

Notes

Remembering Dr Mahmud Husain Khan

*Sharif al Mujahid**

Dr Mahmud Husain Khan, Vice-Chancellor of the Karachi University, breathed his last on Thursday, 4 April 1975, at 2:30 a.m. He was laid to rest the same afternoon, as per his wish, under the shadow of the minaret of Jamia Millia Mosque at Malir, surrounded by four educational institutions he had himself founded.

I have been a copious reader of Pakistani newspapers since the early 1950s, but I haven't seen such wide coverage of anyone in the national press except for Liaquat Ali Khan, Fatima Jinnah, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. No educationist, no literary figure, and no political leader except for the first two named above have induced such widespread, profound and unmitigated sorrow by almost all sections of the Pakistani society since the 1950s, and throughout Pakistan. People from all strata of society condoled his death. These included the President, the Prime Minister, Central and Provincial Ministers, other political leaders, high officials, scholars, educationists, various cultural, professional, academic and student bodies and distinguished citizens. President Fazal Elahi Chaudhry called him 'an eminent educationist of high distinction'. Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto hailed him as a 'dedicated educationist' and a 'distinguished scholar'. Senate Chairman Habibullah Khan remembered him as a 'patriot'. Education Minister Abdul Hafeez Pirzada lauded his 'invaluable services'. The National Assembly and the Senate passed condolence resolutions. Others who condoled included Sindh Chief Minister Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, Sindh Governor Justice Abdul Quadir, Punjab Governor Ghulam Mustafa Khar (who considered his death 'a great national loss'), Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Mir Ghulam Qadir, Balochistan Governor Mir Ahmed Yar Khan and a large number of

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federal and provincial ministers. They also included leaders of various parties across the political spectrum, including Jamaat-i-Islami (Jan Muhammad Abbasi, Chaudhry Rahmat Ali and Prof. Ghafoor Ahmad), Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Mufti Mahmood). So also the Karachi Bar Association, Karachi Union of Journalists, Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Motamar Alam al-Islami (Pakistan branch), Pakistan Girls Guide Association, Pakistan Quami Yakjahati Council and Anjuman-e-Taraqui Urdu. Those who joined the mourning included numerous cultural and educational bodies and student organizations (including those of former East Pakistan/Bangladesh) - too numerous to be listed here.

The bare bones of Dr Mahmud Husain Khan's life are as follows. He was born on 15 July 1907, and educated at Islamia High School, Etawah (UP), Jamia Millia Islamia (Delhi) and Heidelberg (Germany). He hailed from a distinguished Pathan family of Rohailkhand. His eldest brother was the renowned Dr Zakir Husain, Shaikhul Jamia of Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, which was spawned by the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920)'s quest for establishing a centre of higher learning for national education as a substitute for government sponsored and supported universities and colleges. Dr Zakir Husain headed the Jamia for over 25 years, later heading the Aligarh University and subsequently becoming Vice President of India for eight years (1959-67), and still later President (1967), succeeding Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. He died in 1969. Dr Mahmud Husain's another brother was Dr Yusuf Husain, Professor at Osmania University at Hyderabad (Deccan) and an authority on Iqbal. Dr Mahmud Husain served Dacca University as Reader/Associate Professor for some 15 years (1933-47). He became Professor of International Relations in 1948, and Provost, Fazlul Haq Muslim Hall, in 1944. He became member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly in 1946, which position he retained for the next seven years (1947-54). He was appointed Deputy Minister, Government of Pakistan, in 1949; and subsequently Secretary, Muslim League Parliamentary Party (1949), Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations (1950), and for Kashmir Affairs (1951), and became Education Minister (1952-53). He was later appointed Professor and Head of the History Department, Karachi University (1953), became Dean, Faculty of Arts, sometime later and Vice Chancellor, Dacca University (1960-63). He resigned and returned to Karachi University as Head of the History Department in early 1963 when the political climate in the East became murky as a result of Suhrawardy's arrest and imposition of the 1962 constitution. He was Visiting Professor at Heidelberg (1964) and at Colombia University (1964-65). He founded

the Jamia Millia at Malir in 1952 and continued to be its President till his death. He succeeded Dr Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi as Vice-Chancellor, Karachi University, in July 1971, and suffered a heart attack while presiding over a meeting at his office a few days before his death. He was Chairman, Editorial Board, History of the Freedom Movement, since the middle 1950s.

As hinted earlier, Dr Mahmud Husain's entire life, except for some five years he spent with the government as Minister/Deputy Minister, was devoted to teaching, research and educational enterprises. Indeed, he was a rarity even among the fast diminishing class of dedicated souls. He taught Modern History and International Relations at the universities of Dacca and Karachi, and South Asian Studies at two foreign universities. He headed with distinction the Dacca and Karachi universities at critical periods in their respective annals and played a significant role in their development, both as a teacher and as vice-chancellor.

As one of the promoters of the Pakistan Historical Society, as general or sectional president at its various annual conferences, and as teacher, author and research director, he made a contribution, at once substantial and significant, to the cause of history and historical research. His appointment as Chairman of the Board of Editors, History of the Freedom Movement, provides an index to his grand vision, deep interest and vast contribution.

Dr Husain's scholarly pursuits ranged from the mediaeval to the modern period. His first work – *Quest for Empire: An Introduction to the Study of Contemporary Expansionist Policy of Japan, Italy and Germany* (Dacca) – established his expertise in modern history. It was probably the only work of its kind published in the subcontinent before World War II, which discussed the forces shaping the international politics of the inter-war period.

Several of his works and papers were focused on Tipu Sultan (d. 1799), who represented the last Indian bastion against the rising British power in the south. These included his *Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (Karachi, 1956), *Fath-ul-Mujahidin: A Treatise on the Rules and Regulations of Tipu Sultan's Army and His Principles of Strategy* (Karachi, 1950), and several articles on Tipu Sultan's army, navy and administration.

Equally facile and fluent in both English and Urdu, Dr Husain translated three well known works, which went into several reprints. These were Rousseau's 'Social Contract' (*Mua'hida-i-Umrani*) in two editions, (Delhi 1935, Karachi 1964); Machiavelli's 'Prince' (*Badshah*) in three editions: Delhi 1947; Karachi 1957, Karachi 1970; and Nagla

Izzeddin's 'Arab World' (*Arab Dunya*) in two editions: Lahore 1960, 1963.

During the last years of his life, Dr Husain was working on Nizamuddin Shami's '*Zafar Nama*', a contemporary account of Timur's campaigns. He had already translated the entire manuscript into English and was planning after retirement to spend a few months in Central Asia, in order to visit the sites mentioned in the account and identifying the place-names which were missing in the works on the historical geography of the area.

Not only did Dr Husain write on historical subjects, he also gave considerable thought to the role, purpose, and teaching of history. History, he felt, is not only a record of people's achievements and failures; it also serves as a teacher and a guide. Far from being merely a subject among the plethora of subjects taught in our educational institutions, history, he argued, 'is a truly nation-building discipline. On the proper teaching of history will depend whether our new generation will consist of right-thinking citizens with faith in themselves and in their future...'. The teaching of history instills and strengthens the feeling of nationhood; that is why, as he recalled more than once, the Japanese did not allow the teaching of history in their colonies by indigenous educators.

The importance Dr Husain attached to the teaching of history led him to plead for overhauling and modernizing the history syllabi in our universities, the raising of the standard of teaching, the rewriting of text books, and for establishing adequate facilities for research.

He deplored the old-fashioned method of stuffing the mind of the young pupil with isolated facts, a chronology of the kings of a dynasty and their unending exploits to keep themselves in harness in a conspiratorial environment, and a multitude of dates. Instead, what was needed was a broadening of the mind which would enable him to make optimum utilization of his potential intellectual powers. For this, Dr Mahmud Husain felt that the history of Indo-Pakistan and of Islam must be taught against the background of the contemporary history of other parts of the world. At the undergraduate level the students should be given a wide range of choice, and specialization should come only at the graduate level. He also pleaded for instituting courses on the rising nations of Asia, the United States, and the Soviet Union. No wonder, he was deeply concerned about the continuing deterioration in the teaching standard of modern history and civilizations; he also sought to rectify the situation at the University of Karachi. Without the preparation of good textbooks and properly designed syllabi, he felt that no reform in the teaching of history was possible.

Dr Husain, along with other Indo-Pakistani historians, believed that history books written during the British period, such as those by Sir Henry Elliot, grossly misrepresented and twisted facts – and this with a view, of course, to advancing cotemporary British interests. Like others, he also felt that we should undertake the task of rewriting history, and that on a priority basis. At the same time, he cautioned against unduly idolizing our past, however glorious it might have been. ‘Let history’, he said, ‘be an actual record of what we were, not what we ought to have been. . . If history is not to turn into fiction or historians into poets, then history has to be true.’ In this, he followed the nineteenth century German Rankean model.

On the other hand, he was confident that ‘Such is our history, that if historians were only to depict things as they were, not only would they be serving the cause of truth but [also] inculcate among Muslims a pride in their past’.

Apart from history, he made valuable contributions towards developing International Relations, Journalism, and Library Science as academic disciplines. He founded, developed and headed Karachi University’s International Relations Department till his departure for Dacca in December 1960. He also inspired the founding of the Journalism Departments, both at Karachi and Dacca.

As one who has had the good fortune to be associated with him rather closely for some twenty years, and with the Department of Journalism at the Karachi University since its very inception, I can say with confidence that but for him and his endless strivings, this department would never have been established in the first place – at least, not as far back as August 1955. Nor would it have developed to the extent it has. In those early, difficult days when journalism education was for the most part frowned upon by journalists themselves, when people seriously doubted the value of journalism as an academic discipline, when journalism practitioners and editors looked upon the discipline with grave misgivings, in the firm belief that journalists, like poets, are born, not made or ‘manufactured’ functionally – in that desperately hostile environment, it was Dr Mahmud Husain who inspired us to herculean efforts, impelled us to work with endless zeal, and sustained us in our humble but ceaseless endeavours. Again, It was his stature and clout that would open up a narrow patch of ground for the discipline to put down its roots, construct a make-shift tent, and consolidate itself over the next decade.

The Asia Foundation rendered valuable assistance in terms of providing reading materials, text books in bulk, typewriters and one part time visiting lecturer, Robert Goralski (later NBC correspondent,

Washington, DC, in the 1960s). (Not only in respect of Journalism and American Studies [see later], but in the overall development of various departments, as well, the Asia Foundation was a source of great strength till 1965 when it moved to Lahore. Zakariyya Sajid was the Pakistani Assistant in the Foundation, whom I had induced to join the Journalism Department on a permanent basis in mid 1965.)

Welcoming the esteemed guests at the Department's annual function in April 1956, as Lecturer-in-Charge, I had ventured to say, 'A tree is known by the fruit it bears. That verdict we shall await. But, in the meantime, we are venturing out our first batch into the field to test the waters on how to make the profession really functional. At the same time, we are trying to carve out a place for the discipline on the academic landscape.' The function was also addressed by Professor A.B.A Haleem, Vice-Chancellor, and Dr Mahmud Husain, both of whom exhorted the students to breathe a whiff of fresh air in the profession. Today, some sixty years down the road, one could vividly see what sort of fruit the Mass Communication Department, the successor to the erstwhile Journalism Department, has spawned over the decades. Briefly stated, it had spawned, among others, media practitioners such as Razia Bondoray (Editor, *Herald* and *Newsline*), Rehana Hakim (Editor, *Newsline*), M. Ziauddin (Editor, *Express-Tribune*), Muhammad Ali Siddiqi (editorial writer, *Dawn*), A.R Shaji (Editor, Radio Pakistan, Lahore), Shahida Kazi (News Editor, PTV), Mehr Ahsan (UNICEF) and Tahira Jalil (Editor, a NY weekly). Its faculty included Mukhtar Zaman (DG, APP), Syed Mohsin Ali (Editor, *Morning News*), Naushaba Burney (Editor, *Woman's World*) Matinur Rahman Murtaza (Editor, *Jasarat*), and Nisar Ahmad Zuberi (Editor, *Akhbar-i-Jahan*). Its two faculty members' contribution – that of Prof. Zakariyya Sajid and Prof. Tahir Masud – fetched them Tamghai Imtiaz in 2014 while the present writer clinched Tamghai Fazilat and Sitara-e-Imtiaz in 2001 and 2006 respectively.

As a teacher and educator, Dr Mahmud Husain felt that a great library is a pre-condition of the growth and development of a centre of higher learning and research. For over two decades he pivotally and consistently espoused the cause of libraries and librarians. He conceived and founded the Library Science Department at Karachi University and the Library Association of Pakistan which he headed for several years. As events would have it, his last work to be published during his lifetime was a compilation of his addresses on the importance of libraries and librarians. Later, Dr Anis Khurshid, Chairman, Library Science Department, helped a good deal to crystallize his legacy and carry forward the library movement in Pakistan for a decade and more, and

that his name had come to command a legendary status at Library and Information Sciences seminars since the middle 1980s.

Perhaps Dr Husain's most notable achievement in the field of education concerns the launching of the Majlis-i-Talim-i-Milli (Society for National Education) in 1952. It led to the founding of the Jamia Talim-Milli at Malir, which poised itself as the Pakistani counterpart to the Delhi Jamia which itself was headed by his illustrious brother, Dr Zakir Husain. Incredible as it may sound, the Jamia venture was launched with an initial outlay of only Rs. 56 in the early 1950s. And, like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the renowned founder of Aligarh, Dr Mahmud Husain was able to inspire and gather around him a galaxy of devoted and dedicated teachers who worked and taught at the Jamia for a paltry sum,

Indeed, the Jamia was one of those few institutions in Pakistan which was founded with a grand vision and a constructive outlook that was anchored in soul-lifting ideals and genuine principles. Thus, it was an institution with a new bias, a new orientation and a new *raison d'être*. Compare it with the modern private institutions, from top to bottom, and you are bound to realize what a whiff of fresh air had the Jamia represented.

Even as Dr Mahmud Husain's work at the Jamia had long endured, so his achievements at the Karachi University would be long remembered. Though he joined it in 1953 as Head of the History Department after the demise of Syed Sulaiman Nadvi who was earlier appointed to head it, he was associated with the University since its very inception. He played a pivotal role in all the phases of its development: his contribution towards the development of healthy traditions, improving the academic standards, scouting for and injecting fresh talent, and raising the intellectual tone of the University was both substantial and significant.

While all this is widely known, the fact that he was the first promoter of American Studies in Pakistan is known but to a few. As Dean of the Faculty of Arts in the middle 1950s, he was engaged, as indicated earlier, in conceiving and developing new areas of studies. Apart from Journalism, International Relations and Library Science, the other area of study he sought to establish was a course in American history. With the assistance of The Asia Foundation he was successful in enlisting three visiting American Professors to give the course in the Department of History during 1956-62. They were Professor Bean of the University of California, Dr. George Lerski (later at San Francisco State University) and Dr. George Montagno, who was later associated with the

Association of Colleges and Universities for International Intercultural Studies.

Meantime, Dr Mahmud Husain made efforts to have the course given on a permanent basis. Hence he arranged to send a Pakistani history lecturer, Rais Ahmad Khan of the Gordon College, Rawalpindi, for doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley. This was, again, under a grant from The Asia Foundation. Upon his return in 1962, he took over the course from his American predecessors. Later, Dr Rais Ahmad Khan would head the Area Studies Center on North and Latin America at the Quaid-i-Azam University for over a decade. So significant was his contribution in consolidating the Center that it was duly acknowledged by naming the Center's annual conference in 2007 and the main hall at the Center after him.

Dr Mahmud Husain visited various American universities under the U.S. Specialist Exchange Program in the spring of 1956. This was his first contact with the American academia and the American university curricula. And he came back deeply impressed. He felt that the bachelor's programme in the U.S is extensive and wide-ranging, and provide the student with a broad acquaintance with the essentials in various subjects, thus preparing him squarely for specialization in a particular field at the doctoral level. Hence, he always encouraged young faculty members to go to the United States for their doctoral programme.

Dr Husain had occasion to renew his contact with the American academia during 1964-65 when he was invited as Visiting Professor at the South Asian Institute, Columbia University. He also gave a series of lectures at the University of Pennsylvania, at the instance of Professor Norman Palmer, a noted authority on South Asia.

Despite his multitudinous engagements and a busy schedule of work, the most surprising thing about Dr Mahmud Husain was that he was always humane. He was kind, gentle, amiable, affable, friendly, sympathetic and saturated with a string of interesting anecdotes to share with his colleagues, students and others which would inevitably spawn into endless peals of laughter. He met people at the horizontal, not vertical, level and made them completely at home in his presence. He had in him the rare quality of inspiring those he came across and winning their confidence. Those of us who have had the good fortune to work with him for some length of time found him a friend, philosopher, and guide – in the true sense of the word.

Such, in short, was Dr Mahmud Husain whom the academic and cultural world of Pakistan will continue to remember.