

### 3.3 Government College, Lahore: Education and Atmosphere

There were some outstanding teachers at the Government College Lahore (GCL) – as mentioned earlier, considered to be perhaps the best educational institution in India, if not Asia. (Its foundation in 1865 predated that of the Punjab University by 10 years.) There had been some great Principals in earlier times – all Englishmen. The only exception had been Mr G D Sondhi – a Cambridge man, I think, in the early 1940's. When I arrived in 1946, the Principal was Mr Eric Dickinson, the last British head of the College. After independence, he was succeeded by the famous man of letters – both in Urdu and in English - Mr Ahmed Shah Bokhari (Patras). He had been a class fellow of my father's in the mid or late 1910's; had then gone to Cambridge to read English; returned to GCL; and then in the late 1930's or early 1940's had become the Assistant Controller, and then the Director General of All-India Radio at Delhi – where he had collected a galaxy of Urdu scholars around him (Saadat-Hassan Manto, Miraji, Chiragh Hasan Hasrat, Shahid Ahmed Dehlavi, N M Rashid....). He is also one of the top humourist writers in Urdu – his slim volume Patras ke Mazamin (Essays of Patras) is still considered a classic. He recognized me as the son of his old class-fellow, Inayat Ullah Khan (one of his first remarks, when I greeted him opposite the great wooden gate of the college and standing at the edge of the deep-set playing-fields, was: “What is this overgrowth sprouting on your face?” چہرہ پر یہ کیا جھاڑ جھنڈاڑ اگا رہ گئی ہے). He was referring to my unshaven, scrubby face of a 17 years old. Soon I bought a shaving kit.)

Before partition, I had been especially impressed by my maths professors (I read physics, chemistry, mathematics, English and half subject Urdu): Mr S R Gupta, and Mr S A Hamid (Cantab) the father of Azra Begum, Ghazanfar's future mother-in-law). Equally impressive was our Urdu professor, Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum – a well-known poet, who was also (later?) the warden of the New Hostel. (He also taught Persian at the college – and had been a friend of Iqbal's.) After partition, we were taught Urdu by two eminent scholars, Professor Qayyum Nazar (who became a friend in the 1970's), and Mr Ghulam Mohyiddin Asar (from Madras).

### 3.3.1 Khwaja Manzoor Hosain

Amongst my English teachers, the one that left the deepest mark on my personality was Khwaja Manzoor Hosain – formerly of Aligadh University. He was a true scholar and a gentleman through and through: always dressed immaculately in a *shirwani* and tight-fitting Indian legwear (جٹوڑی دریا پانجامہ). He hailed from old Delhi, spoke beautiful Urdu, and was a very fair-complexioned clean-shaven man. He had been educated at Oxford (Exeter College) and spoke English with the elegance and precision of a classical scholar. (He would search for an exact epithet or word: “Then the sentiments, er... er... er, clamoured to come out.) Khwaja Sahib was a rather shy person – and only the most studious of his students (amongst them Muzaffar Ali Syed – later a distinguished scholar of Urdu and English; and yours truly) could follow what he was saying. Most of the others let his lectures pass over their heads. He was also a great scholar of classical Urdu poetry – and would sometimes quote Ghalib, or Anis, or Fani, or Iqbal in his lectures.

فانی: آنکھیں ہیں سو خشک ہوئی ہیں، جی ہے کہ اٹھرا آتا ہے  
دل پہ گھٹا سی چھائی ہے، نہ گھٹتی ہے، نہ بڑھتی ہے  
انیس: بیدیں گبرا کے درختوں سے لیٹ جاتی ہیں  
اقبال: سوادِ رومۃ اللبری میں دیتی یاد آتی ہے  
وہیں عظمت، وہیں عبرت، وہیں شانِ دل آویزی

[Iqbal: In the ruins of Greater Rome, Delhi comes to my mind: The same grandeur, the same lesson of foregone glory, the same look of heart-bewitching beauty.]

After reciting this couplet, which referred to his native Delhi, so recently lost to him, Khwaja Sahib's voice choked, his eyes misted up, he could not conclude his lecture. Slowly, he walked out of the classroom, utterly broken. He had been teaching us one of Keats's poems. I still remember his teaching of Wordsworth's poetry: The Prelude: Boating on the Windermere on half-holidays...

An almost equally effective teacher of English was Professor Sirajuddin (who later on became the Principal of GCL – like Khwaja Manzoor Hosain. He had married Urmila, the beautiful daughter of the Hindu Principal G. D. (Guru Das?) Sondhi, and divorces his other beautiful wife, Razia – whom we used to see around the college. I remember Professor Diraj teaching us Keats's Ode to Autumn (Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness...) and the full-throated (rendered in a very thick and lumpy voice) nightingale singing...

### 3.3.2 Dr Rafi M Chaudhri

In Chemistry, I remember Professor Azeem Hussain – a very clear teacher. In physics, the Head of Department and the Professor was, of course, Professor Rafi Muhammad Chaudhri, M. Sc. (Alig.), PhD (Cantab), PES (Class I). He was an extremely good experimentalist and an incredibly hard-working and hard-task master. (He was not such a good theory man – and was often denigrated in comparison with Salam – a genius theorist and later a Nobel Laureate in Physics (1979).) But Dr Chaudhri was a tyrant. He shouted at his technicians with such aggression that they probably urinated in their pants. He was equally domineering vis-à-vis his staff (lecturers, etc.). Students, too, were scared stiff of him – though I was one of his blue-eyed boys. (Once, while he was lecturing, the ceiling above started to crackle. He remarked: What is that noise, I wonder? I replied: “Differential expansion, sir”. It had been raining and rather cold. Now the sun was coming out. Dr Chaudhri very generously and loudly praised me in front of the whole class. “Now that is what a brilliant scientist is like. Durrani is an incredibly good physicist”. Needless to say, I swelled out of my clothes!)

I have always been a ‘Late Latif’ – for ever arriving late for lectures, functions, mosque prayers, exams... (I still often dream of being late in catching a train and running after it; or arriving late to give a lecture, or not having prepared my lectures or exam material until the last minute.) So, I used often to turn up late for my lab work or the first lecture by Dr Chaudhri (he was an incredibly good lecturer and always spent much time going through his lecture notes before taking his class – a trait that I myself followed during my university teaching). Dr Chaudhri would announce in a loud (and sarcastic – but not too unkind) voice: “So, Lord Durrani has finally graced the lab [or the lecture, as the case may be] with his presence!”

Dr Chaudhri also was as hardworking and long-hours-observing a Head of Department as he had been as a research worker at the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge (cf. Lord Rutherford’s putative remark to Sir J J Thomson – as related by Dr Chaudhri, in his nasal twang: Sir, he is the most hard-working student I have ever come across!). He would arrive at the Department/Laboratory at 7:30am (when the working hours started at 9am) – having walked all the way on foot from the GOR (Government Officers’ Residential) estate beyond the Lawrence Gardens in Lahore – via the Mall Road – at a brisk pace, covering the 5-mile trek come rain or shine. I can still picture him: A tall (6 foot or 5’ 11”) , very gaunt man in his late 40’s/early 50’s (he was born in 1903 at Gurgaon – or Hissar/Karnal, now in Haryana, East Punjab in India), wearing a black felt hat, carrying a thin walking stick or a furled umbrella, sharp, lively twinkling eyes, clean-shaven, very small black moustache, usually wearing a three-piece suit, including a waist-coat. When he took his hat off, his head was completely bald and shiny – a real egg-head. He was quite swarthy of colour. He looked, for all the world, like a taut up-standing cobra, about to strike you! And then he would stay

all hours – not leaving until after 7pm, walking back home again on foot. And he ate hardly anything! All day, he would drink endless cups of tea (which he said was his main food; but it had little milk or sugar in it). For lunch, he usually had a tiffin containing some dry oat biscuits and a bit of cooked spinach (he said doctors had forbidden him to eat meat). I remember at a college dinner once, when I was present as a lecturer, and the sumptuous dinner consisted of several courses, he let each course go by, with an empty plate in front of him each time). No wonder he was so thin! When standing up in grey trousers, with a grey waist-coat, with hands closing the stop-cocks on a tall, complex glass apparatus with horizontal and vertical glass tubes, all constructed by his glass blower or by himself – he looked for all the world like an up stretched black cobra, as I said above.

Incidentally, Dr Chaudhri was extremely stringent in issuing any pieces of equipment to his students (in his MSc Physics class). He spent every Sunday in the Department/Laboratory, ordering equipment from England from his extensive collection of catalogues. These were mostly glass objects or vacuum pumps (both rotary and diffusion) or other laboratory hardware. Then every single item he would keep in locked cupboards next to his own office. He always had large bunches of keys to hand. If you required even a small glass beaker (500 ml, say), you would have to go to the Head of the Department himself (he trusted no staff member or technical staff to look after the booty). He would come out with his bunch of keys, open the relevant cupboard, very carefully bring out a beaker (after having at length cross-questioned you as to why you needed one, and what had happened to the one he had given you only 6 months ago) – and give it to you together with a long spiel: “Durrani, you must remember, these Pyrex beakers are very precious and hard to come by. You can only purchase them from England, and you know we have such small funds available. I am giving you this beaker as a very special favour. But you must take great care of it. Don’t lend it to another good-for-nothing student. I shall keep an eye on how you use this important piece of equipment.....” I used to joke with him later: “Dr Sahib, it appears to me you would expect us to construct our own beakers by glass-blowing the raw material. Don’t you think one could spend that much time doing more useful research than manufacturing a beaker?” “Durrani, you are always making light of important subjects. You are such a funny boy!” he would retort. (His great metier was to teach us how to make our own Geiger–Müller counters by glass-blowing wide-bore tubes and then filling them with argon gas, alcohol vapour, etc. We became very good at using rotary and diffusion pumps to create fairly high vacuums –  $10^{-6}$  mm of Hg.)

Dr Chaudhri had about 8 sons and 1 or 2 daughters. All of them – except two, I think – became physicists. I used to tease him (after my return from England, having obtained my PhD) that the reason all of them became physicists was so that they could have a chance to set eyes on him – for he never was home during waking hours, including Sundays (Saturday

was a working day, of course). “You are a very amusing man, Durrani” he would reply in his nasal twang, his eyes twinkling with suppressed mirth (but mesmerising like a cobra’s).

When I had first met Dr Chaudhri in 1950 – when he interviewed me for admission into his MSc (Physics) class – I had been reading Penguin books about Atomic Energy (all the rage those days) and other popular books on recently discovered phenomena such as superfluidity of liquid helium. This had very favourably impressed him – for not many students those days read anything outside their set syllabi. Hence his appreciation of me as a student.

For my experimental project for the final year of MSc Physics, I had taken up a topic suggested by Dr Chaudhri – which I pursued with my friend Arshad Ali Toor, a kindred soul. It concerned Dr C’s then-recent observation that if the inside of a G-M counter was exposed to sparking radiation, this would enhance the counter’s efficiency. One evening, working late in the lab, Arshad and I noticed that at high voltages (beyond the G-M plateau) the count rate did dramatically go up. We were excited. I immediately cycled home – which was a few doors away from Dr C’s house in GOR – and although it was 11pm and quite late at night, I boldly rang the bell (at 11 Golf Road; we lived at 15 Golf Road). After some minutes, Dr C emerged, clad in a shiny, scarlet- coloured night gown, and was surprised to see me: What is wrong Durrani?, he asked. “Sir, we have proved your theory. The CM count-rate leapt up...” He was elated. “Well done, Durrani! I knew you would succeed in proving my theory to be true”...and so on. This is what got me into Cambridge (although later on, I was sure Dr C’s theory was erroneous. The counter stability had broken down and the gas discharge had simply started to get out of hand. But Dr Chaudhri had found a cause for jubilation and self-congratulation.)

With all the distractions of independence, imprisonment, etc. I had been unable to achieve my high level of exam marks that I had gained in my matriculation. In my Intermediate Examination (F. Sc.: Faculty of Science), I got only  $464/650 = 71\%$  marks – although still a good I class. For my B.A. (Physics with Maths A and B), however, I stood 5<sup>th</sup> in the Province overall (with 360/500 marks) – and 1<sup>st</sup> in the Province with the combination, Physics and Maths. In my MSc. exam, when I had many other distractions, I stood 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Province amongst Physics students. I forget my marks (653/1000?). For my B.A., along with Physics and Maths, I had also taken up a course in English Honours. I stood 2<sup>nd</sup> in this latter course; but the person who topped, did not continue with postgraduate studies. This led to my being given a scholarship (although only Rs 22 per month – but remember the fees were only Rs 10 pm – it was quite a substantial sum those days) during my MSc studies. I soon saved enough to buy a camera for Rs 200. Which reminds me of an incident.

While doing our MSc, Dr Chaudhri never gave us a day’s holiday. So my buddy Arshad Toor and one or two others from our MSc class (including Zafar Ismail and Inam ul

Haq, statistics student), decided to run truant and visit the hill station of Murree. It was towards the end of January (1952, I think) – and we had read in the newspapers that it had been snowing on the hill resort of Murree – for we had never seen snow in our life. So off we went – by train and perhaps by bus. Murree and all the adjoining hills and gullies (7000 feet high) were full of snow, which hung on the trees, covered the paths with virgin masses of the enchanting stuff. I took pictures of these bewitching elysian fields with my newly acquired camera. (For one, I lay down on the path to photograph a woodcutter in his stark garments, carrying aloft his axe.) On return to the college, I found that there was a photographic exhibition. I submitted two of my pictures: one captioned ‘Frozen shadows’ and the second entitled, I think, “A woodcutter among snow-laden trees”. I got a First and (I think) a Third Prize for my exhibits. A very early recognition of my prowess just a few weeks after acquiring a camera! I was very pleased.

Rather harrowing, however, was the prospect of facing Dr Chaudhri after this French leave. So when Arshad and I turned up after an absence of 4-5 days, Dr C was glowering with anger. Where has Your Lordship been gallivanting for nearly a week without leave, if I may be so bold as to enquire? (He shot at me.) I said, “Sir, there was no hope that you would give us leave, had we enquired. And we had never seen snow in our life – and so we could not resist, and went to Murree to see it.” On being told the truth straight forwardly, Dr C relented, but cautioned us: “All right. I shall condone it this time; but make sure never to repeat this offence in the future.”

While on the subject: we waited and waited, but it never snowed during our stay in Muree. I remember that, on the last day, we gave a few pennies (annas) to a beggar who was sitting on the muddy/slushy ground and begging for alms. I said to him: here is some money – but, in return, we would like to ask you to pray that it snows today. He replied: “Yes, sir, I am willing to pray for the snow to fall – but only if you give me this overcoat that you are wearing so that I do not get frozen stiff during the snowfall.” I felt ashamed at my insensitivity and self-centred egotism.