly Iqbal, as Hurley and Sharma note;

Was probably aware of Atiya’s intellectual limitations, especially with respect to Urdu and Persian poetry, he nevertheless sent her his poems and quoted from other poets. Like Shibli before him, he seems to have been taken by the whole idea of her as a cosmopolitan and liberated woman who treated him as a friend.²¹

سوے قطار می کشم ناقہ بی زمام را

The efforts of both Shibli and Iqbal with Atiya, regardless of being interpreted as wooing, taming, or training, bore little fruit. Things were not to work out in this ‘power struggle’ to the satisfaction of any of the parties (Shibli and Iqbal being one and Atiya the other). Despite the sincere desires of Shibli and Iqbal to engage, they could not finally get along with Atiya on Atiya’s terms. In order to have a career of her

¹⁹ Lambert-Hurley and Sunil Sharma, *Atiya’s Journeys*, 59.

²⁰ Letter 2, dated 24 February 1908, in Zuberi, *Khutut-i Shibli*, 31.

²¹ Lambert-Hurley and Sunil Sharma, *Atiya’s Journeys*, 58.

own—in order to have her own way, Atiya chose somebody else, Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin, an interesting choice that, in the context of our analogical musings, we could only interpret as yet another ‘coincidence’ which might help reveal the workings of our collective unconscious in relation to English in the generations subsequent to Shibli and Iqbal. Hurley’s and Sharma’s comment on Atiya’s disillusionment with the traditional mind-set of Shibli, and more so with the intractable ‘conservatism’ of Iqbal looks significant:

Atiya’s frustrating friendship with Iqbal also appears to have convinced her that she would need an unconventional spouse who would freely allow her to take the lead in their relationship and adapt himself to her life and family. Underneath their learning, Shibli and Iqbal were both representatives of two north Indian patriarchal cultures, one a courtly one from the United Provinces and the other Punjabi. As such, they could not have offered Atiya much more than intellectual companionship. It is tempting to imagine that Atiya and her eventual spouse, Samuel, would have met in London during one of her two sojourns, for he was a student there at the same time. Although this did not happen, their common experience of living in Edwardian London, western Indian backgrounds, and involvement with the arts meant that he was the ideal mate for her.²²

I think we need to add a little to the list of reasons Hurley and Sharma provide for Atiya’s incompatibility with Shibli and Iqbal, and her compatibility with Samuel. As for Shibli and Iqbal, they both seem to adhere to the Islamic cultural patrimony rather more unflinchingly than to allow any change that would make them get along with Atiya’s demands. And as for Samuel’s share with Atiya’s sensibility, living in Edwardian London, western Indian backgrounds and involvement with the arts was something that Iqbal also shared with Atiya, and even Shibli, who, except for not being able to visit London, spent some time in Bombay (which he cherished), and was also not devoid of an aesthetic sense. Could it be then Samuel’s Jewish background that might have played an unconscious role in accommodating Atiya’s romantic demands? Analogically, did our culture need a Jewish turn in order to romantically respond to English as a ‘social sweetheart’?

The jump from Atiya to English, and from Samuel to a possible Jewish-Romantic turn in the collective unconscious of our culture may sound to my readers rather abrupt—or in its apparent randomness

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

perhaps somewhat like a Freudian interpretation of a dream or a slip. Could the image of Atiya and Samuel that appeared in the ‘unconscious’ (I mean the endnotes) of Syed Shahabuddin Desnavi’s text be taken as a condensed and displaced dream-image of English, as it met us after Iqbal, with a Jewish-Romantic sensibility standing behind in its background. Desnavi, the vice-president of the Anjuman Tarrāqi-e-Urdu (Hind) and later the secretary of the Dar al-Musannifin at Azam Garh, met Atiya and Samuel for the first time in 1943:

She suddenly came into my office. (Her) appearance was extraordinary: a white thin-clothed gown-like long, loose *kurta*, ‘face turned into a rose-garden with the splendor of rouge’, and ‘the knives of the eyelashes sharpened by collyrium’, in the neck a necklace of gold, glittering rings in fingers—the illustrious husband Fyzee Rahamin following in supplication. I stood up to welcome. Atiya Begum looked with such a stare that I got frightened. Then with a heart-ravishing smile she said in the English tongue: I have established the ‘Three Arts Circle’ in which only the young boys and girls would be the members, only between the ages of 17 and 19. Then she sought permission to hold the session of her Circle in the Anjuman’s hall. One session was held too, which was chaired by Atiya herself and Fyzee Rahamin spoke.²³

Frightening, heart-ravishing, aristocratic, overwhelming and domineering—was this the face of English that managed to finally cast its spell over the cultural imagination of the generation of the Muslims of the subcontinent immediately after Iqbal, with a romantic following of Jewish origins in retinue? This entry of English into the hall of Urdu looks symbolic. We will look into how this image of English appears in Urdu’s ‘hall of fame’, that is, through Rashid and Faiz, the two most noted poets of Urdu after Iqbal.

In one of my earlier essays, I have tried to argue in some detail through Iqbal, Rashid and Faiz how our cultural imagination after Iqbal seems to have fallen into a predicament of a Romantic – Jewish nature. Relying upon the works of some leading Jewish critics in the latter half of the twentieth century like Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, Jacques Derrida, and more recently through the works of Susan Handleman and Sheila Spector, who have made a strong case for the connection between

²³ Syed Shahabuddin Desnavi, *Allama Shibli Nomani, Muanidana Tanqid ki Roshni Mein* (Allama Shibli Nomani: In the Light of Adversary Criticism), (Karachi: Majlis Nashriyat-e-Islam, 1989), 139. English translation mine.

the romantic desire and the figure of the Wandering Jew that frequently appears in romantic literature, I have attempted to show through the works of Faiz and Rashid the presence of a directionless, aimless wandering as a motif that haunts the post-Iqbal canonical Pakistani poetry.²⁴

As Daud Rahbar rightly points out, ‘The Shibli - (Iqbal) - ‘Atiya love-tale ought to be of interest to historians of Muslim culture’ (my parenthesis). From an analogical point of view, Atiya was the image of English that represented a certain ‘high culture’, a purpose of English very much aligned with the liberal humanist aims of introducing English as a subject in the subcontinent in the initial phase of our cultural history—an image, as we have attempted to trace, which could not get along that well with Shibli and Iqbal. That might be one reason why she refused to see Iqbal as a ‘divine’ figure, and while trying to ‘sift’ Iqbal (to exploit the words of Noon Meem Rashid), ‘through the sieve of her own (liberal humanist) self’, admonishes Annemarie Schimmel in a motherly way after Schimmel’s talk on Iqbal in 1958: ‘My child, you have presented Iqbal as someone close to God. I assure you that he was fully a man.’²⁵ This image of English as liberal humanist ‘high culture’ survived well into a few decades in the history of Pakistan, and perhaps is still fighting for its survival in the face of a rapidly spreading corporate culture. When it first emerged, it was startling, as Rahbar says about Atiya and her sisters: ‘She and her sisters startled the high society of Indian Muslims by appearing at public events unveiled. There were no other beauties at these gatherings to give them competition.’ But the ‘normalization’ and spreading of this image accompanied a gradual dilution of its power of infatuating. ‘Today on any campus of a women’s college or a co-educational college in India or Pakistan’, says Rahbar, ‘a girl of ‘Atiya’s kind of good looks and vivacity would not be an unrivalled sensation’.²⁶

Daud may have in mind times when the departments of English in Pakistani universities could still produce the likes of Qurratulain Hyder, Jamila Hashmi, Parveen Shakir and other such culturally

²⁴ See Iftikhar Shafi, ‘Why and How to Read Romanticism: *Ibrah* as a Mode of Comparative Reading for Pakistani Students of Literature and Culture’, *Pakistan Perspectives*, Vol. 21, No. 2, July-December 2016, 81-113.

²⁵ Qadir Zaman, *Talash-i Iqbal* (Hyderabad: Firm for Modern Thought and Literature, 2000), 59. Quoted here from Lambert-Hurley and Sunil Sharma, *Atiya’s Journeys*, 58.

²⁶ Daud Rahbar, [‘Atiya Fyzee] A Poet’s Belated Amour’, in *Sir Muhammad Iqbal, A Modern Interpreter of Islam*, 228.

representative feminine figures who displayed a simultaneous creative engagement with Urdu and Persian, along with English. The displaced image of Atiya as English (liberal humanist high culture) lived on in our collective unconscious perhaps till 1980s, and probably its reminiscences still remain alive in some aristocratic and intellectually elite quarters, but Atiya herself died homeless in Karachi in 1967—and only to mention this as another symbolic coincidence—just a year after TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) was established as an organization in 1966.²⁷

²⁷ The emergence of TESOL has frequently been associated with the increasing commercialization and commoditization of English in the post-colonial era. Raqib Chowdhry and Phan Le Ha in *Desiring TESOL and International Education: Market Abuse and Exploitation* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2014) persuasively argue that today ‘English has been constructed as a commodity and pedagogically reduced to an efficient means of information transfer in this process. Institutions of higher education now operate as if they were ordinary businesses competing to sell their products to consumers. They make major organizational changes which accord with a market mode of operation, such as introducing an ‘internal’ market in which departments are made to be more financially autonomous. To achieve this, they use ‘managerial’ approaches in, for example, staff appraisal and training, introducing institutional planning and giving much more attention to marketing . . . Consequently, there have been conspicuous tensions and conflicts between the teachers’ educational ideals and the management’s actions determined by the status of the unit as a business. There has also been a pressure for academics to see students as ‘customers’ and to devote more of their energies to teaching and developing learner-centred methods of teaching . . . constructed as ‘popular’’. (67) John Gray considers TESOL as ‘Janus-faced’. ‘On the one hand’, he thinks, ‘it is a field of inquiry within an increasingly interdisciplinary applied linguistics where language is construed in ways which are also congruent with understandings in English Studies. On the other hand, it is a multi-million pound industry which markets a model of English which in many ways could be said to mislead the students about the nature of English and the nature of language use . . . The English on offer (in TESOL industry) is also one which is unabashedly celebratory of the values of contemporary consumerism and neo-liberal individualism . . . This is precisely what Edward Said was referring to when he described the kind of language teaching he observed in Middle Eastern universities as having ‘all but terminally consigned English to the level of a technical language stripped of expressive and aesthetic characteristics and denuded of any critical or self-conscious dimension’. ‘TESOL and the Discipline of English’ in *Future of English Studies, Teaching Language, Literature, and Creative Writing in Higher Education*, Ann Hewings *et al.* (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan,

The symbolic echoes of the impending dislocation of the image of English from ‘high culture’ to that of ‘market commodity’ (largely the thrust of the current phase of our cultural interaction with English) can be heard in the events during the last years of Atiya in Karachi. She was made to vacate the ‘Aiwan-e-Riffat’ (‘The High Palace’), the place where she was housed once the Quaid-e-Azam invited her to stay in Pakistan after the partition, and was moved to Hotel Deluxe near Karachi club where she breathed her last in pitiful conditions.

Those who saw them tell us that Atiya’s last days were spent in quite a misery. Naeem-ur-Rahman Justuju disconcertedly recalls his last meetings with Atiya. To him Atiya was ‘a witty, sharp minded lady. She would no doubt converse with ministers, princes, ambassadors, diplomats, journalists, scholars and the learned alike with ease and with fluency in English, in French, in Persian and of course in Urdu, Gujrati, and perhaps in Marahtti’.²⁸ But that was perhaps till the time she was relatively comfortably placed in her ‘Aiwan-e-Riffat’. Her fall from that position of high culture into the market-place rendered her extremely frustrated (perhaps somewhat relatable to the anguish of English literary studies against the triumphant occupancy of the so-called ELT in the current Pakistani academic market). Justuju recalls that ‘At time, Atiya Begum would get into a fit of frenzy. Shrieking madly, it would seem that her vocal chords would break. On such occasions, Faizee Rahmin would confront her closely with a direct gaze into her eyes. This would immediately subdue her. She would become calm and meek as if nothing had been the matter. One would think that he mesmerized her. I for one thought so’.²⁹

But Fyzee Rahamin died, and with him those romantic consolations which would mesmerize Atiya out of the ugly vicissitudes of culture, leaving Atiya to face the market-place alone, at the Hotel Deluxe — leaving the discipline of English in its identity as ‘high culture’, as a ‘social sweetheart’, to helplessly see the emergence of English as another feminine figure that would threaten to push her / it to a miserable end. This new face of English, which emerged in our third phase of cultural interface with English, was that of a woman with whom one can only have a ‘scientifically detached’, mundane, pragmatic, practical, an-aesthetic, physical (to a strict exclusion of any *metaphysical*

2016), 96. See also Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism Continued* (London: Routledge, 2013).

²⁸ Naeem-ur-Rahman Justuju, ‘Portrait of a Lady’, *Dawn* (daily), 13 April 2003.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

dimension) relationship—a relationship that one can neither call love, nor even infatuation, but a relationship based solely on money in the ultimate analysis—English as a further culturally degraded face of Rashid's *Jahanzad*!

Justuju tells us that at the Hotel Deluxe where Atiya was moved in her last days from the Aiwan-e-Riffat, 'there used to be a number of half dressed girls . . . It looked very odd when on entering the hotel, several girls would try to approach you helter skelter. Atiya Begum was very much annoyed with the behavior of these girls. So much so that she would start shouting and waving her fist at them. It was quite a job for poor Rahmin Saheb trying to pacify her at such moments'.³⁰ One can imagine how and why for a woman who had a relationship, even though not a very smooth one, with Shibli and Iqbal, it must have been a crushingly frustrating experience to be made to put up with those whose relationship with Shibli and Iqbal is quite unimaginable. But can one imagine the frustration of those who consider the likes of Shibli and Iqbal as their cultural predecessors and remember Atiya rather sadly but fondly for having played some kind of a role in their lives, but are often made to put up with the market demands of teaching English 'language'—and not literature? Rahamin Saheb is dead, so is Atiya—and her image as English in Pakistan is perhaps breathing her last in my apocalyptic apprehensions. I think we need something more than a Rahaminian-Jewish-Romantic mesmeric gaze to pacify the present frenzy of English in Pakistan.

³⁰ Justuju, 'Portrait of a Lady,' *Dawn* (daily), 13 April 2003.