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Munshi Fateh Din

Some glimpses

By Tariq Mustafa, grandson



My take on the word "Munshi" as applied to our dear and respected grandfather is a little different.

No doubt in pre-British days "Munshi" and "Maulvi" were honorific terms applied to real scholars of Islam. This perhaps continued through the first century of British rule, but later — especially after the debacle of 1857 — these terms gradually lost their lustre. As our ulema withdrew into their shells and the Islamic political order worldwide took a nosedive, we drifted into today's usage.

My understanding — and no one since the late Mian Salimullah can either corroborate or deny this with authority — is that our grandfather was not a highly educated man in the conventional, or even the old deeni, sense. He was a practical agriculturist, with a patwari's knowledge of land-revenue matters; and a patwari of British days was no mean rank.

Munshi Fateh Din later entered the service of the Raja of Kapurthala State, not far from Jullundur — at Mauza Talwandi, to be exact, between Jullundur and Nakodar — and became manager of the Raja's lands.

There he gained experience of every side of land matters, revenue and legal alike. That, and the hands-on farming that came naturally to any Arain of note, stood him in good stead when he was invited by Lyall — the Deputy Commissioner after whom Lyallpur was later named, and

who rose to be Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab — to move with his extended family to Lyallpur. He came with other agriculturists, Muslims and Sikhs, to cultivate the newly irrigated colony of the Ravi–Chenab Doab.

The pioneering atmosphere of the new colony suited our grandfather to the hilt. Through dedicated hard work, and his knowledge of both farming and land law, his holdings kept growing until he became the largest landowner, and a friend of Mr Lyall.

So, in my view, the epithet "Munshi" in our grandfather's case did not reflect formal education — a doctorate, in today's terms. Rather, it signified his role as a manager, and it stuck to his name ever afterwards.

There are a number of villages in Lyallpur District carrying the name "Chawi Chak", i.e. Chak No. 224. Our ancestral village was popularly known as the "Chawi of Munshi Fateh Din" because of the love and affection in which he was held by the people of Lyallpur — the English, the Hindus and the Sikhs, not to speak of his fellow Muslims. That was not on account of higher learning or deeni knowledge, but because he was a caring and munificent human being, a philanthropist of a high order, grateful for the bounties he had received from the Almighty and sharing them freely with others, especially those in need.

From the stories I remember hearing from dear Daddyji, he was a disciplinarian. Daddyji was punished once or more by having his hands put under the legs of the charpai on which Daddaji — whom Daddyji fondly called Mianji — was lying. Daddyji also remembered often being made a "murgha" whenever he stepped out of line. (I wonder if our new generation knows what that means: one bends down, reaches one's arms back under one's legs and catches hold of one's ears — not a comfortable posture to hold for more than a few minutes. Take it from me, since I was made a murgha too, under Daddyji's orders, once or maybe twice — quite understandable for one who had the honour of being dubbed "Tooti No. 1" by Daddyji.)

Despite his relatively simple agricultural background, Daddaji was clearly a far-sighted man who had plans for his children. Of his four sons:

01 **Mian Barkatullah**
The first-born, was asked to help Daddaji with his estates after completing his graduation.

02 **Mian Fatehullah**
The second — dubbed "Fattyullah" by his landlady in the UK — was sent to England to study civil engineering at the City and Guilds Institute. He not only completed his engineering degree but, on his own, also became a barrister at one of the Inns of Court in London (perhaps Ahmad Atta will know which). He joined government service as an SDO in the Irrigation Department, but his deeni leanings got the better of him: he resigned early and became a follower of the Pir of Sharaqpur Sharif. A very humble, but resolute and generous, soul.

03 **Mian Hafiz Abdullah**
The third, was sent to the madrasa at Nadwa in India, then to Al-Azhar in Cairo, to become an alim. He went into politics, was for many years a Member of India's Central Assembly, and sat on the Executive Committee of Jinnah Sahib's Muslim League. In his spare time he was an accomplished wrestler, and he kept a whole almirah of guns and pistols for me to gawk at.

04 **Mian Muhammad Nurullah**
The last — our dear Daddyji — could not benefit from Mianji's guidance, as Mianji passed away when Daddyji was barely ten. He was brought up by his mother and siblings (including one sister, about whom, unfortunately, I know little). Daddyji damaged his knee falling from a wall and was operated on by a specialist in Vienna, who asked him to return for a check-up after six months. Instead, Daddyji went to the UK, got into the LSE, and returned after graduating to Lyallpur to try his luck in politics. He

represented Lyallpur or Toba Tek Singh in the Punjab Assembly from 1929 to 1951, serving as Finance Minister in the Mamdot cabinet. He was prominent in the Pakistan Movement, along with his brother Taya Abdullah, but soon grew disgusted with politics in Pakistan. He made a U-turn from a vilayati sahib in tail coat and top hat to a proper Tablighi — learning Islam as a born-again Muslim — and was in the first Jamaat to visit the USA, in the early fifties.

Lastly, I would like to mention a handwritten copy of the Qur'an-i-Karim, probably by the grandfather of Munshi Fateh Din, who was a real alim — perhaps a true Munshi Fazil of his day — and, by some uncorroborated accounts, a Sufi and an Aulia Allah (Wallahu a'lam). This copy is now with Samina Appa, daughter of Appa Attiya, daughter of Hafiz Abdullah, in Lahore. For those seriously interested, its last page gives more information.

So yes, we did have a true Munshi Fazil among our ancestors, even if it was not the redoubtable Munshi Fateh Din himself. May Allah's blessings be upon him and all our ancestors. Ameen.

Ahqar — Tariq Mustafa, son of Mian Muhammad Nurullah