

A Weeping Bust in Datia

The jacarandas were still in bloom and some feathery patches of clouds could be seen gently floating across the turquoise expanse above them, when M. Shāstra Pālaka, the *bon vivant* of Morningside Heights, disguised as an *au courant* Sanskrit scholar—Vasco da Gama-like beard, sandals, and wire-rimmed sunglasses—arrived at the humble offices of the municipal administration at Datia. A ready-to-ingratiate group of men, having received a call from ‘the Palace’ barely 30 minutes earlier, nervously awaited him in the front. They greeted him with apologies for not being able to offer proper hospitality, and urged him to have some tea first. He politely declined, though the smell of freshly fried samosas—with just a hint of *asafætida indica*—was ever so tempting, and asked them instead to take him to ‘The Room’ right away. ‘I leave for Delhi at noon—and you know I must also call on Maharaja Sahib before I leave.’ It was a cruel thing to remind them of his authority, but he was in earnest, he had come looking for a specific object and he intended to get the job done without delay. It was something his meshuga friend in Chicago had asked him to do one evening months back, while drowning his sorrows in a wineglass.

In a flurry of ‘Yes, sir,’ and ‘No, sir,’ he was rushed to ‘The Room’ where, he had been assured, he could find what he was looking for. The Maharaja had told him that ‘The Room’ contained much of everything that had to be discarded over the past 150 years but subsequently had to be retained in some fashion. ‘Just in case it becomes important someday,’ he had explained.

Two men were desperately trying to remove some of the overflow in the verandah and clear the space in front of the room when the party arrived at a remote part of the building. One of them hurriedly pushed the old double doors wide, and politely preceded into the room so that he could guide him through the confusion on the floor. But M. Pālaka was not dismayed by what he saw; on the contrary, he felt more confident he had been brought to the right place. He gingerly stepped into the room, then remembering his promise he pulled out his camera and took a quick snap, the first in a series he later mailed to his friend in Chicago.



It was no doubt a daunting sight, but M. Pālaka had expected it. In fact, his polite smile now slid into a barely concealed grin, for now he felt certain of his success. Meanwhile, the senior minions, standing at the door, directed their juniors as they busily shuffled misshapen bundles here, bulging sacks there, and looked under and around everything for what M. Pālaka's so desired. Dust arose in the musty air, adding to everyone's discomfort. One of the senior minions pulled out a handkerchief to cover his face but thought better of it when he saw the foreigner calmly following in the juniors' wake to make that nothing was left unchecked. He muttered a few unmentionable words in Bundeli, little knowing that M. Pālaka had made many of them a part of his own vocabulary during the previous evening's party at the palace. Then one of the juniors exclaimed, and everyone hurried to his side. There was something on the floor; at first sight it looked like an elaborately carved Shiva *linga*as but soon disclosed its true identity as the head of Jārj Panjum that earlier used to grace an important civic space in the city.



(The Narrator's footnote: 'Good old King George V, Emperor of India from 1910–1936, grandfather of Elizabeth II. Still blessed with hair, neatly combed and parted. Handsomely bearded. Full mustaches, demurely twirled. 'A broad forehead marked with good fortune,' as his grandmother might have said of him had she learned her Urdu really well. 'He looks Muslim,' many of his Muslim subjects in India had said about him; some had even held prayers in mosques for his conversion, and one or two had gone ahead and predicted the date when it was to happen. Somehow it never happened; the goodwill he had gathered, however, remained. He was, after all, the last Emperor of India to put a fair quantity of real silver in the rupees minted in his name and still cherished in a rural bride's necklace—the wretches who came after him scraped away even some of the copper in the *paisa*.)

A second triumphal cry from another minion brought everyone to the spot where he stood, pointing down with a finger still trembling with excitement: 'Here it is!' 'Yes, indeed it is!' echoed M. Pālaka. A small miracle had happened. He had found what his friend had mumbled about. It sat in the midst of the mess on the floor, its partly visible nose snuggling into a bulging jute sack.



The sack was pulled aside, loose papers were removed, and a marble head could now be seen more clearly. ‘Looks like Gandhi’s,’ thought M. Pālaka, as he moved in to take another picture. A minion explained to him that the marble’s cranium was *not* improperly marked—in ‘indelible’ purple ink with an accession number and other relevant information—‘It was required by the regulations.’



One of the juniors swiftly cleared a space on the floor, another lifted the bust out of the mess and placed it where the dignitary and the seniors could see it more properly. There was no longer any resemblance to Gandhi; the bust was of some other person. ‘But why is he crying? Why the

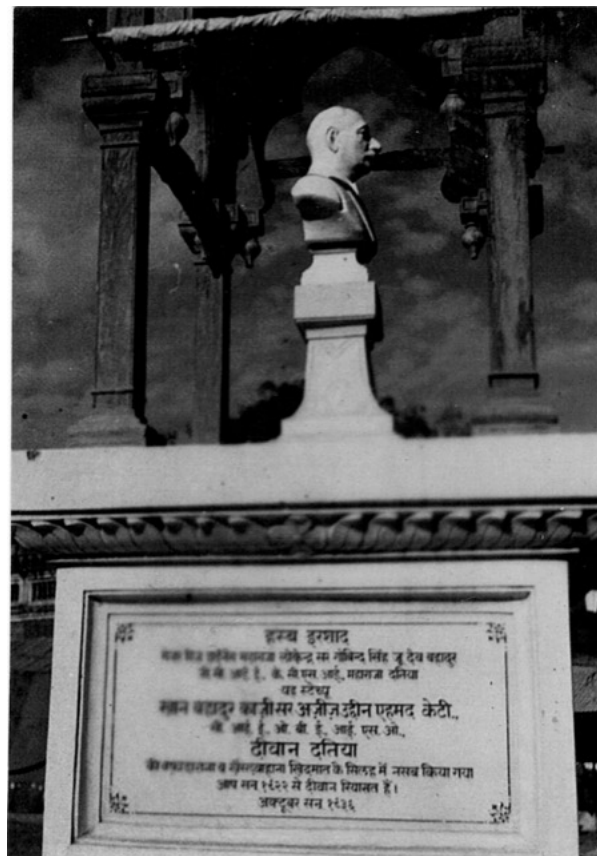


tears?’ M. Palaka thought. ‘There were none on George’s face? Could be a nice topic for a post-colonial seminar.’ Handing his camera to one of the minions, he added a dab of glamour and mystery to an otherwise depressing scene.



The recent many news of disowned and discarded commemorative statues made me think of the marble bust of my maternal grandfather, my *Nanajan*, Qazi Azizuddin Ahmad (1861–1939). It used to stand in a prominent public space in Datia city until sometime in the 1950s when it was removed and tossed away along with some other reminders of the colonial years. The black and white picture below, taken by one of my brothers, shows the bust in its days of glory. Most likely it had three celebratory plaques in the three ‘formal’ languages of the state, Standard Hindi, Standard Urdu, and English. The picture shows only the one in Hindi. (In reality, the opening phrase is in Persian. Clearly, Hindi had not yet replaced Urdu in the aristocratic culture of Datia.) It translates:

‘By the order of the Maharaja of Datia... Lokendra Sir Govind Singh Ju Dev Bahadur.. this statue of Khan Bahadur Qazi Sir Azizuddin Ahmad, Kt. CIE, OBE, ISO, Diwan of Datia was established [here] in recognition of his (illegible) Services. He is the Diwan of the state since 1922. Dated, October 1936.



Who was Azizuddin Ahmad and why did he have a marble bust installed in his honor on the main street of Datia? The relevant entry in one of the volumes of *The Indian Yearbook* reads as follows:

Khan Bahadur Qazi Sir Azizuddin Ahmad, C.I.E, O.B.E., I.S.O. Prime Minister of Datia State. Born April 7, 1861. Educated in Gonda High School. Married (1893) the daughter of Mirza Muhammad Isma'il, Subordinate Judge, Gonda. Worked for 34 years in the administrative service of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Was District Magistrate and Collector of Buland Shahr, and Assistant Director, Agriculture and Commerce, U.P. Was appointed to accompany the late Amir of Kabul during his tour of India. In 1910, he was sent on loan to the state of Bharatpur as its revenue minister. In 1913, he was transferred to Dholpur State. Retired from the government service in 1920, but continued to work as Dholpur's judicial minister. 1922, he was appointed Datia's Prime Minister.

He is a member of the Court of the universities of Delhi and Agra, a trustee of the Agra College, and a member of the senate of the University of Agra. From 1907 to 1920, he was a fellow of the University of Allahabad. Member of the Royal Asiatic Society. Scout Commissioner of Datia, and the President of the St. John's Ambulance Association and the Red Cross Society of Datia.

Has written approximately 40 books in English and Urdu, including *His Majesty King George V*; *His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales*; commentary on the Indian Penal Code, and the Land Revenue Laws of the United Provinces. He also translated at the Government of India's request the report on the War Conference of 1919 and the account of the coronation durbar of 1911.

There is also available an entry in a similar Urdu book from around the same time. The writer is given as Khwaja Husain Nizami, but it could have been his father, Khwaja Hasan Nizami, who someday will get the full biography he so much deserves, for he knew Nanajan but was not patronized by him.

Nawab Qazi Sir Azizuddin Ahmad: Medium height. Slim body. A face like Lord Wellington's (sic). Wheatish complexion. Big eyes. Prominent high nose. Shaved beard. [Moustaches,] big and white. Age, more than sixty.

God has placed in his brain all the intelligence and brilliance of the United Provinces. He possesses ancient wisdom and also the intelligence of the new age. An expert in Indian politics, he also understands the British politics very well. He is a perfect example of the *waza'dari* of old Muslims. When he adopts a way of relations with someone he maintains it no matter what. He is more generous than the Hatim of Arabia. He gives to people secretly. God only knows how many families are surviving on his help, and how many students are getting educated. He has been a minister in several states. Presently he is the Prime Minister of the Datia State, and Datia has doubly flourished on his account.

He is the author of many books. Writes equally well in English and Urdu. Had he not been a prime-minister he would have been the editor of some newspaper that favored the government. In his old age he has more energy and fortitude/ambition than any youth. Any Englishman who ever came to India, [can be counted to be] his friend. There is no one in India who knows the English people like him; they, too, appreciate him very well.

The title 'Nawab' in the name was not something he had inherited; he had received it from the Maharaja of Datia the same year when the statue was installed, together with a small *jagir*—all in recognition of his meritorious services over 15 eventful years.

What had brought him to Datia, and what were the services that brought him such rewards?

For a long time, I had no idea. My mother never mentioned anything in particular, except that the Maharaja and his wife were both much pleased with her father, and also showed him particular respect. I had then assumed that the Maharaja had been quite young when he came to the *gaddi*, and that Nanajan had 'guided' him through a trying start. But some years back, a chance discovery in an old Urdu weekly made the matter clear. The headline in the *Intikhāb-e Lājawāb* (Lahore) of February 21, 1912, read: 'The Misfortune of the Maharaja of Datia.' After informing its readers that the Maharaja was said to behave like a tyrant and that his subjects were most unhappy with him, the weekly reported that the 25-yr old Maharaja had been asked to leave his state and live for three years in Dehradun under the supervision of an 'English Captain.' It

added that earlier the Maharaja had been barred from attending the recent *darbar* in Delhi, despite the fact that his camp had already been set up there, and that it was all due to some ‘improper action’ on his part.

Subsequently, I had found—thanks to the Internet—an entire academic [article](#) about the tyrannous Maharaja: ‘Educating Govind Singh: ‘Princely Character’ and the Failure of Indirect Rule in Colonial India,’ by Fiona Groenhout.¹ Here is, in her words, an account of the events that had caused the drastic action in 1912:

On a visit in October [1910], Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Macdonald, the local Political Agent, had been informed that a few days earlier an elite household had been virtually obliterated by a murder-suicide that appeared to be linked to the Maharaja. Further enquiries revealed that the head of the family in question, Govind Das, had been arrested and imprisoned by the *Ijlas-e-khas*, a tribunal operating in parallel to the *darbar* (state bureaucracy) and under the orders of the Maharaja. Govind Das had been accused of embezzling state funds (prior to his arrest he had administered the privy purse), and told that unless he produced the money ‘his skin would be taken off and filled with *bhusa*.’

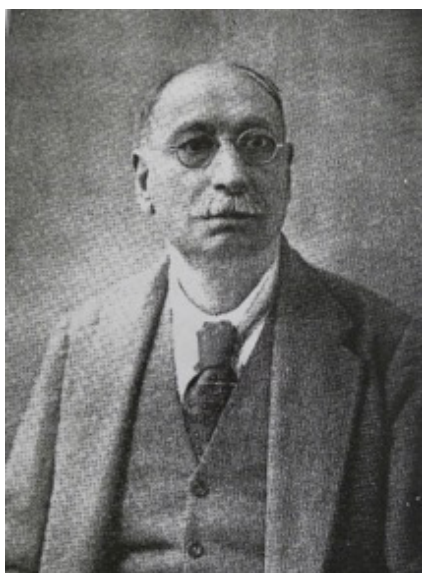
After two days in custody, and with his hands bound in an act of public humiliation, Govind Das was paraded by police through the capital to his home, so that he might persuade his two brothers to pay the debt. Seeing him approach, the brothers assembled the other nine family members – two of whom were pregnant women – in the courtyard and murdered them, before killing themselves. The only survivor was Govind Das’s teenage son. Upon examination, he recounted that one uncle had claimed it would be ‘better to die’ than to be treated in the same manner as the Latorias, a family that had been similarly harassed a year earlier.

Dr. Groenhout explains Nanajan’s role at Datia succinctly, without giving much details. She writes:

¹ In Peter Limb (ed.), *Orb and Sceptre: Studies on British Imperialism and its Legacies, in Honour of Norman Etherington* (Peter. Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), pp 1.1 to 1.23.

Given the serious flaws that British officials perceived in Govind Singh's character, how did they explain the relative stability of the intervening years between the crises of 1921 and 1941? Officials readily attributed this period of calm to the 'benevolent and astute handling' of the Maharaja and the administration by Qazi Sir Azizuddin Ahmed, who served as *dewan* from 1922 until his death in 1939. 'The Kazi,' as he was somewhat affectionately referred to by British officials, was considered an astute politician, a capable administrator, and a supremely effective manipulator of the Maharaja. Significantly, he was also a willing collaborator with British authorities and became a 'trusted confidant' of local officers...

As Kenneth Fitze, the Political Secretary in 1941, declared: 'No one knew better than the Kazi his master's fundamental and incurable failings, but his skill in exploiting what good there was in His Highness, and concealing the bad, was such that during all that period of 18 years the Maharaja's record was *outwardly* almost blameless ... On the death of the astute Kazi it was hardly to be expected that anyone else could be found to keep up this standard of *stage management*.' [italics added]



A picture from his biography (1930) by one of his many acolytes:²

² Muhammad Abdul Latif Khan, 'Kushta', *Hayat-e Aziz* (Agra: M. Hanif Khan & Co, 1930). A second printing of the book carried, unfairly, a new author's name Muhammad Rafiq. The latter edited and published a weekly, *Aziz-e Hind* (Jhansi), quite likely financed by Nanajan, since it was of great use to him in his 'diplomatic' work. Sirdar

Nanajan must have won over the irascible Maharaja by helping him regain status and respect among his peers. The Bundela maharajas of Datia did not enjoy the same prestige as the Rajput ranas and maharajas of Rajputana, and Datia was a minor state despite having the status of ‘a 15 guns salute.’ And yet, during Nanajan’s time Datia gained a unique token of respect when the Nizam of Hyderabad, who did not socially mix even with Jaipur and Gwalior, broke a journey in his special train at Jhansi, and came to Datia for lunch in February 1932, before going on to Delhi to visit with the Viceroy.

Nanajan belonged to an old and respected family of Qazis, but not in some major city; their home was in Biswan, a good-size *qasba* in Sitapur district, where they also owned some property. His father worked in the revenue department of the new government after the end of the Nawabi in 1856. His genealogy and his work had earned him many friends in the Muslim and Hindu elite in Oudh. But, despite working for the colonial administration, he was firmly against English education; instead, he made sure that his son got a firm education in all that was deemed necessary for the family’s tradition, and had him trained at home in Arabic, Persian, Islamic Law, and Calligraphy. These he had learned, and learned well, by the time he was 16, when his father passed away. Now, Nanajan had to find a job, and his father’s connections came to his rescue. He began at the lowest level of the ‘clerk of the court,’ and eventually rose to the position of a senior Deputy Collector. His biggest break was his appointment as one of the three official companions of Amir Habibullah Khan, the ruler of Afghanistan, during the latter’s tour of India (December 1906–March 1907), for it enabled him to get admitted into the ‘States’ branch of the colonial administration and also established initial contacts in the highest circles of the North Indian society. In this progress, he was greatly helped by several British officers (and their wives, whom he credited for greatly improving his English). He also taught himself Hindi well enough to write a novel in it latter. (He also made sure that his only daughter, my mother, learned Hindi.) He had a talent for writing and a good sense of humor, and some of his earliest writings were contributions to the famous *Awadh Punch* of Lucknow. One of his novels, *Kaniz Fatima*, was in school syllabi for years, and all went through more than two reprints. (A minor note: he also served under Vincent A. Smith, better known now as a historian than a civil servant, who was at first not pleased with the young man’s habit of wearing trousers and a fez—

Diwan Singh Maftun’s autobiography, *Nā-qābil-e Farāmosh*, has many fascinating anecdotes of ‘the Kazi’s’ diplomatic activities. Maftun was another of his journalist proteges.

the costume made popular by Sir Syed. Nanajan knew Sir Syed, and helped raise funds for the M.A.O. College at Aligarh. He had come to the great man's attention when, on another occasion, he could provide a verbatim transcript of Sir Syed's two hours-long oration thanks to his early training as a scribe.)

Nanajan's reputation in the family was always as its singular patriarch. He arranged marriages, took care of the orphans and the needy, helped out those who got into trouble, recommended the youth for jobs, and made sure the young members of the family, particularly the girls, got good and proper education. When he was in Datia, my mother told me, his salary from the state was entirely spent on supporting the needy in the family and on his philanthropic contributions to any number of institutions. It is well known that when he died he did not leave behind a big 'bank balance;' what was left, however, was such an abundance of goodwill in so many places that his descendants benefitted from it for years.



(April 2022. Revised)