

For Robert and Hootoksi

I'd written ages ago about some of the stuff I'd been reading about the Tyabji family, which is now in the Nehru Memorial Museum Archives.

What I'm reading is, believe it or not, the entire set of Badruddin Tyabji's family books, dating from 1880 till 1906, which ran into several volumes, and were copied out by Amiruddin bhai's mother, Safia, in the 1950s!

No-one knew where the original books were, or even that anything like them had ever existed—I imagine because that generation has now died out. Then, to my enormous excitement, I discovered them in Qays's possession in the SFBT office, where they must have been moved when Somerset Lodge was broken down. Qays, being what he is, didn't know, and really couldn't care less what papers he had, except when it's a question of people, including his own immediate family, wanting to look at them.. Anyway, it was in these books, written in Urdu, and contributed to under severe compulsion sometimes, by every member of the family, that I discovered all sorts of delightful things about our revered elders, your grandparents, Robert, and my own too, which I'll recount very briefly to you.

You know, I'm sure, but I'm mentioning it for completeness' sake, that Mohsin chachajan was born in 1866, and that as a young man, youth, really, he went up to Oxford (Balliol, no less), to read for the Oxford Schools as the BA exam is known.. He must have done sufficiently well to feel he should sit for the ICS entrance exam, which he did in 1885, being the first Muslim to enter the service, at a time when the number of Indians being recruited was minimal, on account of the age bar (nineteen, I believe) and that the exams could only be sat for in England. Not content with this achievement, he came first in the final ICS exams in 1887. He returned to Bombay that year in the company of his father, who must have been bursting with pride, and certainly to the delirious joy of his brothers and sisters, and his first posting was as Assistant Commissioner to the Collector of Bombay.

He was then sent to Surat as Sessions Judge and then to Sind in February 1890, where he spent about 7 years, before being posted to Thana, again as Sessions Judge, in 1898.

I'm not sure when he got engaged to Tahira, but she starts to appear in the family chronicles from 1895 onwards as his prospective wife, and I suppose the idea was to get her to know the family she was marrying into, and their rather unusual pursuits. It seems that he had first been engaged to his first cousin Saada, who was the daughter of his uncle Najmuddin (whose house in Kihim was Dilkusha, and one of whose daughters was Khadija, whom you might remember).

Some time then, there was a great eclipse, to see which members of the family made a special trip to some rather remote place, and saw it all. Mohsin was rather sternly commanded by his sister Sakina, I think, to write the account, which he dutifully did, in great detail. I'll add the translations of the end of this note. All the contributions had by the way to be in Urdu, much to the disgust of some members of the family, especially the younger ones. But rules were rules, and punishment meted out quite impartially. At one point, fed up of people just not writing, and being quite impervious to being fined, they'd even had a system of uth-baiths imposed on family members who hadn't written their weekly bit. The uth-baith had to be performed by all culprits, regardless of age or status, before the family, at Sunday breakfast. All this is written about with great relish by the daughter who'd taken charge of the book Hafiza, who died early at the age of 17..

It's interesting how these responsibilities are taken on by different people at different times—quite often one of the worst offenders would, a couple of years later, become the person harrasing and haranguing the others, and this would mean guests at the Matheran and Mahableshwar houses as well as the immediate family, to write. My grandfather Faiz (earlier Hasan/Hassoo) was apparently such a terror of an Editor Sahib that he was called Zulum Sahib.

Mohsin I find writes always in a rather sober fashion, as befitted I suppose the eldest son, and one with great achievements behind him by the age of 22.

In April 1898, when he was transferred to Thana, they got married—rather an interesting wedding, as it was a joint one with Halima and A. A. Fyzee (who then inherited Yali). From various comments made by his irreverent brothers and sisters about him and Tahira after they were married and came to stay either at Chowk Hall in Matheran, or Blue Valley at Mahableshwar, they were a very happy couple, completely caught up in each other, although there was a considerable difference in age. Tahira was I think 17 or so when she got married, though it's difficult to be sure about the exact age, as, even within the contemporary family accounts, dates differ by a year or so.

A year later, in 1899, they visited their first cousin Ibrahim Ahmedi (the uncle and adopted father of Daud Ahmedi), who was a brilliant engineer, and had won the Bombay University gold medal some time in the 80s. Ibrahim was a Senior Engineer with the PWD at Bijapur, and was apparently responsible not only for roads and bridges, but also for the conservation of the wonderful (I think 17<sup>th</sup>-century) buildings there. He must also have been very musical, or perhaps he simply appreciated his new cousin's musical tastes, because he apparently arranged for a sitar performance in the wonderful Gol Gumbad, which is supposed to be the largest dome in Asia, if not the world, and have splendid accoustics! They certainly visited all the monuments, as did many other family members, who found them quite breath-taking.

In 1901, he travelled with Tahira and Badruddin to Europe. Amin was born at Bournemouth mid-1902.

. In 1902, he was transferred to Dhulia, and then in 1903 to Ahmednagar, again as Sessions Judge

### ***Tahera Luqmani***

From her photographs, which I hope I can get for you some time soon, she was an enchantingly pretty girl, who was very musical. What's interesting is that in none of the Tyabji family photographs that I've come across of that period, are the girls shown in anything but the most formal poses, they're all in groups sitting on chairs—so these pictures of Tahira with her sitar are all the more charming and interesting.

By 1895, she was engaged to Mohsin, and visited Badruddin's family in Matheran at Chowk Hall (later the Olympia Hotel). She and Hasan (later known as Faiz, my grandfather) were very fond of each other, and he teases her unmercifully for wearing a red topi and antari—matching Mohsin's beard! (Perhaps he'd greyed early, and used mehendi?)

When the family went on long and sometimes exhausting excursions to Worli and Vihar, by train and bullock cart, she'd accompany them. She very quickly adjusted to the family

girls being energetic walkers and badminton and croquet players, although this doesn't seem to have been part of her own family's style—she was from Baroda, and I'm not sure of the connexion with the other Luqmanis. She was of course a fine musician, and her singing and sitar playing were greatly admired at family gatherings, whether at picnics or evening entertainments.

In 1896, when she was almost 15, and by then known as a good croquet player, there were teasing references to her as Faluda and Wayat, and also as Geet ki Teete? in the akhbar book. They seem to have led extremely energetic lives in Matheran, with long walks or rides every day, and games of badminton and croquet every evening. (It seems daughters –in-law were especially favoured by being taken to ride in the mornings with Badruddin, on one of his fine Arab horses, while the rest of the family walked).

There'd be a picnic practically every day to some wonderful point, where after eating and drinking a lot (maddening, they hardly ever say what they ate), they'd climb up trees, and sing or play whist. There's an account either by her or some sister of how Hassoo helped her get up a favourite family jamun tree, where she sat quite happily, ate jamun with great gusto; and also played whist with her elder sister-in-law Jamila as a partner, sitting up in the tree.

At some point in this akhbar, she makes a point of explaining that a certain Mrs Sethna is a Parsi, which makes Hassoo comment teasingly about her being very well-informed (or something on those lines!)

And that, I'm afraid, is all I can share with you. You would know that Mohsin chachajan was drowned in Kihim, in front of Retreat, where they'd just had a great aam khor, in 1917.

Qays has whole volumes of letters of Tahira Khalajan's written to my grandfather Faiz after this event, as well as Mohsin chachajan's letters from England in the 1880s and later, and one volume of condolence letters written after his death. Things being what they are, I doubt very much that I'll get to see them while these papers are in his possession, so we can only hope that sense will prevail, and he'll donate them to a library or archive as Asaf Fyzee had done.

Here now is a translation of Mohsin chachajan's account of the 1898 eclipse, written in our Bombay style Urdu, but on the whole grammatically quite correct!

'I'm afraid that this is the first specimen of my handwriting to appear in this book, but those who have to read my hand mightn't be too unhappy about this.

After having spent over seven years in Sindh, I'm now posted to Thana. And since it is only an hour from Bombay by train, we're hoping that I'll be there for some time.

Yesterday, we, that is my parents, Sakina, Hulloo, Hasan [Faiz], Mohammad Akbar Hydari and Amena went to Jewor? To see the eclipse. We knew that this would be a natural phenomenon of a kind that would not be seen again for another 200 years or so, so it seemed a good idea to take the trouble to go somewhere from where we would be able to see it from the very best vantage point. And I think everyone will agree it was well worth all the effort and cost. The railway authorities had arranged for three special trains to run from Bombay to Jewor, starting on Friday evening. Our train left at about 10 p.m., and we got to Jewor at about 11 [the next day?] There were about 500 people who

had gathered to watch this unique event, including the governors of Bombay and Madras, and of one other place—so it seems we hadn't gone far wrong in choosing to go there. {Persian quotation.} The eclipse began at about 5 minutes after 12 [noon?], and culminated at 1.13—if that's the right way to describe it. And it ended at between 2.35 and 2.40. A lot of people were watching through pieces of glass that had been stained black, and Mohammad Akbar got us some of this glass, which was very useful. We wouldn't have been able to look at the sun through plain glass with the naked eye, as even when the moon had fully covered the sun, the shape and size[radiance] of the sun was not affected.

We were chatting away when father called out to us that the eclipse had started, and indeed the face of the sun had been partially covered by the moon—the right side, so that the sun looked as if a slice had been cut out of it. Gradually the sun's appearance changed, and it began to look like the new moon, except that it was red. And the light began to fade gradually, and it began to cool—everything, the sky, the earth, trees and human beings changed colour and looked different. Instead of the warm clear light of the sun, there was a pale cold light from the moon, spreading everywhere. And, apart from that, it had a strange effect, hard to describe, but very real—a kind of sadness, a bit like the feeling one has when the sun is setting. Everything seemed dim and shadowy. The light was then like that of the full moon, and the sky had become grey. The moon itself had gone quite dark, and it became black when it had completely covered the sun, and one felt that one could just stretch out one's hand and touch it! It looked quite hard and solid. Around this dark ball, there was a brilliant circle of light, and above and below the circle there seemed to be arrow-like flames. [diagram here—quite a sweet one] And there seemed to be red spots on the circle. After the moon had completely eclipsed the sun, its shape began to change again till it finally regained its proper shape.

We had quite a good view of all this, but it's a shame that we didn't have binoculars to watch the last stages. We did watch this last stage through a telescope, of which I hope someone else, such as Hasan, will write an account. This has become such a lengthy account that I think I'd better stop. There are many others who'll be able to correct my mistakes and fill in all the gaps I've left.

Finally, I should specify some of the problems and difficulties that we had to face: we had so very many boxes and baskets of good things to eat that we kept of being distracted by them, and the results of all our efforts can be seen with one glance at them. Signed  
Mohsin

This is followed by a short entry by Hasan [Faiz], disclaiming any need to add to this full and exact account!