

Fazl-i-Husain — A Protagonist of the Punjab Politics: 1921-1925

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In the context of Indian politics personalities have always played a dominant role in the growth and development of political activities. The political scenario in the Punjab provided a wide arena for the exposure of ambitious personalities like Fazl-i-Husain (b. June 14, 1877) who emerged as an influential regional leader between 1921 and 1925 when he played a vital role in the Punjab politics. In 1923, he organized a political party — the National Unionist Party and was the main architect of its politics till his death on July 9, 1936. By organizing this party, he served two ends: on the one hand, he showed to the bureaucracy that, being a staunch supporter of constitutionalism, he was against revolutionary activism. On the other hand, like Sir Syed, he convinced the Muslims that the policy of total opposition to the Government would not be beneficial to them. Consequently, he secured for himself an honourable place in the political hierarchy, and the government welcomed him with open arms as a useful ally.¹ Surely, he played a very significant role in the realm of parliamentary traditions by organizing the National Unionist Party which meticulously followed the parliamentary principles. This step helped him to fill the vacuum created by the non-cooperation of Indian National Congress and All-India Muslim League. It opened wide political opportunities and avenues of progress for the people of the Punjab and made it convenient for them to convey their demands to the British.

Fazl-i-Husain, after completing his higher education in England, returned home with an ambition "to be the recognized leader for the Indian Muslims and some day to sit in the House of Commons as the Right Honourable Gentleman from the

Punjab".² In 1901, he started legal practice at Sialkot but the prospects of wider opportunities pulled him away to Lahore. There he paid full attention to his profession, did hard work, and within two years proved himself to be a competent counsel. In 1907, with the rise of revolutionary activities he got professional opportunities to defend the persons who were accused of their seditious conduct. As a competent advocate, he not only earned a name for himself but also acquired intimate knowledge of terrorism and political conspiracies that made Fazl-i-Husain acutely critical of romantic tendencies in political methods.³

Fazl-i-Husain joined the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam as a member of its general council and management committee, and served for about fifteen years. As an active member of Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, he contributed towards the promotion of Islamia College Lahore, and obtained grants for the expansion of its building. In 1914, he secured from the Government an annual recurring grant of Rs. 30,000 for the college.⁴ In 1908, he was nominated as the fellow of the Punjab University and also worked as member of the University Syndicate. Later on, he was elected the secretary of the Oriental Faculty in 1913, and of the Law Faculty in 1915. He continued to serve in these capacities till his appointment as Education Minister.

In 1905, Fazl-i-Husain began taking interest in the political affairs as member of the Indian National Congress. In 1906, he organized a political party which was "the first organization in India to call itself the Muslim League".⁵ By 1915, he was inclined to play a more effective rôle in politics and contested the election of the Punjab Legislative Council from the University seat. During the election campaign, he had to face sad realities of communal politics in India. Due to religious antagonism, only three out of thirty Hindu voters agreed to support him. Luckily, he won the election against Harnam Singh by filing a valid election petition. It provided him a chance to serve the political aspirations of the different communities. He supported the demand for separate electorates which was essential to avoid grave injustice to the Muslims. He further pointed out that the process of petitions and counter petitions might lead the communities only towards 'robbing and flattering', and he questioned: "why could not the communities settle

between themselves the principles of the distribution of the loaves and fishes of office".⁶

As an active member of All India Muslim League and Indian National Congress he was among the designers of Hindu-Muslim unity and played an outstanding role in the famous rapprochement between the two communities — Lucknow Pact (1916). By doing so, he aimed at providing opportunity to the Muslims to secure necessary political gains. During a Hindu-Muslim unity conference, in October 1917, in his presidential address, he deplored the backwardness of his province, criticized Government openly and decried its functionaries as an "insolent bureaucracy".⁷ Although the revolutionary politicians cooperated with each other in the Khilafat and Non-cooperation Movement, Fazl-i-Husain opposed the movement as it "would invite chaos and lead to disturbances".⁸ The so-called progressives and revolutionaries wanted to adopt a full-fledged non-cooperation programme but as a moderate politician, he decided to adopt constitutional means. In his opinion, it was an unconstitutional trend which would be harmful specially for the Muslims. Being fully aware of Muslim backwardness in different fields, he rejected the idea of non-cooperation, and advised them not to endorse the boycott of the legislative councils, law courts, educational institutions and to abstain from resigning their Government jobs. Actually, he regarded civil disobedience as an inexpedient means of achieving political goals and desired to bring the revolutionaries and moderates closer to each other. "He believed that 'freedom is the recognition of necessity' and no positive political achievement is possible except by a realization of limiting factors".⁹ Instead, he preferred to follow the constructive measures through constitutional means such as — the amendment of land revenue rules, extension of irrigation, development of industry and railways, expansion of educational facilities, improvement of medical relief and sanitation. When in September 1920, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League decided to cooperate with the revolutionaries, he resigned from both the political parties. It shows that at such a crucial stage, he was even ready to sacrifice his mass popularity for the sake of his life-long adherence to constitutional action which he believed to be in the best interest of the province.¹⁰

According to the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms the first Punjab Legislative Council was set up in November 1920. The landlords were in a dominating position because out of 27 members initially returned to the Council against rural Muslim seats, five were from influential families of *Pirs*, and all of them were Fazl-i-Husain's supporters.¹¹ Among them, he was the most experienced politician having extraordinary talent with a moderate disposition and an outstanding personality. He led the Muslim bloc of thirtyfive members who represented the rural nobility. At that moment Fazl-i-Husain decided to cooperate with the Punjab Government to bring the province into the main stream of political progress and in return he was appointed Minister for Education and Local Self-government. When the first reformed council was constituted there existed no political party in the Punjab, whereas Fazl-i-Husain believed that political parties were essential for an emerging democratic structure. In line with the best parliamentary traditions he laid the foundation of party system by making democracy a reality in the Punjab. Actually, he was anxious to frame an organization which could have a common outlook on political, economic and administrative problems, so as to bring the members of different communities together for joint activities in the pursuit of common objectives. Consequently, in 1921 he floated an idea in the form of a united front named Rural Bloc which sooner came to be known as the Rural party. The Rural Bloc, which consisted of Muslims and Hindu Jat members of Haryana. Since its inception they never recognized caste, creed or colour and with the support of official members they were in a position to achieve majority in the Punjab Legislative Council. Subsequently, it grew into an influential political party and Fazl-i-Husain succeeded to bring into focus the rural Punjab and tried to avert the prevalent bitter and bloody communal tensions among them. By organizing such a group of politicians, Fazl-i-Husain's basic aim was to help the backward areas, classes and to protect the peasant class from the clutches of the greedy moneylenders. Consequently, this political trend helped to foster greater cohesion among the different communities of the rural Punjab, and helped to place the conservative elements in office.

According to the urban Hindu elites, in the new political set up, the Government was trying to create a wedge between

the rural and urban population. But in Fazl-i-Husain's opinion, "Urban and rural areas should not be politically segregated and placed in watertight compartments".¹² In spite of the fact that in Punjab about 89.31 per cent of the population lived in villages, he opposed any division on urban and rural basis. He indicated how the Government had been countering the influence of educated class by neglecting and minimising their importance and by creating a new class of 'rais' — *Jagirdars* and grantees of land. It was generally believed, and not without reason, that the Government with the introduction of new reforms, had masterly planned to divide the masses into rural and urban classes and by doing so it aimed at creating, in every province, such a class of loyalists which could be used to counter the growing strength of the nationalist movement. The Punjab Government seemed anxious to create a political force which could be used for maintaining law and order in the province. In this institutional frame-work, Fazl-i-Husain created an agriculturist's party to answer the political need. Actually, in the presence of agrarian infrastructure, he wanted to support the downtrodden segments, the majority of whom belonged to rural areas. In order to fulfil the basic democratic requirements he introduced legislation (January 3, 1921) to decrease official control over District and Municipal Boards and instead established autonomous *Panchayats* and small towns' administration. In addition, he worked for the introduction of compulsory primary education, establishment of dispensaries, high schools and intermediate colleges in small towns and villages for the common uplift of all the communities. He steadfastly strove for the development of the most backward areas of the society and sincerely tried to adopt certain measures for the uplift of the rural population. For instance the statutory *Panchayats* were established with the approval of the Punjab Panchayat Act 1921. He did a lot to revise the rates of the grant of *Taqavi* loans and granted these loans to the peasants on low rates. He helped to pass the Punjab Land Alienation (Amendment) Act, to remove the ambiguity therein and to end the exploitation of peasants. He further persuaded the Government to adopt certain measures for providing relief to the cultivators by decreasing the rate of revenue and *abiana* to the maximum of 25 per cent of the net assets and protected the debtors against the moneylenders. He

also helped to introduce a scheme for the creation of model villages and *chaks*. It shows that Fazl-i-Husain was determined to utilize his aptitude and ability for the improvement of backward classes because neither the urban elites nor the other political parties wanted to safeguard the interest of peasants and the rural labour class in the Punjab.

After the elections of the Punjab Legislative Council in December 1923, Fazl-i-Husain converted the Rural Bloc into a well-organized political party and named it the Punjab National Unionist Party. According to Sir Chhotu Ram the Unionist Party came into existence on December 20, 1923,¹³ while its organizational set-up could not be completed by February 1924¹⁴, but according to Azim Husain:

The formation of the party did not take place, as in the case of the Rural Party, after the elections in the legislature; but some efforts were made to organize it before the elections. For the first time in the history of the Punjab, an election manifesto was published and the electorate was asked to vote for party candidates rather than individuals.¹⁵

Anyhow, the idea which was present in his mind for quite some time, ultimately materialised in the shape of Unionist Party in 1923. The question arises, why Fazl-i-Husain, in the presence of the Muslim League, decided to form a new political organization. There was a dichotomy of national and local interest among the Muslims. Muslim League was divided in different groups at provincial level, and had failed to gain a stable foot-hold in the Punjab. According to Fazl-i-Husain, the provincial problems were totally different in nature and were not a fit subject for a national party. His experience had further strengthened the view and he advised that, in future too, under a parliamentary system; the proper course for the Muslims in Punjab to achieve political representation, lay in the formation of a non-communal organization. He also wanted to balance the agricultural and commercial classes politically and eradicate their backwardness commonly in both rural and urban areas irrespective of caste and colour. In the light of his political experience Fazl-i-Husain concluded that the Muslim League could never thrive and succeed as a Central Muslim Organization on purely communal appeal. Moreover, in his opinion the Punjab Provincial Muslim League, being a feeble organization,

could not unite all sections of the society on one platform without which it was impossible for it to make any headway in achieving the political benefits for the people of the Punjab. Moreover, Fazl-i-Husain encountered the opposition of the urban Hindus who considered his non-communal body a challenge to their political career. One could assume, that Fazl-i-Husain did not read the existing trend and failed to recognize the need of an all India Organization to serve the interest of the Muslims and decided to confine his leadership to Punjab. Hence, for the advancement of provincial economy, he decided to establish such a non-communal organization which could serve the local and provincial interests at large. Further, it seemed that he came to realize that his membership of the League could not secure him his cherished goal of holding the supreme position in Punjab politics.¹⁶ In the higher echelons of the Provincial League, he was faced with the rivalry of the Arains of Baghbanpura who enjoyed the unstinted support of the League stalwarts owing to their well-known contribution to the Simla deputation. This did not mean that he ceased to take interest in the affairs of the All India Muslim League. To confirm his deep association with the League, in 1924, he invited M.A. Jinnah to hold its session at Lahore.

Though religion, more than economics or politics, determined the election results, yet the Unionist Party, under the leadership of its leader, succeeded in averting a bitter and bloody communal struggle by uniting the rural population comprising Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs. As a result of 1923 elections, the Unionist Party could achieve the support of thirtynine out of seventy one elected members.¹⁷ Among them thirtytwo were Muslims who belonged to famous feudal and *Pir* families such as Tiwanas, Noons, Daultanas, Gurmanis, Shah Jiwanas, Makhads, Rajoas and Gilanis. Few Hindu and Sikh members from the south-east Punjab also cooperated with them on the basis of rural interest. In the presence of such a mode of feudal representation it seemed difficult for a leader like Fazl-i-Husain to protect the poor peasants from the clutches of the feudal lords. Anyhow, Edward Maclagan (1919-1924) the Governor of Punjab, recognizing the Unionist Party's majority in the Punjab Legislative Council, decided to repose his trust in Fazl-i-Husain. He was reappointed as the leader of the House

and asked to form ministry. In this coalition, Fazl-i-Husain showed a marked sense of cohesion and continuity with the help of his Hindu supporters. A coalition Government was inevitable as the Muslims were not in a majority to run the Government without the support of another group.¹⁸

In the new reformed Council Fazl-i-Husain held the portfolio of Education and Local Self-Government, Health and Religious Affairs. He regarded education as the *sine qua non* of social, economic and political progress.¹⁹ Keeping in view its importance, he introduced a new education policy which definitely helped to lay the foundation of a sound vernacular educational system throughout the province. According to him, it was the most urgent requirement, because, in 1920, out of a population of 20.37 millions, only 2.42 per cent were getting education.²⁰ For this purpose he spread a network of new schools all over the province. With the implementation of these educational reforms in 1926, the percentage reached 6.71.²¹ More funds were allocated to the backward districts like Muzaffargarh, Mianwali and Kangra. For admissions in training institutes, preference was given to the residents of backward districts. A large number of scholarships were awarded to the families serving in armed forces. In Muslim populated areas, Muslim headmasters were appointed to make the schools more popular among the conservative Muslims. It was decided to assign a separate share to the Muslims out of the government grant for education. Quota system was introduced by which 40 per cent seats were allotted to the Muslim students in different institutions. The same principle was adopted for services in local bodies and Government departments. Yet the Muslims were not satisfied. Consequently, they held an Educational Conference at Lahore, and demanded at least 50 per cent seats in different departments.

Fazl-i-Husain was passionately interested in the development of local bodies and was of the view that "political life in the Punjab could hardly be said to exist, and would be at the mercy of any whiff of breeze of political agitation that might be blowing".²² He introduced elective system in the districts instead of the system of nominations. As a result, "out of a total of 1,177 members 812 were elected and the rest nominated".²³ Measures were also taken to delegate administrative powers to the District

Boards and the principle of having elected chairman was introduced. For the welfare of big cities, he introduced the Town Improvement Act which provided facilities for their extension and also afforded relief to the people of congested areas. For the smooth running of the municipal administration and for healthy representation, four Acts were passed by which official representation was reduced and the number of elected members was increased. The elective system was extended to areas where it was not in operation. The franchise qualifications were also lowered and the number of elected element in Municipal Committees was raised to 75 per cent of the total number of members.²⁴ As a result "by the end of 1926, in the existing 105 Municipalities, there were 72 per cent elected members, and the democratisation of Municipalities resulted in the reduction of official presidents from eighty six to forty one".²⁵ Moreover, Fazl-i-Husain got the approval of the Punjab Panchayat Act of 1921, by which every *Panchayat* was to be elected by the adult voters and its strength was fixed from three to five members who were called *Panchs* and they were to elect their *Sarpanch* from among themselves. Fazl-i-Husain also decided to appoint Panchayat officers to promote the working of the *Panchayats* and made them effective organizations. For the towns and the cities he amended the Municipal Act, and for the small places, he introduced the Punjab Small Town Act, 1921. According to this Act, town committees were constituted and were to be elected by non-communal electorates. The wards were arranged in such a way that the return of members from different communities was ensured in proportion to their population.

Fazl-i-Husain, as Minister for Health, reorganized the medical department according to the local requirements. He reduced the higher posts to 50 percent and all the lower posts were declared open for the Indians. The number of dispensaries was increased at an average rate of at least twenty five per year. The medical facilities were extended to far flung rural areas through the agencies of local bodies, missionaries and charitable organizations. As a result of this comprehensive scheme, within five years Fazl-i-Husain had "sufficient dispensaries to bring the total number in each district up to one dispensary for every 100 square miles or for every 30,000 of the population".²⁶ Consequently, it "involved the establishment of 375 new rural

dispensaries, and by 1927, 205 such new dispensaries had already been built".²⁷ Measures were taken for the reorganization, expansion and efficient working of the Public Health Department. In every district one medical officer and a sanitary inspector was appointed to look after their smooth running and to improve the medical and sanitary facilities.

Fazl-i-Husain, being the Minister of Religious Affairs, treated all the communities equally. He enacted the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Act, 1922, to meet the legitimate grievances of the reformist Sikhs of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee against the corrupt and dishonest *Mahants* and at the same time to preserve the legal rights of the *Mahants*. He tried to bring about a compromise between the administration and Akali leaders on the question of possession of the scheduled gurdwaras. But the extreme reformist Sikhs "wanted complete control of gurdwaras and merciless liquidation of the *Mahants*".²⁸ Fazl-i-Husain, wanted a peaceful settlement of this issue but these hopes proved in vain due to the negative attitude of the urban Hindus who had made this Act an issue with the help of extremist Sikhs against his alleged communal policy. Consequently, the government appointed Frederick Puckle and Herbert Emerson to negotiate with the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee for the settlement of the issue. As a result, the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, was passed. It was a great service rendered by Fazl-i-Husain to Sikh religious unity and material prosperity. The Act later on served as the vanguard of anti-Muslim agitation. According to Azim Husain, "it banded the Sikhs against the Unionist Party and inspired them with new confidence in their strength under the leadership of Master Tara Singh".²⁹ The position of Shiromani Akali Dal was strengthened as Sikhs were recognized a *de jure* authority under the Gurdwara Act of 1925. After this communal tension was heightened in the Punjab.³⁰

In 1901, the Punjab Government had decided that not less than 30 per cent of subordinate appointments should be filled by Muslims but this decision, remained on paper only.³¹ In 1920, almost in all public services, except in the lower sections of police and jail departments, such as constables and wardens, the Muslims were in a minority. Their condition in the Local Self-government and Education Department was not much

different. The urban Hindus were making a persistent demand that all posts in public services and the admissions to higher educational institutions should be finalized on the basis of competitive examinations irrespective of religious or economic distinction. The Muslims desired to secure their rights on the basis of their numerical strength and historical background. However, after 1923, the policy of Fazl-i-Husain was mainly to provide representation in services to all the communities according to their population. Therefore, after becoming minister, he took necessary measures to provide appropriate share to each community. In different administrative departments, Muslim share was less than one third, in the middle ranks about 40 per cent, in the lower ranks more than 40 per cent and in the higher services, they had very little representation in proportion to their population.³² Fazl-i-Husain, keeping in view this deficiency, carried out necessary reforms to provide due share to different communities. But the Hindu critics misrepresented his reforms and called him a bigoted communal minister, the hater of Hindus and the enemy of the Hindu-Muslim unity. Gulshan Rai, general secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha, wrote many articles in the daily *Tribune*, and attacked the communal policy of Fazl-i-Husain. But the Muslims of the Punjab in general appreciated his policies which enabled them to claim their due share and to occupy a stronger position in the Punjab administration³³, than ever before under the British *Raj*.

Hindu Mahasabha's opposition reached its climax when on March 13, 1923, Raja Narendra Nath moved a censure motion against Fazl-i-Husain. Pir Akbar Ali, Ahmad Yar Khan Daultana and Feroz Khan Noon delivered speeches in favour of Fazl-i-Husain and argued that if, in future, the Hindus adopted a policy based upon justice and equality, they need not demand security measures for Muslims. When the censure motion failed, the Hindu press demanded Fazl-i-Husain to abandon his utterly erroneous and destructive policy or resign from the ministership. In spite of Hindu opposition, on June 6, 1923, Fazl-i-Husain introduced a new formula in municipal bodies. According to this formula, out of 40 seats, 17 were allocated to the Muslims, 11 to the Hindus, two to the Sikhs, one to the Europeans and remaining 9 were to be filled by Government nomination.³⁴ The urban Hindus were against this formula and as a protest Lala Lakhi

Ram, Ruchi Ram, Lala Amar Nath, Lala Ganpat Rai, Lala Antak Rai, B.L. Rulia Ram, Gopi Chand, K. Santanam, Lala Hari Ram, S.S. Chawla, R.T. Inglis, R. Sirajdin, F. Datt, Pandit Ram and Hira Lal who were the members of the Lahore Municipal Committee resigned from their membership.³⁵ The daily *Tribune* opposed this formula saying that "the Legislative Council with Mian Fazl-i-Husain is a battle ground between the Hindus and the Muslims of the Punjab.... Fazli's period was the worst form of communalism".³⁶ But the Muslim press appreciated him because, for them, it was a positive step which opened a wider scope of public services for the Muslims. Even though the Muslims were not satisfied and they demanded their due share according to their numerical strength.³⁷ The Hindu leaders, particularly those who belonged to the Congress ranks such as Pandit Santanam, Ruchi Ram, Chaudhri Bhagat, and Budh Raj, were against the new local bodies scheme. The Hindus objected on the ground that the Muslims comprised the majority in the province, therefore, separate electorates or a fixed share in services "for a majority are not needed as a protective measure".³⁸ Further, they opined that these facilities "can be continued for a majority community, only if class ascendancy was regarded as a desirable feature of our political constitution".³⁹

In fact, Fazl-i-Husain's policy was based upon the Congress manifesto by which he wanted to satisfy all the communities by granting them their due share on communal basis. Although he himself regarded communal representation as a temporary expedient, yet it was the main objective of his policy to secure for every community its fundamental rights irrespective of caste or creed. Anyhow, the failure of the censure motion provided not only the vindication of Fazl-i-Husain, but also exposed the bigotry of the Hindu Mahasabha. The prominent Muslim politicians such as Malik Barkat Ali, Pir Taj-ud-Din, Syed Hasan Shah, M.A. Khan, Ghulam Jilani, Sheikh Niaz Muhammad Hoshiarpuri and Malik Muhammad Hussain, on July 13, 1923, joined a procession in which they showed full confidence in Fazl-i-Husain's programme and demanded due share for Muslims in the public services. Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam "greatly appreciated the steps taken by Fazl-i-Husain for the advancement of Punjabi Muslims. The Anjuman called "Fazli

the custodian of Muslim rights in the Punjab".⁴⁰ But the Hindus constantly opposed his communal policy and argued that he had not analysed the situation from a purely national point of view, and misrepresented the entire matter. Actually, Fazl-i-Husain's political programme was not against Hindus but the restoration of Muslim share of state patronage strictly according to the law. Further, his unique place, due to his imaginative schemes, motivated the Hindu politicians to raise hue and cry against him. But he proved to be a "man of inflexible will and immutable purpose, with a mind like diamond which can cut its way through anything".⁴¹

Fazl-i-Husain, served the majority of the Punjab until he was included in the Provincial Executive Council as member land revenue in early 1926. Though after joining the Executive Council, Fazl-i-Husain's political position was radically changed but practically it was not the end of his long-standing political career. He continued to act as an informal leader of the Unionist Party. On April 1, 1930, he was appointed as member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and remained away from Punjab for five years. But during this period, he kept himself in close touch with the Punjab politics and sent directives to the Unionist leaders from time to time. On March 31, 1935, he returned to the Punjab after retiring from the Viceroy's Executive Council. He wanted to keep himself aloof from active politics due to his ill health. But the request made by his close friends like Aga Khan, Shafaat Ahmad Khan, Shahab-ud-Din, Mir Maqbool Mahmud and Sardar Ujjal Singh, convinced him to lead the nation towards the goal of provincial autonomy. The Unionist Party itself was helpless to do much due to its own differences over the ministerial positions. It compelled Fazl-i-Husain to resume the leadership of the Unionist Party and it was his return to the arena of Punjab politics.

In spite of urban origin, Fazl-i-Husain was the leader of the landed aristocracy. It is interesting to point out that he consciously avoided the use of popular distinction between the rural and urban populations. In reality he "had no real affinity with the 'agriculturist' as defined by the Punjab legislation, yet he utilized the support of the Unionist Party in so far as this could aid him in securing the advance of the Muslim Cause".⁴² Apparently, a person who had an urban origin was not supposed

to take interest particularly in the rural progress and could not call himself as the champion of the agriculturists. His actual aim, therefore, was to work for the improvement of economic conditions of the backward sections of the agriculturist society. A deep study of his political activities shows that his main object was to help "the backward community irrespective of their religion, be they Muslim, Hindu or Sikhs".⁴³

An overall estimate of Fazl-i-Husain's political achievement during the first phase (1921-1925) of his leadership, shows that in spite of landlords' dominance over the party, he improved the lot of masses by his useful social uplift programme like sanitation, medical relief, means of communication and educational facilities. Moreover, he adopted certain measures for providing relief to the cultivators by decreasing the rates of revenue and *abiana*.⁴⁴ Apart from above-mentioned salutary measures, Fazl-i-Husain played a significant role in the realm of parliamentary traditions. In this regard, the role of the Unionist Party as a parliamentary party was definitely laudable. It continued to serve as a parliamentary party and helped in the legislative sphere by cooperating with the Government at the time when both Indian National Congress and All India Muslim League had decided to boycott all elections under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. By taking such steps, its leader, Fazl-i-Husain filled the vacuum created due to the non-cooperation programme of the major political parties. But in spite of his several positive deeds, he was often criticized by friends and foes. The friends desired to look at him as an effective opposition leader to the Government policies. While the foes condemned him as the advocate of the British *Raj*.⁴⁵ But he often criticized the official policies during discussions over the reserved subjects. However, he generally avoided creating trouble for the Government and refrained from criticism for the sake of criticism. Finally, he always did take up the role of a prominent opposition leader. In simple words he actualized his political ideas and gave new hopes, aspirations and worked for a broad communal outlook and was therefore, rightly called as the protagonist of the Punjab politics.

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42. Quoted in Waheed Ahmad, ed., *Letters of Mian Fazl-i-Husain*, Lahore, 1976, p.xxxviii.
43. *PLCD*, Vol. IV, March, 15, 1923, p.1318.
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45. Muhammad Khurshid, *op.cit.*, p.282.