

Traveling and Writing Back: Two Muslim Women in Early Twentieth-Century London

MACFEST, July 24, 2022

Md. Mahmudul Hasan

Department of English Language and Literature
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

Atiya Fyzee (1877–1967)

Zeyneb Hanoum (1883–1923)

- September 1906
- Atiya: (1906–7) England and Germany
- Zeyneb: (1906–12) France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and England

Both travelled in London extensively.

Introducing Atiya Fyzee

- The Fyzees and Tyabjis
- Muhammad Shibli Nomani (1857–1914) and Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938).

Atiya the iconoclast

- Traveling to London to study teacher training at Maria Gray College at 29 and unmarried
- Atiya's marriage at 35
- Rabindranath Tagore 22 and his wife Mrinalini Devi was 9 years old.

Atiya Fyzee's *Zamana-i-Tahsil*

- Sayyid Mumtaz Ali
- Muhammadi Begum
- *Tahzib un-Niswan* (est. 1898)
- Roznamcha

Introducing Zeyneb Hanoum (1883–1923)

- Mehemed Noury Bey (1858–1908)
- Reschid Bey
- Zeyneb's and Melek's multilingual credentials
- Their names
- Literary collaboration

Turkish connections


- Both were born in Istanbul
- Charshaf
- Yali

Hajj, hijab, hijrah and rihlah

- Atiya: Rihlah (educational travelogue) and Hijrah (“migration for education”)
- “rihlah ‘ilmiyyah (educational tourism or edu-tourism) or rihlah fi talab al-’ilm (travelling in search of knowledge)”
- “One who leaves their home in search of knowledge remains on the path of God until they return.”
- “One who travels in search of learning, God makes their entry into paradise easy.”


Fetishized inquisitiveness about their presence

- Zeyneb: “Alas! Alas! there is no privacy inside or outside Turkey”.
- Atiya: “Until now they had ungainly thoughts regarding Indians. If they meet an Indian who does not meet their fixed views, they become totally flabbergasted. I don’t know at which level they place Indians in their minds that everything surprises them!”

- 
- London for Atiya
 - London for Zeyneb
 - Atiya's comments on London and Londoners: mainly cultural
 - Zeyneb's: political and more critical

Admiration for London, Londoners

- “How can London be described and how can it be imagined without seeing it! Ofo! Such streets and what a grand city, and the shops! It appears very nice when it is lit up at night. The way each shop is decorated – it’s truly a skill. How much can a person see; people are models of fashion and get-up ... God knows how these people are so accomplished.” (Fyzee 2010, 124)

- 
- “What a magnificent city London is! If you English are not proud of it, you ought to be ... It seems to me as if English character were expressed even in the houses of the people ... Like ours [in Turkey], the houses here are made for use, and their wide doors and wide passages seem to extend a welcome to you.” (Hanoum 1913, 212–13)

London Underground


- “Every moment this small railway comes and goes, and people are standing ready to board. If you delay it’s gone, to appear again in a few moments. It’s the working of a jinn” (Fyzee 2010, 158).
- Railways in India first in Bombay 1853
- First underground railway in India (Calcutta) 1863
- The Tube on steam in 1863 – Paddington Station (then called Bishop’s Road) to Farringdon Street on 10 January 1863
- London underground electric trains 1890

Private space of women

- “It is a luxury to cook on an English stove and thus to keep a clean kitchen. If only food could be cooked in this way in India, it would be so convenient” (Fyzee 2010, 183).
- “Truly, if this nation did not have these virtues, then half the world wouldn’t be in their control. They are really accomplished people” (Fyzee 2010, 191).

Islam and Londoners

- Atiya: “These people are so conscious of cleanliness. There is no trouble for them to observe the cleaning rules of us Muslims. To accept English ways in a Muslim manner is a simple, easy, and effortless task.”
- Atiya: “In this country the sea of learning flows with a force and many fortunate people benefit from it. It is true that only knowledge benefits human beings. Honour in life and paradise in the after-life, it gives a rank in both worlds. May God make the light of learning shine again in our community, inshallah.”

- 
- Atiya states: “Many such people who have dedicated their lives to knowledge were gathered there. A marvellous group! I saw a new world: everyone immersed in competition and trying to outdo the others. I was amazed”.

- British author and colonial administrator William Lee-Warner (1846–914)
- “Finding an opportunity, Mr Lee-Warner also spoke of how he lived in India ... and, what he had observed there of the Muslims, there seemed to be no hope for their future progress and betterment. It is a slothful community. They don’t know anything except the past, and so on ... he spoke the truth, if we feel bad that’s our choice.” (Fyzee 2010, 163)

Scotland Yard

- Atiya: London's "excellent police system"
- Zeyneb: "Whatever difficulty I have, they seem to be able to help me, and the most curious of all curious things is, they will not accept tips! What wonderful men! and what a difference from our policemen in Constantinople! In Constantinople, I trembled almost at the sight of a policeman, but here I cannot imagine what I should do without them." (Hanoum 1913, 182)

Harem in London


- But, my dear, why have you never told me that the Ladies' Gallery is a harem? A harem with its latticed windows! The harem of the Government! No wonder the women cried through the windows of that harem that they wanted to be free! I felt inclined to shout out too. "Is it in Free England that you dare to have a harem? How inconsistent are you English! You send your women out unprotected all over the world, and here in the workshop where your laws are made, you cover them with a symbol of protection."

Critiquing Englishwomen

- About the contralto singer Clara Butt's (1872–936) dress, Atiya says: “God knows how she can bind herself and sing in such a constricted state, and that too with a smile. These people bear all kinds of tortures for the sake of appearance” (Fyzee 2010, 143).
- “Fyzee charshaf”

Zeyneb's admiration for "the suffragettes"

- A distinction between "the suffragettes" and "sporting and society women... all passionately absorbed in their own amusements" (Hanoum 1913, 215).
- 1897: National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)
- 1903: Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)
- It took a violent (suffragette) turn in 1905 with the arrests of Annie Kenney (1879–953) and Christabel Pankhurst (1880–958).

- 
- “I cannot tell you the horrible impression it produces on the mind of a Turkish woman to learn that England not only imprisons but tortures women; to me it is the cataclysm of all my most cherished faiths ... It was the land of all lands I longed to visit, and now I hear a Liberal Government is torturing women.” (Hanoum 1913, 236)

Concluding remarks

- Despite all her high regard for Britain and for the British, Atiya “cannot ever imagine liking this country enough to remain here forever” (Fyzee 2010, 149).
- “Désenchantée I left Turkey, désenchantée I have left Europe” (Hanoum 1913, 246).
- “[I]t was the distance that lent the mountains their hue – but it was too late to go back, and she perished in the cold, biting snow” (Hanoum 1913, 238).