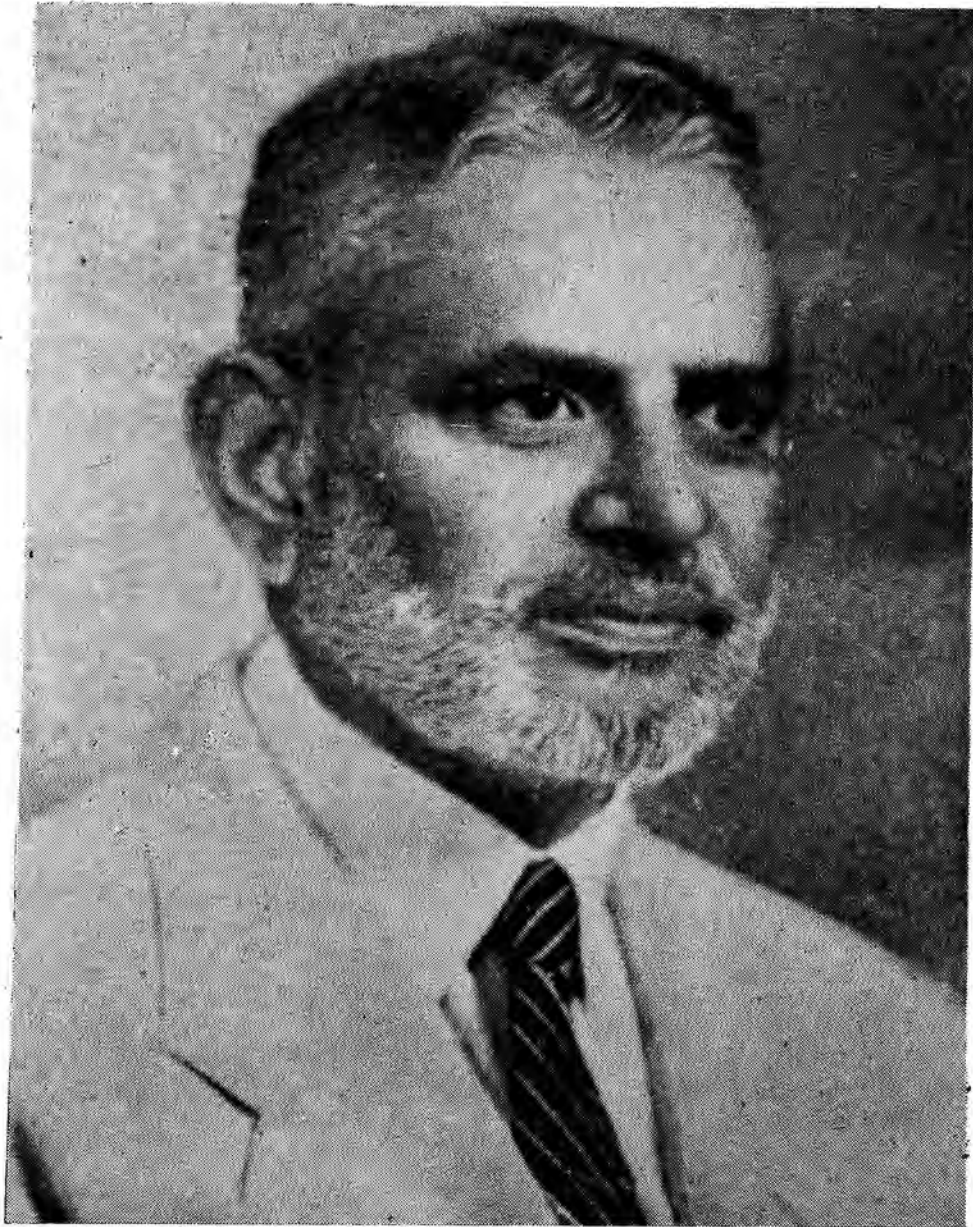




Dr. Afzal Husain



MIAN MUHAMMAD AFZAL HUSAIN

(1889 - 1970)

Foundation Fellow

*"He giveth wisdom and knowledge unto whom
He will, and he unto whom wisdom and
knowledge are given, he truly hath
received abundant good....*

Al-Quran (2 : 269)

BIRTH AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

Mian Muhammad Afzal Husain, father of Mian Husain Bakhsh, was a scholar of Persian and Arabic and was well read in classics. He took up service under the British and retired as District Judge in 1904. He was a very religious minded man and brought up his children as practising Muslims. Mian Husain Bakhsh had five sons and two daughters. He died in 1911. The eldest son of Mian Husain Bakhsh was Mian Sir Fazal-i-Husain, MA, Barrister-at-law, KB, Kt, KCIE, KCSI, DOL (Honoris Causa, Punjab University).

MIAN MUHAMMAD AFZAL HUSAIN was next to Sir Fazal-i-Husain and was born on June 10, 1889. He spent his childhood in different cities wherever his father was posted. He inherited from his father the habit of regular and systematic hard work, high sense of duty and unimpeachable honesty and integrity in thought and conduct. He passed the Matriculation of the Punjab University in first Division in 1907.

Man is a creature of his environment, but great men create their own environment. Mian Afzal Husain followed the footsteps of his elder brother, but created an environment for himself which was totally different from that of his elder brother. Mian Afzal Husain was born only forty years after the annexation of Punjab by the East India Company. At that time education was only for the elite and science was looked upon with a great deal of disfavour by the Muslims. It has also to be remembered that Gregor Mendel had published his paper on laws of heredity in 1856 and Darwin wrote the Origin of Species by Natural Selection in 1859 – only thirty years before Afzal Husain's birth. Near at home, the Punjab University had been established under Act-XIX of 1882 (only 7 years before his birth) "with an obligation to maintain an Oriental College and a Law School and such



other schools and colleges as the Senate may from time to time direct". Teaching of Science was not even mentioned.

According to tradition of most First Divisioners he joined the Government College, Lahore and took the unprecedented step of opting for sciences. He passed the BSc (Honours) examination, with Zoology as the major subject, in First Division, in 1911, and won the Alfred Patiala Scholarship. During this year only 530 students passed the BA and BSc Examination of the Punjab University. He passed the MSc (Zoology) Examination in First Division in 1913 and topped the list of 59 successful candidates of MA or MSc Examination of the Punjab University.

He was always among the best students of his class in school and college and was awarded prizes in most of the examinations. He proceeded to England for higher studies in 1913 and joined Christ College, Cambridge. He passed both the Part I and Part II of Natural Sciences Tripos Examination in First Division. He was a very favourite student of Professor J Stanley Gardiner who remained his friend, philosopher and guided all his life. Afzal Husain was elected Scholar of Christ College. He won the Frank Smart Prize for being the best student of Zoology in 1916, and was awarded the Charles Darwin Prize for his research work in 1918.

The First World War broke out in 1914 and Afzal Husain could not return home till 1918. He, therefore, took up research assignments in Zoology and Entomology in the University of Cambridge, Natural History Museum, London, Imperial College, London and the Victoria University, Manchester for about three years. He also worked as Demonstrator in Zoology at Cambridge.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER

The war had ended and Mian Afzal Husain returned home in 1918 after having been appointed to the Indian Agricultural Service. He reported for duty as Supernumerary Imperial Entomologist at the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa, Bihar. He was transferred to Punjab in 1919 and was posted as Professor of Entomology and Entomologist to the Government of Punjab at the Punjab Agricultural College, Lyallpur. The writer joined the Agricultural College as Freshman in 1919 and, thus, had the honour of being among the first batch of his students.

Prof Afzal Husain had a brilliant and a very rewarding career which is summarized hereunder :-

Supernumerary Entomologist, 1918-19, Professor of Entomology, Lyallpur, 1919-33, Principal, Agricultural College, Lyallpur, 1933-38, Vice-Chancellor, Punjab University, 1938-44, Member, Indian Famine Commission, 1944-45, Member, Punjab and NWFP



Public Service Commission, 1945-47, Chairman, Punjab and NWFP Public Service Commission, 1947-48, Chairman, Central Public Service Commission, 1948-52, Vice-Chancellor, Punjab University, 1954-58, Chairman, Pakistan Sugar Commission, 1957-58, and Chairman, Pakistan Council of Agricultural Research, 1961-65.

Main Afzal Husain was a brilliant Scientist. He is rightly called the Father of Plant Protection in India. His peers in other provinces of India had done very useful work in systematic entomology and had studied the life-histories of several insect pests. But Afzal Husain extended the laboratory work into field work. His stock in trade was, however, very limited and he had to work at great odds. The only insecticides then known were tobacco decoction, Bordeaux mixture, Paris Green, Sodium Cyanide and Pyrethrum. Light traps were merely a hobby and banding of trees was also practised. Although DDT was synthesized in 1939, it became readily available only after World War-II. With such primitive means at his disposal he made a success of the new profession. He successfully controlled mango hopper in the Shalimar Gardens of Lahore. He was the first to use power sprayers to control cotton whitefly. Plant protection by chemical means had become an established practice before he left Lyallpur to take over as Vice-Chancellor, Punjab University in 1938. A list of his publications is attached.

As a Scientist he was at the top of his profession. His credo in scientific pursuits was that of a research worker, the toughness of a soldier, the intellect of a scholar, and the character of a saint. His work on desert locust is considered as classical. He finally attained a position of eminence amongst the scientists of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent. He was a foundation fellow of the National Institute of Sciences in India and was its Council Member for a long time. He was also Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences. He presided over the Agricultural Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1933 and the Entomological Section of the Jubilee Session of the Indian Science Congress in 1938, and was elected General President of the Indian Science Congress in 1946.

Mian Sahib remained active in the service of Science till the last. He was elected the first General President of Pakistan Association for the Advancement of Science in 1948. He was a Founder Fellow of the Pakistan Academy of Sciences and was also its President for the first four years.

He was pre-eminent in the field of education. Socrates was called the gadfly of the Athenians. In a smaller sphere Afzal Husain performed a similar valuable service to the Punjab University. During his first tenure as Vice-Chancellor he established the Departments of Fine Arts, Music and Statistics. Towards the end of this tenure he conceived the idea of removing the Campus of the University outside the city of Lahore. This idea, however, remained dormant till his second tenure. He then pursued this idea and, to his great pleasure, the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony was performed by the President of Pakistan on December 30, 1957. Soon after this ceremony the 85th Convocation of the Punjab University was held at the new site. The occasion assumed an international character and messages of goodwill were received from 241 Universities of 49 countries.



During his second term as Vice-Chancellor he established Departments of Social Sciences, Sociology and a Social Sciences Research Institute.

On his recommendation the Government of Punjab appointed an Enquiry Commission to look into the teaching and research activities of the University. Three eminent Professors from United Kingdom were requested to perform this onerous duty. They submitted two reports, one a formal one and another short, confidential report. Both the reports were rather uncomplementary.

Again on September 26, 1970, he launched a campaign for establishing an Alumni Association, the building of an Alumni House and initiated the idea of appointing a Council of Elders to advise the University. These ideas could not assume practical shape because of his death. His personal interest in the affairs of the University is evident from the fact that he attended a Special Convocation of the University only one day before his death. The University of Punjab conferred the degree of DSc (Honoris Causa) on him and the Government of Pakistan conferred the Honour of Hilal-i-Quaid-i-Azam. After his death the Chair of Zoology at the University of Punjab was named as Afzal Husain Professor of Zoology.

He represented the Indian Universities in the Central Advisory Board of Education, Government of India and also in the Advisory Board of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research. He was a Founder Member of the Entomological Society of India. He represented India as a delegate to the International Locust Conference, Cairo in 1935. He also represented India on the Permanent Agricultural Committee of the International Labour Office, Geneva in 1938. In 1944, he was deputed by the Government of India as delegate to the Agricultural Conference of the Middle Eastern countries.

In 1944, Mian Sahib was approached by the Government of Bengal to re-organize the Department of Agriculture of the Province. But soon after, he was asked by the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in April, 1944, to become a member of a 15-man Planning Committee. Mian Sahib accepted this offer after getting permission from Sir Nazim-ud-Din. The Planning Commission, however, could not do much work due to political turmoil in the Country.

PERSONAL LIFE

Mian Afzal Husain was a tireless worker. Early in his official career he acquired skill in typing and did all his typing during his work at home after office hours. When the University Training Corps was started, he was the first to join and became Officer Commanding D Company of 4th Lahore UTC. He always attended the annual camp at Shahdara. The restlessness of his mind and the diversity of his interest was shown when on the spur of the moment, in 1924, he decided to become an Oriental Interpreter.



Persian. He passed the Examination and won an award of Rs.800/-. He finally retired in 1958 at the age of 69 Years. He then joined the Lahore Polytechnique and became a qualified electrician. He was a many-splendoured person and it is not easy to describe his qualities of head and heart in a full measure. His acuity, diligence and devotion to duty were superb.

Inspite of his austere and almost ascetic exterior, Mian Afzal Husain possessed great sense of humour. He gave of himself unstintingly. His circle of friends and acquaintances was very wide. One side of his life was a closely guarded secret; he was a deeply religious man and his devotion to the Holy Quran and daily prayers was superb. Infact, it can be said of him that he lived his religion in his daily life. It was the love of his religion which prompted him to organize and call a meeting of the International Islamic colloquium in 1949 at Karachi in which scholars from 41 countries participated.

Mian Sahib and I had a common heritage. We were made from the same clan. He, therefore, was always very kind to me. The relationship matured into friendship. But the brightest spot of my life was yet to come. In 1944 Mian Sahib was working as Member, Bengal Famine Commission in New Delhi. I was summoned to Delhi by Mian Sahib. He told me that he had some differences with the rest of the Famine Commission and that he was going to sign the Report subject to a Note of Dissent. He then briefed me for about an hour about the thinking of the Commission and for about half an hour about his draft of the Note of Dissent. He told me that he wanted my views on the Note.

There was intense political activity in India during the thirties and the forties. Battle lines were drawn and the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League were at logger heads. In 1943, Bengal was governed by the Muslim League with Khawaja Sir Nazim-ud-Din as Chief Minister. Bengal was visited by famine in 1943 and Afzal Husain sensed that covertly attempts were being made by some members of the Commission to lay at least a part of the blame of the famine on the Nazim-ud-Din Ministry. The atmosphere was surcharged with emotion and Afzal Husain decided to append a Note of Dissent and chose me as its moderator.

We sat together after lunch and read the Note together. He agreed with some of my views and rejected others. We finished our tete-a-tete in the late afternoon. Then occurred the highest point of my life. He thanked me for my journey to Delhi and said that he felt confident about his Note because I had gone over it.

I felt a surge of self confidence because Mian Sahib had thought it fit to consult me, of all people, in a highly technical and also politicised Report and felt satisfied with my suggestions. This build-up of self-confidence has served me throughout my career.

When he was Vice-Chancellor at Lahore, we had tacitly agreed to spend some time together whenever I visited Lahore. So I would go to his house on the left bank of the Canal across the bridge on the Mall Road leading to Lahore Cant. After a cup of



we would go for a walk on the canal bank towards the Jail Road Bridge, a distance of about a mile. It used to take us half an hour to reach the Jail Road Bridge. Then we would cross over and walk back on the right bank of the canal. Dr AN Puri, the great Chemist, lived on this bank. We would invariably go to his house and Mian Sahib used to shout "Puri Khan". This was his affectionate name for Dr Puri. If Puri were at home we would have a jolly good meeting.

I could go on like this but I cannot use too much space. In his death I lost the most valuable asset of my life. Mian Sahib dominated the intellectual firmament, first of India and later of Pakistan for more than half a century. He was known in the scientific and intellectual circles of the world.

He was essentially a family man, giving and receiving admiration from his family and friends. He led a happy life, but the shadow cast by the loss of his wife in April, 1968 to be followed soon after by the demise of his second son-in-law was too much for his brave soul and he went to his heavenly abode on November 1, 1970. He left behind one son, Mian Arshad Husain who retired as Ambassador of Pakistan in Moscow and four daughters and a host of friends to mourn his loss. May God grant him eternal peace. Amen.

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