WOMEN’S PORTRAYAL IN WRITINGS OF
QURRATULAIN HAIDER

❖ QURRATULAIN’S SHORT STORIES AND NOVELETTES
❖ QURRATULAIN’S NOVELS
Qurratulain Haider occupies an important place in modern Urdu Literature. She consciously began to abandon all the existing forms and styles of Urdu story writing and marked a strong departure from them. Though Progressive writers and then the Modernists made a deep impact on Urdu literature, she made her own way different from both trends. Leaving superficial social issues aside, she is continuously in search of basic cultural values. Secrets of universe do not make her incredulous but give her insights. Her literary journey still continues with the same vibrant and dynamic outpourings.

Every piece of Qurratulain Haider seems to be experimental and bold. The quality of search in her works impresses readers profoundly. Many things are not clear, but the enormity of the search felt genuinely important. History appears to be a source of great sorrow and longing. However, a prototype of theme in Qurratulain's novels can not be fixed. The distinct feature of her novels is that they are not subjective. Her special interest is in the culture and the "cultural changes" and the causes of their impact on people's life. After the partition of 1947, the people of the subcontinent were faced with these cultural changes which find place in her writings.

The distinction of Qurratulain Haider is that she did not bow down before popular demands and restrained from making her creations a commercial art. It did not create hurdle in the way of her popularity. Even today, she is the most popular Urdu writer though her readers are less in number than other writers. The second distinct feature of her contribution is to introduce Urdu fiction with new ideas and new artistic requirements. In addition, for the first time she endowed women characters with independent and sovereign feelings and uncovered layers of mental and
psychological world of women characters beyond the popular slogans of women's freedom.

Qurratulain Haider is a romantic — at once incisive, vibrant and full of creative verve. She has portrayed different aspects of life in her stories. However, the central characters in most of her oeuvres are women—abused women, abducted women, raped women and women separated from their roots. Generally, her stories conclude at tragedy and misfortune which include streams of affliction to sorrow. Though we witness more often in her stories a living world, her women characters feel alienated and afflicted. With their high ambitions and good characteristics, the heroines are deprived and miserable. Though Qurratulain does not take the side of the oppressed and toiling class against oppressors while portraying class oppression and exploitation but sometimes glimpses of sympathy can be seen in some characters as Dr. Mohammad Hasan points out:

Undoubtedly, Qurratulain Haider has viewed woman as a part of universal issues. To her, women are not only women but also part and parcel of beings on a greater level and an element of entire human life. On the one hand, they victimise time and history and on the other they themselves become victims of time and history. These women in her short stories are wandering from Mohammad Bagh Club to airports and parties in London, on the way to Iran and Turkey with unknown and ambiguous twinge.¹

Most of the characters in her initial works were landlords, owners of estates, petty kings and princes, engineers, scientists, university students and the people of various religions but later on her themes became wider, and changes occurred in her creative instinct. She started portraying artistically painful consequences of
partition, feeling of exodus and exile, struggle of human mind, cultural and moral degradation of higher society, hollowness of socio-political values, issues of class difference, aspirations for better life, tyranny of time and its secrets, fraternity, feeling of colour and creed, religion and nationality and so on. G.C. Narang puts:

"Inspired as she is by a keen love for the beautiful in what is past and dying, she very ably succeeds in recreating and reliving that atmosphere. Her fiction, to borrow a term from E.M. Foster, is a study of "life in values" rather than "life in time."  

The literariness of her style, which gives tongue and depth to historical realism, has often been confused with romanticism. Although she deals with a contemporary situation, her treatment is so gripping and her study is so penetrating that it gives the reader a feeling of rediscovering the truth. If an element of nostalgia creeps in while dealing with contemporary Avadh and its lost lustre, it is because she has known the life more intimately.

In her later works, she widens her range even to the extent of carrying a heavy metaphorical strain as is evident in some of the stories. The elders, from among her characters, are generally balanced and controlled. The toddlers are full of pranks and innocent mischief. The girls are dreamy, vivacious. Young men tinker with radical ideas. But as they grow, boys and girls both soon get disillusioned. Caught in the throes of crumbling order they are uprooted and are sometimes torn asunder in raging winds. Some of them, like their counterparts in Henry James, cross borders and pass through phases of anguished ambivalence in alien lands. A few of them are able to strike roots while others quietly wither away. All of them are vulnerable but women come out more so, bruised and scarred.
In Urdu Literature, though woman issues were addressed from the beginning of this century, but got momentum only after the publication of "Angare". Due to the anti-class approach of the Progressive Writers' Movement, women's problems were discussed more openly. However, the ideology of class struggle and economic freedom lowered the voice of women's liberation. Overlooking the voice of women (the half of the human population) Qurratulain Haider perceived very seriously the women and their feeling as being the second sex, and presented them very artistically.

QURRATULAIN’S SHORT STORIES AND NOVELETTES

About the time of partition of the subcontinent, several distinct approaches regarding the short stories had emerged. The progressive writers believed that human life could be steered or moulded by literature and others insisted that literature is autonomous. One traditional approach tried to propagate religion through literature while another set of writers was preoccupied with the portrayal of sex. These trends continued even after Partition. However, good fiction is primarily neither progressive nor modern. It is good because it is true to the specificities of its context and to its own creative rationale.

The Independence period was like a Golden Age for Urdu with writers like Manto, Bedi, Bhisham Sahni and Chughtai, as well as poets like Faiz. Think about the religious and ethnic diversity of the writers, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu, each one writing in different modes, Manto's black comic short stories, Bedi's realism, Chughtai's secular leftist nationalism. All these writers creating all this literature that was diverse in influence and effect, contesting, competing, and pulling in different directions, representing diverse life from all the different communities.
Qurratulain started writing short stories when she was merely seven years old. Her first story was “Kath Godam Ka Station”. The heroin of this story was perhaps her doll that purchased ticket herself and walked to the train but by mistake sat in another train. In the early stage of her life, Qurratulain Haider dedicated her writings to children of her age and received wide appreciation. Once, she was offered to write in “Nairang-e-Khayal (a literary magazine of older age) and she accepted the offer. From here, her creative instinct took a drastic turn towards human life.

She published her first story as a child in 1939 and soon there was another one as an aspiring young girl in 1944. Later on, she became a trendsetter in Urdu fiction. She began writing at a time when Urdu fiction was yet to establish itself as a serious genre in the poetry-oriented world of Urdu literature. She lifted it out of its stagnation and divested it of its obsession with fantasy, romance and facile realism. She offered it extraordinary range and depth and brought to its ambit, hitherto unexplored terrains of human thought and sensibility. Her first collection of short stories Sitaron Se Age appeared in 1945 when she was still in her teens.

Qurratulain Haider has so far written some 12 novels and novelettes, four collections of short stories and has done a significant amount of translation of classics. Her books have been translated into English and other languages. In her stories, she keeps a vigilant eye on internal conflict, mental tempest and solitude of human existence and often reveals romantic life of her characters through contemplation.

This is not surprising as Haider perhaps began the trend of feminist literature in India, which sought to rewrite the patriarchal worldview and challenged the set order. Her characters, though caught in a parochial society, have the strength to deal with it. Her
story "Hasab Nasab" [Lineage Tree] delves into gender orientations specific to our societies. They invoke a rethinking of stereotypical ideas about female beauty, the cherishing for female honour in the new world and the quest of woman in the changing man-woman relationships.

In the story Hasab-o-Nasab [Honour], Qurratulain Haider beautifully presents the death of a civilization and the birth of another one through her characters. The story revolves around Chammi begum and the tragedy of a well-off feudal family. In the family, the two brothers are living independently in two different parts of the house separated by a wall and they are landowners. The elder brother has a son Aziz Khan affectionately called "Ajju Bhai" while the younger one has a daughter Shamshad Begum alias "Chhammi Begum". Both were engaged with each other since their childhood as per the prevalent customs of the time.

Chhammi had been an arrogant young girl but age and misfortune had mellowed her down. When the marriage date had been fixed, the disaster struck. Cholera broke out in the vicinity and within few days both her parents were dead. She was consoled by her future parents-in-law but within a short interval they also departed from her and left her toiling and lurking her wedding with Ajju.

The years went by with amazing speed. Chhammi was thirty and still waiting for her dream of getting married to come true. But Ajju who went to Allahbad, married a whore formerly known as "Miss Kallo Bai of Lucknow". Now Chhammi was alone in her destitute and no one came forward to save her from the destitute. Consequently, she had to first sell her ornaments and then slowly other household items.

* The writer has translated it as "Honour*
Once, Ajju sent her a large sum of money through an aunt, but she refused to accept it declaiming:

Dhammu Khan, let it be known that I, daughter of Jumma Khan and niece of Shabbu Khan, would prefer to starve rather than accept any money touched by the inmates of brothels...³

Meanwhile, Ajju was killed during the communal riots spread out in the wake of partition of the country. Kallo broke into a long and loud wail: “Apa, I have become a widow...” Chhami Begum wiped her tears and pulled herself together. She stood up, erect and imperious as ever. She said firmly:

Wretched! You have become a widow today, I have always been a widow.⁴

After a few weeks, Chhammi was persuaded by her new neighbour to accept her current position and swallow her pride. It was suggested that there was no harm in working for one's living. Finally she agreed and stepped out of the threshold of her forefather’s haveli which had been reduced to a magnificent ruin. Then, Zamindar Jumma Khan’s daughter became a genteel, impoverished teacher going out into a strange, unknown world. She also worked as a maidservant in different houses in Delhi where she accustomed with the ultra-modern life-style of the high society. In the last phase of her age, she had to take protection in the house of a prostitute and offered thanksgiving prayers for getting shelter as a drowning man catches at a straw.

Qurratulain Haider's another story “Carman” reverberates with the same tune. In this story, “Carman” is an unfortunate and a wretched girl who is waiting for her love. She is spending all her earnings for preparing her trousseau and collecting toys and books for her future baby. However, at the end she becomes merely a symbol of devastated emotion and failure of love.
Around ten years back, Carman met with Nick and fell in love. Though she was ugly, Nick would say to her frequently that he loved her heart, her brain and her soul. In the beginning, they lived in the same town but war separated them. In the series of bombardments, Carman’s house was destroyed and she lost her mother as well as two brothers. Since then, she moved from one place to another with her sick father who suffered from tuberculosis and later died of it. Meanwhile, Nick went abroad and she had to settle in a working women’s hostel. In this hostel, the writer met with the girl and was stunned when she came to know about her story. The girl shared her secrets with the writer and expressed her confidence that Nick would come back. The writer asked her:

"Don’t you write a letter to him?"
"No."
Why? I asked her with surprise.
"Do you believe in God?"
"This is a very big question." I answered yawning........but tell me why you don’t write a letter to him?"
First, give the answer to my question "Do you believe in God?"
Yes, I said to cut the discussion short ...
"Well, do you write letters to God?"

At the end of the story, it is revealed that Nick has already been married and has a pretty baby girl. Carman is not aware of the fact that her dream is shattered but she is still waiting for her "God".

Both the characters, that of Chhammi Begum and Carman, are continuously in pursuit of love but afflicted with dejection and shattered dreams. The writer tries to describe that the male-dominated society has been exploiting women since long. Love and
loyalty are considered as their eternal characteristics that can’t be
ignored by them even though they become victims of betrayal and
treachery.

Qurratulain Haider’s story “Patjhar ki Aważ” [The Sound of
Falling Leaves] roves freely in an attempt to explore the local
contexts, which cause a modern Muslim girl, in a time of new
freedom, to lose herself bit by bit. The name of the story, which is
also the name of the collection, symbolises the meaning of downfall
and confusion in an individual or social life. The heroin Tanweer
Fatima belongs to a religious and feudal Muslim family. She herself
tells her story and considers her present life, after passing a
significant age of her life, like an autumn. She has been a student
of science and is able to become a lecturer of chemistry. About 36-
year-old Tanveer Fatima meets her old acquaintance in a Lahore
bazaar. It brings back memories of her teenage years in Delhi, her
awareness about her sexuality, her awkward ways of dealing with it
and the middle class morality which restrains her from expressing
it.

She is a modern and well-educated woman but her
freethinking along with the freedoms of modern society creates
havoc in her life. At the same time she has also enjoyed a lot after
becoming mistresses of different men in different times and lived
lavish life. In spite of her joyful life, at the end she realizes a kind of
loss and defect but does not know the reason behind it. Despite all
her pleasures and enjoyments she expresses her deprivation:

I keep lying on bed silently with open eyes in dark nights.
Science has revealed to me many secrets of the world. I
have read numerous books on chemistry and I have
pondered for long but I am scared. In the dark nights, I
become terrified a lot. Khush Waqt Singh, Khush Waqt
Singh. What concern do you have for me?”
The story ends with this paragraph. The last sentence is symbolic and perhaps the voice of autumn in the context of a storyline which was expressed through 'stream of consciousness' as if the heroin Tanweer Fatima is verdure and a thriving tree of life. Thus, when she was in her prime, Major Khush Waqt Singh enjoyed the close company of her beauty and got the opportunity to become her first lover and admirer. The gala time of her prime crossed several years and the days of spring also went away.

After her experience with two lovers, Tanweer Fatima leads a married life with a gentleman but can not forget her past. Despite all her scientific knowledge, this symbol of spring seems to be indigent or mad. She is Schizophrenic. She flirted with three men and was mistress of two of them but now she thinks that she has never flirted with anyone:

I have never ever flirted with anyone. Beside Khush Waq, Farooq and this dark complexioned giant person who is my husband, I am not aware of any fourth person. I might not be a loose character. I don't know what I was and what I am. Raihana, Saadiya, Parbha and this girl who became terrified after seeing me, might know more than me. Now what's the use to remember Khush Waqt, the time has passed.

With this feeling, the story reaches at its logical end but leaves behind many questions whose answers can save any girl from being another Tanweer Fatima.

_Agle Janam Mohe Bitya Na Kijyo_ as the heading suggests, is a poignant story of two women streetwalkers, Rashk-e-Qamar and Jamilan. The duo along with Hurmuzi khala (mother's sister), a tuberculosis patient, and Kanre Khalu (husband of mother's sister) toil hard labour for the livelihood in the world of well-educated feudatories. Even though some of them lend helping
hands or want to do something for them but actually no one seems to be their messiah except a rickshaw-puller who is himself beleaguered and insolvent.

In the presentation of women's characters, Qurratulain Haider tries artistically to portray the seriousness of women's issues. The character of Rashk-e-Qamar emerges from and sinks in the same flow of time. The beginning and the end of her life are alike and what happens in between are only a mirage and a dream. In the same tune, Jamilan appears on the horizon and leaves a deep impression through her character and thought. She is Rashk-e-Qamar's sister but with determination she analyses the consequences of men's professional and exploiting attitude and prefers a thoughtful life to a luxurious one.

Thus, the novelette tells us a long series of successes and failures. The women in the story are destined with eternal solitude and longing. The writer is very much afraid of their life and destiny.

O God, I plead you and fall at your feet again and again

Don't incarnate me as a girl, no matter, send me to hell

According to the writer:

From the very beginning, the life of the women has been tragic and they have been bestowed upon as the symbol of modesty, the statue of loyalty and goddess of sacrifice to pull the wool over their eyes.

In the society, women have to live under the obligation to men and like Qamrun, they need security and support. If security and support systems are strong, they lead peaceful and happy lives. Else they have to face devil and destruction. When Rashk-e-Qamar along with her family reached Lucknow, Farhad was impressed with her beauty and her voice. After that she was acquainted with a number of people including Verma Sahib.
Among them there was one Agha Shab Awez Hamadani who excited her desire and expectation by deceitful promises and disappeared mysteriously from the scene.

Rashk-e-Qamar anxiously passed sixteen years of her life with the memory of Hamdani and their love baby Mehpara. Then, she sets for Karachi to trace him out but finds nothing except misery and depression. She also loses her daughter Mehpara in Karachi's underworld. When she returns to Lucknow, nothing was left for her except chagrin and distress. What's more, her handicapped sister, Jamilan, could not bear the wait for her and bid goodbye to the world of disparity and discrimination.

After coming back to Lucknow, Rashk-e-Qamar tried to revive her past and met her old acquaintances who were once waiting for her to have a glance in her prime of youth. But now they have turned their eyes since the flame of her voice has been put off and her beauty and youth have faded out. Finally, expelled from the high society, she once again becomes Qamrun and seeks job from the contractors of embroidery work.

Jamilan is also an important character of this novelette. She views wonders of the world and becomes terrified with the time. She says:

I never saw leisure and pleasure in our lives. Now the ambience around us has suddenly changed but I am afraid that there may be some deception in it.\(^{10}\)

Jamilan has swallowed venom of life drop by drop which, on the one hand, makes her tone more poisonous and on the other hand, uncovers the tortuous facts of life. To her, the importance of morality, idealism and religion are things that can only be discussed. She says:

I told Khala, embrace Christianity. God is neither here nor there. So, it won't make any difference.\(^{11}\)
Jamilan warns her sister Rashk-e-Qamar who is living in a fool's paradise after falling in Agha Shab Aawez Hamdani's love. Be careful or he may also ditch you. He is an Iranian; at most he will have Mut'a (usufruct marriage contracted for a specified time and exclusively for the purpose of sexual pleasure) then he will dump you.....but I don't believe he'll call you to London or Karachi to tie the knot.\(^1\)

Jamilan acknowledged the reality of life but could not compromise with time and finally disappeared in the valley of death. She remains so modest and self-restraint that she does not accept any support from sons of feudatories. After her death, her sister Rashk-e-Qamar who has witnessed the world as a popular radio artist could not make a shelter for herself. This story like "Sita Haran" is also a tragedy of Indian women but misery of Rashk-e-Qamar is more painful than that of Sita Mir Chandani of "Sita Haran".

In "Sita Haran" [Abduction of Sita], Qurratulain Haider has again portrayed the tragedy of a modern woman in post-partition India. Dr. Sita Mir Chandani, the central character is symbolised as Sita of her time. She has lost the struggle of life and falls into the hands of modern Ravanas, among them some are Hindus and some are Muslims. Now, she is struggling to get the custody of her only son in a desperate bid to keep in touch with her past. She is not set at rest at either side of Indian border, neither in Pakistan nor in India. She has no shelter even outside of these two countries. She is a product of treacherous civilisation and a creature of a bland culture.

The name of this novelette itself transports our mind to the story of Hindu mythology. The legendary Sita who is embodiment of sacred, innocence, devotion and worshipper of husband, is actually a metaphor of Indian women. The similarity between this legendary
Sita and Indian women is the exploitation in the society at some level or the other. Though its tale is invariable but the exploiters (Ravanas) have continuously changed.

Sita Mir Chandani migrated from Sindh to Delhi after the Partition of India in 1947. Then, she goes to her maternal uncle in Canada for education and gets admission in Columbia University. Meanwhile, she meets Jamil and without taking permission from her family, she gets married to him. She loves Jamil and tries to mould herself according to his attitude and culture. But there is some hidden desire which inclines her to Qamarul Islam Chaudhry who has come to America to learn acting. Forgetting norms of society and morality, Sita comes closer to him. As a result, Jamil throws her out of his house. She goes to Qamarul Islam to seek his protection but he says:

I have committed a mistake, I will never accommodate with you. I am a very irresponsible man. Go back and ask Jamil to forgive you. He is a very noble man. He must forgive you. I will also beg my pardon for him. We both had flown with the stream of emotion. Sita Rani, you can obtain a real comfort of life only in the house of a solid man.13

Being disheartened, Sita comes back to her house in Delhi. After the separation from Jamil and refusal of Qamarul Islam Chaudhry, she feels completely exhausted. She is unable to forget Jamil and keeps roaming here and there to find solace. She has a series of dreams one after another but all of them are shattered before they are fulfilled. One of her dreams is Irfan whom she met in Pakistan. He has an attractive and charming personality. After sometime, she went to Colombo to meet him where she got acquainted with an American archaeologist Leslie Marsh with whom she spends three to four days. Thereafter, she returns to Delhi. Afterwards, she goes to Paris to meet Irfan and stays with
him for some time. Meanwhile, she gets the news of her father's
death and returns to her mother in Delhi. Here, she is once again
confronted with solitude and loneliness:

All of a sudden, she came to realise that she has no
friend. In this vast world, in this great scintillating
capital and in this milling crowd of acquaintances,
she has no companion. Why not? What wrong she
did with them?14

In the meantime, she remembered a famous painter, Projesh
Kumar Chaudhry. Feeling Projesh's company as an alternative to
her solitude, she establishes relationship with him which continues
for many months. At the end, she once again goes back to Irfan
only to find him married to some other girl.

Thus, the writer has portrayed the deprivation and
frustration of Sita Mir Chandani who established relationship with
men one after another. It seems she is looking for a kind of security
which provides love as well as recognition to her. She becomes
subservient to every man who carries fame in any field. Perhaps,
celebrities, intellectuals and artists are her weakness:

Projesh Kumar Chaudhry.......the great painter of
the country.......world fame expressionist
artist.......whose pictures she had noticed in
exhibitions, in magazines and books. On them, she
had read articles in American art magazines. At this
hour, Projesh Kumar Chaudhry was standing before
her in person. Thinking that she is having
conversation with the most famous painter of India,
she felt a wonderful sensation. Being impressed
with famous personalities was her biggest
weakness.15
However, she does not forget Irfan who is her ideal and achieving this ideal is the prime goal of her life. She writes in response to Irfan's letter:

Wait for me. You are the only one whom I love and will continue to do the same till the end.\(^{16}\)

What is the meaning of such a desire within Irfan's Sita? Probably, she finds him as a permanent security and shelter for her. Moreover, it seems, this uprooted Sita wants to go back to her roots with the intention that she can obtain integrity of her body as well as her soul. She goes to Jamil, Qamar, Projesh but not in a single one amongst them she finds satisfaction of her soul. Perhaps, Projesh understands this fact. He says:

Sita Devi, you are so strange a girl in this world that you will hardly find the happiness that you are looking for.\(^{17}\)

Sita considers Irfan as her ideal because he is from Pakistan and her native place is Sindh which is now a part of Pakistan. In this way, she can become closer to her roots by being attached with Irfan. She thinks:

Despite enriching her soul, Jamil and Qamar, both of them wounded it. Projesh was lost so much in his greatness that he did not even come near to her soul but Irfan.....Irfan.....Irfan.

Sita Mir Chandani.....Sita Jamil.....Sita Irfan and very soon her old friends Bilqees, Hema and Lalita will become alien to her. Her mother, her brother and sister and all the people of India, the great Sindhu Ocean is no more for them. Now Sita Mir Chandani is going to Sindhu Desh. Finally, she has acquired her home. Now thinking about Irfan is as if the moon has appeared suddenly in the night of Amawas (lunar month's last night).\(^{18}\)
In fact, Sita is born in a traditional Hindu family from Sindh and her culture is deeply linked with her soul. After being attached with Jamil, she tried to appropriate herself in his culture. She learned Urdu language and participated in religious rites and festivals, but such an artificial way of life did not help her in acquiring mental peace.

“Housing Society” is another of Qurratulain’s novelette which is a powerful satire on the existing socio-political system. The readers can find curiosity, revelation and calamity one after another. The ambience is full of predicament of history, conspiracy of state machinery, political enmity and complexity of society. In such ambience, some ideal characters emerge and then disappear struggling with time. For example, there is Salman Mirza and his beloved artist Surayya Husain. Meanwhile, some characters also come into light furnishing their worldly lives by intriguing with time, like the selfish Jamshed and his associates.

The novelette revolves around three families who meet in pre-Partition Uttar Pradesh. However, in post-Partition Karachi the tables have turned. The two rich and influential families before partition are now destitute and homeless. The poor country cousin is a powerful business magnate, who has managed to twist the new political class to suit his convenience. The main character here is Surayya who chooses to become an artist and live an independent life.

The writer has divided the novelette into two phases. The first one is pre-independent India which is the custodian of characters’ past. In this phase, there are examples of affliction as well as justice and bravery. The second phase was about the turmoil following the Partition and post-independent Pakistan where aspirations of love and idealism are lost and selfishness is on the rise. Its ugliest face appears during a house warming party
organised by the nouveau-riche Sayyed Jamshed Ali in his splendid building. Being completely inebriated, the participants become wild and forget minimum decency and social etiquette. When they come into sense, Jamshed realises his own reality as well as the reality of other characters particularly women whom he had been considering only as business materials and a source of enjoyment.

In this story, Manzoor-un-Nisa is a poignant character. She is a complete replica of Indian women's misery and despondency. She spent her whole life in poverty and destitute serving the people in need but she herself had been deprived from love and dignity. She is married to Jamshed who considers the marriage with her only as a formality and divorces her. Finally, she substantiates her life as a helpless and dies in the same condition.

After the divorce, Manzoor-un-Nisa thinks of her responsibility towards Jamshed's daughter, Farhat. When he arrives at Mohammad Gunj from Karachi to take away his daughter, she treats him with grace comprising love and sorrow. When the time came for the arrival of the train, Manzoor-un-Nisa dressed the girl in a new suit embossed with light-brocade lace and made small plaits of hair rubbing oil. She put the breakfast on the table and went away onto the roof covering her untidy hair and drying her sweat with dirty shawl. She sat there propping on the parapet of the roof and kept her eyes on the road coming from the station through the small hole of the drain pipe. When Jamshed got down from yakka (one-horse shay), Manzoor-un-Nisa strained her eyes and kept on trembling. Jamshed greeted Sayyed Mazhar Ali bowing his head, embraced with villagers and coming inside enwrapped his daughter.

It can be imagined what may happen on this statuette of pain and motherly love at the time when she separated her
daughter from herself for her better future, who is the only solace of her solitude. Perhaps, this is woman's eternal misfortune and misery, deepened by man's callousness.

In contrast, Basanti Begum (Miss Surayya Husain) who has been a victim of feudal system in her early age receives higher education as she becomes mature and fights for her rights. She has a progressive bent of mind and is supporter of a revolutionary leader Anand Mohan Ghosh. She falls in love with Salman and joined his group. When India was divided and Salman was sent to Pakistan, she promises him that she will soon join him in Pakistan. Later on, she reached Karachi but could not find him since he was in jail.

Then, the time takes a sudden turn and now this Basanti Begum would like to be called Surayya Hussain removing every sign of her past. She comes into contact with Jamshed and becomes the cynosure of the parties in Karachi. When she is dancing with Jamshed, Salman's sister mutters:

By uttering your name repeatedly, Bhayya (my dear brother) went to undergo a term of imprisonment. When he came out after serving a long term of imprisonment, his hair had become grey and had looked old. But my brother would never grow old in age. He would never accept defeat whereas you had accepted defeat so easily. It is you who had given light, heart and courage to Bhayya.19

However, Surayya's living standard becomes higher and higher day by day. She forgets all her ups and downs of the past and is lost in present glamorous life. She removes from her mind the revolutionary ideas of Salman Mirza and his love. She does not make the pain of departure from Salman a running sore and does not like to embrace insignificant death like Manzoor-un-Nisa but
compromises with the new circumstances which may be called her opportunism and also her compulsion.

**QURRATULAIN'S NOVELS**

It must be noted that the pre-independence novel, with all the looseness of art and romantic exuberance in the initial stages, had one feature and that was its roots in social reality. The treatment was idealistic and reformation seemed to be the panacea for all ills. The understanding of the socio-economic situation was superficial and as a corollary, the characters often lived in a world of imagination created for them, though imagination itself was not entirely unrelated to reality.

The problems of real life were too complex to admit for simple solutions, which reformists from Nazir Ahmad to Rashidul Khairi offered in Urdu novels. In Sarshar and Ruswa, one could clearly hear the flicks of the new concepts of social realism, which Premchand enriched by a robust sense of realism. He based his novels on the complex problems of life and interpreted them in terms of the common man who now entered the stage as a hero, upset by the growing moral degeneration and economic ruination. Premchand’s early novels are deficient in that those comprehensive, artistic crispness which enlivened his short stories. However, in his last novel, *Godan*, we get a decidedly perfect piece of art with a well-knit plot, executed with consummate skill and insight. Dr. Abdul Mughni says:

> Like Qurratulain, Premchand has also portrayed common life of his time with a broad perception and extremely contemporary sensitivity. He played a very crucial role in depicting political events of social importance. However, Qurratulain supersedes him in two basic things. First, while Premchand consolidated Urdu novel and fiction

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with artistic crispness, the next phase of development in these two literary genres has received momentum from Qurratulain. She broadened the artistic horizon. Second, Qurratulain had the stratum of cultural and human studies which Premchand lacked. His imagination is very simple but Qurratulain's imagination is very complex and far-reaching. Moreover, in her writings, there is a reflection of vast global life which is deficient in Premchand's writings. In brief, Qurratulain's artistic and imaginative experiments and expertise are wider than that of Premchand.20

Qurratulain Haider, described as the grand dame of Urdu literature, has been credited with refining the form of the novel in a poetry-obsessed Urdu and has been compared to literary icon Gabriel Garcia Marquez for the epic historical sweep of her magnum opus Aag Ka Dariya [Rivers of Fire] published in 1959, and translated as River of Fire in 1999.

Qurratulain has so far published six full-length novels Mere bhi Sanamkhane, Safina-e-Gham-e-Dil, Aag ka Darya, Aakhir-e-Shab ke Humsafar, Kare Jahan Daraz Hai, Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman and Chandni Begum. She has also published several travelogues and translations from other languages. Translations of her stories have appeared in English and other Indian and foreign languages.

Qurratulain Haider's first novel, Mere Bhi Sanamkhane [My Temples Too], published in 1949, is a cry from the heart for the faded charm of Lucknow, for the essence of India, for what the author calls its Ganga-Jamni culture — composite, harmonious, gracious. The entire periods merge imperceptibly into the quiet flowing stream of consciousness, transcending time and space but
never losing sight of the course through which the stream meanders.

The novel relives the agony of the great tragedy of the widespread and barbaric post Partition riots on both sides of the border. The post-Partition events, particularly the uprooting of vast population on either side of the border deeply moved Qurratulain and expressed itself in *Mere Bhi Sanamkhane*. The novel portrays how the sparks of the partition blew up the streams of a composite culture and what remained was a yawning gap of the burning dust.

*Mere Bhi Sanamkhane* is a powerful story of kinship, intimate friendships and love in a context of socio-political upheaval. It is told in an idiom that is distinctively Haider's, in its syncretic fusion of an innately Indian "centuries of Hindu-Muslim cultural inextricability" style, which simultaneously takes cognizance of western thought and ideas. In the protracted historical process, the characters create their idols, worship them and destroy them, just to recreate them in ever newer forms. They display little interest of their own but appear to exist as links to a living continuity through centuries. Time sanctifies and preserves the images of tradition, culture and civilisation, occasionally awakening a sense of loss, of a shattering dream.

The novel tells the tale of the birth of two nations, experienced in the lives and deaths of its young citizens. Rakshanda, Peechu, Kiran, Salim, Christabel — the youthful protagonists are idealistic and enthusiastic, fighting for a brave new world. With the turbulence of partition and independence, the quiet rhythms of domesticity are brutally disrupted. New animosities replace old loyalties, and the merry Gang of Lucknow is torn apart as the old order begins to fragment.

The plot of the novel revolves around a landlord family whose elders are not only unaware of changing socio-political scenario but
also they do not want to know about them. Though youngsters are very much concerned about these happenings but they are obsessed with their class and its values. They are living in utopia and are busy only in writing fiery and radical articles sitting on sofas in their havelis and palaces. From here, an extremely tragic story of life, class, tenacity, yearning and values sets in motion.

The novel can be described as a "family Saga". Artistically, the scenes of the novel change rapidly. But these changes occur according to the situation leading to the logical ends instead of being episodic. The writer has portrayed a number of characters having different bent of mind. Initially, their interests, engagements and views seem to be the same but gradually the situations and incidents present the different stories beyond the veils of their parties, their laughter and jokes. Though every character seems to be standing apart, they are close to each other inspite of vivid destinations. The characters of Kiran and Peechu loom large in the novel from beginning to end. They are full of dreams and determinations but have built a utopian world like educated bourgeoisies. However; Rakshanda is portrayed as a normal girl who does not lose her way though it seems to be so at the end. The writer introduces the characters as following:

"Hens Anderson had told that the life of every man is a fairy tale written by God Himself. He was an imaginative romanticist who had created a separate world of Snow White and Cinderella that could only satisfy the children. Perhaps, she was not aware that there were several afflictions and miseries in this ugly world created by a careless God. The afflicted lives of these small human beings could not be the fairy tale in any condition.

Yet, this girl, this black eyed snow white was sleeping in a satin quilt hiding her nose after
making fuss in Christmas party, dancing for several hours and pulling crackers apart. She was leading a merry life in Anderson's green valley where flowers used to bloom and the cold mizzle of rain used to shower on them. Till now, she and her comrades seemed to be very special beneficiaries. God did not interfere in their business. There was a deep impact of their temperament and ambience on their characters. They were brought up under the old niches of Ghufran Manzil in the background of old traditions. They were always conscious about what to do and what not to do, this should be done and this shouldn't be. Everything was in right direction. They were always happy.

All of a sudden, a very tragic incident occurred and the country was divided. Those, who were preachers of composite culture, and preoccupied in discussing art, literature, philosophy and politics, witnessed fragmenting their views and universalities. In the wake of partition, communal strife broke out everywhere. Peechu and Kiran were killed while Rakhshanda's mental faculty stopped functioning.

Rakhshanda appears as a symbol of those ideal youths whose beautiful world was destroyed and those who suffered mental imbalance. She is also known as Roshi and Rakhshanda Irfan. She is the daughter of Kunwar Irfan Ali and Kunwar Irfan Ali:

He had given Rakhshanda complete freedom because he knew that she would not misuse it. After finishing a five-year course in Mary College, she obtained a bachelor's degree in music. She learnt dance in Culture Centre of Almora. She used to go to Dilkusha Club with her two brothers (Peechu and Polo) and participate in English dance. She was free
to go by Peechu's car or her bicycle whenever and wherever she wanted to. She had a number of friends and was very much popular in the society.22

The most tragic incident in Roshi's life is related to Salim who is a friend of her brother Peechu. Once, she remembers her past as she spent an evening dancing with a stranger on the occasion of Christmas in a foreign hotel. Meanwhile, the same person after his transfer to Lucknow comes to meet his friend Peechu at Ghufran Manzil. Hearing the sound of horn:

Rakhshanda rose with disgust and crossing the room she reached the veranda. Leaning on the railing she saw that charming, unique, arrogant, black-eyed and long-eye-lashed stranger is standing before her and is about to call the servant.

Oh, this is he, this is he, this is he.
She knew him. She also knew that he would come sometime or other. ....... Are you Dr. Salim?23

On the other hand, Salim was thinking:

This was she, this was she whose hair was straight and black like Amrita Shergil whose Armenian or Spanish face was like Madonna and by seeing her he became unnerved and it seemed that the fire broke out somewhere. He knew her. He always knew that she would certainly meet him sometime or other wandering with the caravan of the life. He must see her somewhere.24

Rakhshanda loved Salim and Salim also loved her but they did not express their feelings to each other. Both of them were egoists and lost in their own worlds. Rakhshand was class-conscious while Salim loved his dignity and his hard life. Beside being a columnist in a revolutionary newspaper, Rakhshanda did not want to come out of the confinement of her bourgeois class
and maintained its elegancy which was the distinction of that class. Finally, she was destined for the shattered dreams.

Yet, it was not *Mere Bhi Sanamkhane* [My Temples Too] which brought Qurratulain's recognition but *Aag ka Darya* [*River of Fire*], her most popular novel. *Aag ka Darya* is considered one of the classics of modern Urdu literature. After some forty years, it is finally also available in English, translated by the author herself. *Aag ka Darya* has a magisterial ambition and technical resourcefulness rarely seen before in Urdu fiction. Qurratulain employs diverse genres — letters, chronicles, parables, journals — to present her melancholic vision of the corrosions of time. Mind-boggling in its span and scope, the novel is essentially a study in the absorbing culture and civilisation of India over the ages. The narrative also deals with the partition of India and its aftermath, and shows how the communal and divisive tendencies were at odds with what the entire Indian civilisation stood for.

The writer is arguing for the Indian culture that is inclusive and all encompassing. It encompasses the fates of four recurring characters, Gautam, Champa, Kamal, and Cyril — Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian — over two and a half millennia and is divided into four sections, with each section dedicated to classical, medieval, colonial, and modern post-national era. In different eras, different relations form and reform among the four, romance and war, possession and dispossession. The novel rolls centuries into the dynamics of time through the crowded passage of the history of the great Indian civilisation. But history does not protrude itself as a premeditated chronology. The writer conjures the vast panorama of ideas and events in fast moving miniatures, with perfect control over details, blending of colours and slimness of composition.

In this novel, characters appear in different guises but bear the same name and link in each era. Gautam Nilambar is the first
character who appears as a student of mysticism at the Forest University of Shravasti in the 4th century BC and reappears in many reincarnations across the centuries, as does his friend Hari Shankar and others. Kamal, the Muslim character appears midway through the novel as an 'outsider', part of the Mughals who invaded India, and loses himself in the Indian landscape. Champa, who embodies the Indian woman in every era, begins and ends the novel. She has been chronicled as different forms of women with historical perspective from ancient period to modern times. Cyril, the Englishman, appears last. The four characters in the novel share different relationships in different eras. These reincarnations are handled well and make for an interesting sense of continuity.

In the first episode, Gautam comes across two bathing beauties in the river and feels love for one of them. Soon he meets Hari Shankar, a prince who yearns to be a monk, but he appears masqueraded as a Yavana. When Gautam mentions the bathing beauty, Yavana's face turns red. For, the beautiful one is actually the young pretender's sister, Princess Nirmala. Gautam also elicits the truth about the princess's friend, Champak. The first romance that blossoms as Gautam meets Champak remains unfulfilled, and in some ways, the sense of un-fulfilment characterizes Gautam and Champak.

Many years after Chandragupta's invasion, Gautam becomes a wandering performer who curses all those who make swords and arrows. Once, during a performance, Gautam and Champa meet. The beauty who was the model and inspiration for his "Sudarshan Yakshini" had become a matronly old mistress of a minister after she was captured by the invading army. Princess Nirmala also met with a similar fate, but she became a Buddhist nun.

In fact, Champak of the ancient era represents the continuous pains and pangs of the Indian women. To her, conflict
and dilemma between society and individual are eternal. With these perplexities and dilemmas, she reaches at the conclusion that the mankind is helpless before the unseen forces of time and history. The history created by mankind himself to control other human beings through his force, appears in the form of different historical events and decides the fate of human being hardly within a moment. The fate of those who want to save themselves from inhuman and aggressive attitudes of the society or those who are unable to save, they at least consider them as wrong doings. The callousness of history comes to light as mental and emotional breakdown in individual life.

Champak is the daughter of the Royal Priest of Ayodhya. Wealth, honour and fame are under her feet and she is intelligent and sensitive. She can prolong discussion with Gautam on the philosophy of life and renunciation. She is also one of the best dancers of the time and loves Gautam. However, she is quite helpless before time and history. She becomes homeless in the wake of a historical event and is compelled to marry a 50 year old Brahmin against her will. And now:

She had undergone her own transformation: she had done what a mere woman was required to do — she had accepted her "fate" and perhaps, this was her duty...... It was Champak's religion that she must worship him and attend on him because he was her husband. She used to attend on him as thousands of housewives used to do. She was one of them and there was nothing special with her. She was holding her baby in her lap. No longer had an ideal or vision, just a smug matron with a double chin and a middle age spread.25

The writer wants to say that these women have a charm of their own. They are faithful, shy, and docile. They worship their
husbands as demigods and touch their feet in obeisance every morning. They put the man on a pedestal and sing songs in his praise. That's how it ought to be. This Cult of the Lady developed in Hispania and introduced the concept of romance and chivalry into the rest of Europe — gallant knights fighting in honour of their ladies and young poets singing lutes on moonlit nights while the lady sat on trellised balcony. Here the roles are reversed — man is the beloved, the woman pines for him and is forever waiting for him.

In the middle age, which was the confluence of Indo-Islamic culture and known as medieval India, the same Champak appears as a Brahmin woman, Champawati. She loves Abu al-Mansour Kamaluddin who came from Baghdad and regards him as her god. But Kamal was preoccupied with his victory and forgets Champawati who devotes her whole life to loneliness and oblivion waiting for him. Such kind of love and devotion were quite strange for Kamal. When he says to Champawati:

Listen, Champavati, make your choice to marry me.
But I already regard you as my husband without any rhyme and reason.
He became perplexed with the answer and asked how? I haven't yet married you........
It doesn't matter, she keeps laughing, I consider you as my lord, you can't understand it. She laughed her silvery laugh. I will regard only one person as my husband and that is you. We are made for each other.26

And after a long time when Kamal had almost forgotten Champavati due to his engagement in war and laurels, she had been wandering in populated and depopulated areas to trace him out. An ascetic sorcerer informed Kamal:
When you were spending gala times in the court of Gor, she was wandering in forest in your search but no royal goose could convey her message to you.21

In the third phase of the Indian history as described in the novel, this Champavati bearing the name Champa Bai searches her identity in brothels of Lucknow. As Nawab Cyril’s story takes shape, Champa Bai appears, but this time, as a courtesan in Awadh, where Nawab Cyril starts his secret rendezvous with the celebrated lady, evading his native consort, Sujata Debi, who turns into a possessive and loveless mistress, but Champa, as in the previous episodes, is an alluring character, full of the promise of love, free-spirited, witty, and decadent. The third incarnation of Champa comes to personify the story of Awadh and old Lucknow and the urban fantasies about high culture that would become the source of much nostalgia in the rest of the novel. She appears as a symbol of social and cultural downfall. In fact, the woman having all capabilities is a mere helpless creature in this society. Neither she can live a life according to her own will nor can she establish her own identity. She can sustain her individuality in the feudal system only when she becomes a prostitute:

In royal and feudal society, the woman can attain freedom only when she becomes a prostitute. Then, she achieves social dignity as well as wealth. Afterwards, she is allowed to educate herself and engage in literary activities. Champa Bai was the product of that system. But Gautam was unable to understand her status because he himself belonged to that new middle class which came into being recently.28

The writer gives a very poignant description of this character when Champa Bai becomes old and stretches out her gnarled hands for only one pice:
An old woman hobbled up and stretched out her gnarled hands. Wrapped in a thin, tattered dulai she started droning mechanically – “Give us a pice for the sweet sake of Ali. May you never know any other sorrow except the sorrow for Hussain...”

Nawab Kamman once had told Gautam Nilambar Datt about a destitute, toothless woman who had become a beggar and had been waiting unreasonably at railway station for an old man to come back from Calcutta. Remembering the story, he shivered as it struck him that this mendicant could be Champa.

Nilambar Datt took out a fistful of Victoria coins from his purse.

She opened her eyes wide at the sudden sight of sparkling silver coin. Then she regarded the old Brown Saheb sitting in the carriage.

Nilambar Datt identifies the old woman as Champa but she did not recognise the eminent, elderly gentleman who looked much younger than his age because he was wealthy and had no personal worries. Life had treated him kindly. She shook her head and muttered that she asked him only for one pice but he gave her a silver coin. She clinched her fist tight and whined:

“My lord! May you celebrate your great grandchildren’s weddings. I have been ruined by the Mutiny.

Champa stared at the rupee in the gloom of the evening. Then she sneaked into a by-lane and stopped before an opium den where addicts sat in dim corners with their heads between their knees. Gautam Nilambar looked back once and saw her standing under the street lamp. She was still gazing at the coin. Her hair shone like a lot of silver and her face was covered with deep furrows. The skin of her arms sagged. She wore a patched clothe
and her quilted stole was full of holes. Gautam leaned against the cushions and closed his eyes.

The story makes its final shift from the 19th to the 20th century and a whole new configuration of characters, Gautam, Hari Shankar, Nirmala, and Champa come together as friends at college. Also on the scene are Kamal, Amir, Tehmina, and several other young Muslims and Hindus. The only one among this group who actually comes from a “congested mohalla in Benares” is Champa. In order to fit in Champa must reinvent herself constantly, just as she did in her previous versions, and it is her free spirit and her bold beauty that makes her the centre of attraction wherever she goes, be it Lucknow, Calcutta, Paris, or London where they all meet as students and expatriates.

Champa of modern era reincarnated as Champa Ahmad, is living lavishly and has all kinds of luxurious amenities but she cannot express her feelings to her ideal Amir Raza. As a result, she is destined to eternal solitude. The character of Champa Ahmad has been presented in a manner that it becomes an embodiment of mental and emotional conflict of the new generation particularly of the educated middle class with other characters of her age.

Champa is a middle class girl. She goes to Lucknow to get education and then to England. In this age, all characters Amir Raza, Tahmina, Talat, Nirmala, Guatam, Hari Shankar, Kamal and particularly Champa Ahmad (who is called as Baji by others) are confronted with the issue of communication. They are unable to express their feelings before others. Champa who loves Amir is unable to say that she loves him. The same problem happens in England which was considered as the fountainhead of modern era. Finally, the lack of this communication ends on Champa and she will lead an unknown and lonely life. Champa thinks:
The company of group is useless; in fact, loneliness is the reality.32

In a different form, the consequence of Champa Ahmad is also of Sita in "Sita Haran" and Deepali in "Aakhir-e-Shab ke Hamsafar". All these characters are disillusioned with life. This disillusionment of Champa and Kamal provide heading to the novel as "Aag ka Darya" which is not easy to be passed through. However, Champa learns the lesson to face the reality after coming out of her disillusionment. She thinks:

It is in my own hand to make this country as a hotbed of pain and sorrow or as a treasure of happiness. I am not bothered about others. Opening one hand, she looked at it meticulously: the hand of the dancer, the hand of the artist or the writer. No, this is only the hand of a general, mediocre but intelligent girl who wants to work now.33

The decision of Champa indicates to her existential behaviour in which she learns how to remain self-dependent by her experience without relying on others.

To sum up, this novel is about time, about the pointless insistence of the flux of this fiery river of the novel's title. The plot runs like this: Gautam Nilambar, Hari Shankar, Champak, Nirmala, and a few of their friends come together as a wonderful "family" in their youth and they end up hanging out together. They are all handsome, intelligent, and good-hearted. In spite of their minor cultural and personal differences, they love each other and live for their idealistic passions. They expend their youthful days with such joyful abandon that when history breaks them apart and mercilessly leaves them floating like debris in the "river of fire," all that will survive is a sorrowful longing for the good old days as it
happens to Andalib Bano and her daughter Dr. Anbareen in Qurratulain’s novel *Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman*.

*Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman* is the story of those individuals and families rooted in old feudal ambience and appear as fluttering in an era of nuclear and modern technology. The Partition of India and the Second World War, which have changed the flow of the history and cultural mode, have terribly affected the scenario. Amalgamation among generations and men and women of every generation are playing the most significant role. The emerging social trends along with the spiritual and ethical tendency have created so much complexity and ambiguity that economical, political, religious and mystical factors are playing significant roles.

Most of the female characters in this novel are prostitutes and every one of them has been portrayed as imprisoned with the tyranny of time. They are desperate to come out of their confinement just like those birds who are anxious to get their freedom to fly. But their wings are trimmed badly and the atmosphere inside is so suffocating that it is really hard to free themselves from the confinement and fly. Thus, these confined birds exhibit their strength to fly and fall down as broken wings but some of them do enlighten the way to struggle for freedom by showing their courage. The most apparent character among them is Dilnawaz alias Hajjan Bi who finally renounces the profession of prostitution and has to face numerous hardships to lead a respectful life. However, she shows a path for women like Andalib Bano who manages to save her daughter Dr. Anbareen by following on Dilnawaz's footprints.

Like her other novels, it is very difficult to fix a particular theme for this novel which also represents exactly similar cultural changes. The novel has a number of characters but none of them can be described as the central one. In the perspective of long
Indian history, many characters emerge with their ups and downs starting from the mutiny of 1857. In this historical event, not only the people of the country have been greatly affected but the Mughal culture and Red Fort's intercessors had also suffered the same kind of trauma. Dilnawaz Begum and Mehroo, the two young girls were associated with the Fort. They had a narrow escape in the massacre of 1857 and a prostitute of Chawri Bazar [the prostitute had a relation with a British colonel] and her brother helped them. From here, the tragic story of the two sisters begins.

By representing Mughal’s dilapidated cultural values, Dilnawaz Begum, Mehroo and Nawab Fatima establish their identities as individuals. Dilnawaz and Nawab Fatima never accept the new life which was destined by their miserable conditions. Thus, they have been portrayed as victims of emotional conflict through their life. Even after having spent a long period, their feelings and actions show that they have never forgotten their past and that it is in fact still running in their veins.

Chaudhry Fateh Mohammad, who affectionately raised Dilnawaz Bano as a daughter, had been regarded as her real uncle (maternal uncle) by the people. When she wanted to marry with a nawab who put the condition that after the marriage she can only meet her sister and uncle, Dilnawaz insisted that Chaudhry Fateh Mohammad was neither her uncle nor was she a prostitute inherited by the family. However, before receiving the letter in which she revealed the truth, nawab was dead. At this point, Dilnawaz looses her sense with indignation. In fact, she was not pained with the death of nawab but with the fact that nawab died without knowing the reality.

Similarly, when Nawab Fatima reaches Calcutta, she tramps to trace out her king’s undone successors and makes presents to them. Dilnawaz Bano, known as “Hajjin Bi”, is greatly affected as
an individual with the stream of her internal feeling. She keeps her family past in mind while she has already lost it in the mutiny of 1857. She wants to live with the help of her past because she could not adjust herself in a new life and spent the remaining life in troubles and pains. She repeatedly pursuades her sister, Mehroo, to give up the profession of prostitution and tries to keep Nawab Fatima away from this life. But the situations were not favourable and finally she reached the culmination by spending a painful life. Her past could not support her when she departed from her roots following a historical tragic event and despite adopting a new life, she continues to associate herself with the past. This intensity of her feelings and struggle makes her entire life tragic.

Nawab Fatima is also a tragic character. The difference between the two is that Hajjan Bi dares to renounce her profession and spends her life with hardships. Though Nawab Fatima does not struggle like Hajjan Bi, but the feeling to be a sinful continues haunting her. This feeling exacerbates more during the last phase of her life.

Mehroo who is the younger sister of Dilnawaz Bano has a temperament to accept and compromise with the present life. She has a longing to lead a peaceful life. But her attitude consists of a kind of bitterness as though she is retaliating with the irony of time by amalgamating herself with it. She narrates sarcastically insensitivity of time before her sister Dilnawaz and wishes that Dilnawaz, who is suffering from hardship of life, would come to her.

All these female characters seem to represent changing history of India and callousness of time over which they have no control and before which they are helpless spectators. The most important character, Andaleeb Bano is like a character of Greek tragedy as well as Greek chorus whose function is to speak the prologue and epilogue and comment upon events to spell out the
story of life. Andalib Baig is an offspring of Nawab Bai and a Belgian artist Andre Renal. The life of Andalib is a story of continuous struggle. With reaching the age of discretion, she tried to escape from her environment but the situation was not favourable. From beginning to end, Andalib appears as a person whose personality is full of intoxication. Though she looks calm and peaceful, her life is covered with anguish and anxiety. To overcome this restlessness, she drinks and tries to keep herself engaged in different activities. She wishes a better future for her daughter but her past creates obstacles in the way towards a better future.

However, Anbreen Baig, a doctor by profession, defies her fictitious surroundings and wants to reject the doubtful legacy inherited from her mother. Nevertheless, her radical steps start staggering as she confronts reality. Though fully determined to face the tune, the present conditions terrify her mind and she looks like a person who has lost her mental balance.

In this serious condition, a young doctor Mansoor Kashghiri helps her. He does not desist from her even after knowing her family background. In fact, the more her condition deteriorates, the more supportive and helpful he becomes. He continues relentlessly till she completely recovers. Although Dr. Anbareen recovers due to the treatment of a neurologist, this could become possible only because of Mansoor’s selfless care and constancy which heals the wound of her soul. Thus, in the backdrop of happenings over the last few centuries, Mansoor emerges as a better man and as a humanbeing who through saving a precious life shows the society a path of reform.

Andalib and her daughter, Anbareen are not scared with the callousness of time but have the courage to face its reality. Andalib tells Dr. Mansoor Kashghiri about her past so that if the reality
comes to surface, he and her daughter who has a dream of marriage with Mansoor, would not be confronted with emotional shock. When it was revealed that Anbareen Baig was not the daughter of Mashkoor Hussain but that of Amba Prasad, she could not accept the fact. With this disclosure, her past becomes a monster for her. Unable to identify herself either as Miss Mashkoor or Miss Amba Prasad, she asked Mansoor who is a symbol of her future, “who am I, Mansoor?” Here, Anbareen as an individual is shown under identity crisis. However, her problem represents the identity crisis of an entire nation of the sub-continent. Mansoor says:

Partially, your problem is very much personal, Lady Amber. Nowadays, entire nations are facing identity crisis. To what extent, Amba Prasad has penetrated in them and to what extent Mashkoor Hussain. Amba Prasad has been totally rejected there but many people want to ignore Mashkoor Hussain here. Moreover, your problem is also similar to Urdu.34

To Anbareen, the question of identity overcasts her life and consequently she loses her mental balance. For the treatment, she is taken to London. When she recovers, she returns and makes efforts to overcome her mental shock accepting her past as the reality. She thinks:

In any case, we can't run away from our shadows. If I accept them completely, I may be cured.35

She addresses Mansoor:

Having been frustrated with Alcoholic mother and neurotic daughter, you want to escape. But I'll bear your escape with courage.36

The tragedy of Anbareen is the embodiment of her past as it is the past that determines the future. Identification of the past is
also necessary to go well with the society. For this reason, everyone wants a useful past. In the search for it, some people fall into fantasy and seek false supports using idiotic means to maintain their status. In this novel, two such characters are portrayed by the writer.

Nigar Khanam and Shahsawar Khanam are real sisters. They have built a world which belongs to a ruined state and of which they are the princesses. However, the fact remains that their brother is a nouveau-riche. Their family ambience and living standard are examples of indecent mannerism of nouveau-riche class. The elder sister is a novelist and in every two or three months she completes a novel. The inaugural function is organised with great fanfare. On the occasion, the pomp and show of their family is repeatedly exhibited. In this process, they recover a cameo of Andalib's mother, Nawab Begum. This is the cameo of a portrait made by Andre Renal and had been stolen from the house of Andalib. By purchasing it from the market, the two sisters make an addition of "of Pardhan Pur" to "Her Highness Nawab Begum". They also make her their grand-mother due to her appearance as a Mughal princess. For, it is a matter of pride and happiness for them to integrate their past with a royal family like that of the Mughals. Declaring their step-brother as mad, they detained him as a servant. Finally, on an occasion, all secrets are disclosed and the two sisters fell into their own trap.

In the novel, *Akhir Shab Ke Hamsafar* [Companion of the Last Night] Qurratulain Haider views life and universe in the context of history and despotism of time. The theme is the flourishing militant communist movement in the legendary atmosphere of Bengal and its consequences. The movement against the British colonialism was active during 1930 to 1947 in Bengal. Comrades of this movement are from Bengal and among them
Raihanuddin Ahmed and Deepali Sarkar acquire centre stage. These characters want to achieve their ideals with force by associating themselves with a militant organisation. They are always ready to sacrifice any thing in order to obtain specific ideological revolution, but with the passage of time, their resolves change. Finally, all of them including Deepali Sarkar shun their dreams and compromise with time. In other words, the conflicting waves of history and time take them far away from the cherished dream. It seems Aakhir Shab ke Hamsafar is a temple where idols are destined for dilapidation. Some of them change their faces according to their own wills but others lose their identity in the deep ocean of tyranny of time and circumstances. Thus, their shared dreams were shattered into pieces.

Having dream or selecting an ideal is, however, a perennial fact. From the same family background as Arjumand Manzil, Nasira Najm-us-Sahar, the daughter of Raihan's sister, emerges as a new revolutionary. She hates Arjumand Manzil and its inhabitants just as Raihan. The only difference is that the inheritor of Arjumand Manzil is now Raihan himself. Deepali thinks about Nasira:

......And what would happen to this rebel Najm-us-Sahar? Will she not drop her present thoughts very soon? Will a new trend not appear as a backlash of any trend? How long will Nasira be rebellious?

Like other novels of Qurratulain Haider, this also has a number of characters. However, Raihan and Deepali occupy central place whereas Uma Roy, Rosy Sanyal, Jahan Ara, Yasmin Balmont, Nasira Najm-us-Sahar and so on are sub-characters. Nevertheless, their importance is no less than the central characters that have their own distinct features in the fabrication of the novel.
The Story begins in 1942 with a militant movement in Bengal led by Raihanuddin Ahmed who is equally an ideal for Jahan Ara and the other members of this militant outfit such as Deepali Sarkar and Uma Roy. Raihan is an intelligent and loveable person. He is simultaneously a lover and a leader of the movement. The two aspects of his life are not contradictory but congruous and complementary to each other. The entire phase of his youth revolves around these two aspects, Deepali and the national movement. The leadership of the militant group is the result of his understanding which was flourished in his studentship. If he is the son of a peasant, he is also amongst the grand-children of Nawab Fakhr-uz-Zaman and the would-be son-in-law of Nawab Qamar-uz-Zaman. However, he has a dream of a new and prosperous social life and makes efforts to achieve it. He desists from his fiancée, Jahan Ara so that he would not have to abstain from his dream. In fact, Jahan Ara is his cousin sister (maternal) and fiancée since childhood. He has a quiet and peaceful love life which is inevitably a natural consequence of childhood companionship. Raihan says:

I loved her but not so passionately..... That was calm and quiet. I was always aware that wherever and howsoever I returned back, she would have been waiting for me as a shady tree and sweet water of the well.38

Contrary to Jahan Ara, Raihan’s relation with Deepali is not emotional romance of youngsters but based on maturity. He is influenced by her intelligence and courage. In her company, he experiences her deep love as much as his ideology which he can not afford to overlook at any stage of life. In extremely romantic moments, he meets her in Sunder Ban which is not only mysterious but full of dreams as well. During this brief companionship, the relationship between the two becomes more mature. Raihan informed Deepali about the complexities of this
relationship and feels the need and importance of each other's company:

".......He had already realised that his life as well as the life of that girl are like a ship which is floating on a noisy wave of the river and moving towards an unknown shoreline without caring for the tide." 39

Beside Raihan and Deepali, the writer has also portrayed the characters of Uma Roy. Uma is educated and belongs to a well-off family. Her father, Paritosh Roy is an eminent barrister from Dhaka (presently capital of Bangladesh). She is a sympathiser of the militant movement and later on, associates herself with it. However, her association is somehow different from the ups and downs of the movement. Her character does not emerge as a serious one on the political level but her association seems only like an amusement. Unlike Deepali, Raihan and other comrades, she is not emotionally involved in the movement but is more interested in Raihan. When both of them are acquainted with each other in London, Uma felt attraction towards him and became a friend not only at ideological level but they are also concerned with each other in personal life. Raihan feels strangely passionate love in her attitude. He says:

"....... "Ronu ___"
Only his mother called him with such great passion.

Ronu, tea is ready. Wake up. "Ronu, take it, tea is ready. Wake up." Uma was saying.

He raised his head hurriedly and like a thief cast a look at Uma. My little mother. 40

When she came to know about the relationship between Raihan and Deepali, she not only becomes unpalatable but in fact tries her best to separate them. Uma wanted complete domination and control over Raihan. In her love, there is not a feeling of sacrifice. She thinks to herself that if she can not have him, then
neither would Deepali. For this purpose, she adopts a traditional method as a villain and finally, succeeds in her plan. This is a very tragic moment for both Raihan and Deepali and also for the dream they had cherished with their group.

Till now, Raihan's personality was neat and clean. He was not only beloved of Deepali, Uma and Jahan Ara but he himself could love Jahan Ara, Deepali and Uma. He was honest for all and committed with his ideology as well. But at the turn of history, all are left behind. Neither Deepali nor his ideology is with him and now, he is a changed person. The change can be the downfall of his personality and also the return to his past. Raihan compromises with time and situation and returns to his old life against which he had struggled for a long period. He starts living in Arjumand Manzil as an inheritor of Nawab Qamr-uz-Zaman Chaudhry.

On the other hand, Deepali comes from a respected middle class family of Bengal. Her father Banoy Chand Sarkar is a doctor by profession. She joined the militant movement when she was still in her teens. Meanwhile, she meets Raihan who became her ideal like the party's ideology. However, when she fails to achieve him, she sees her dreams shattering. At the same time, the party with which she is associated, was also being dismantled. One by one all her comrades desist from their ideals. Raihan and Uma whom she considered once as a central point of all her activities and emotional world, are proved as malevolent. She becomes homeless in the wake of Partition in 1947. During the early days of her exile, she inhabits in Calcutta. Then, she goes to her father living in Trinidad city of West Indies where she marries an aged person, Lalit Mohan Sen. Though she feels emotional and spiritual vacuum in this apparently peaceful world, her conscience is satisfied with the fact that she did not compromise with times and situations. After a long period when she comes to her country, Bangladesh,
she has only few words to express this sorrow. The discussion between Raihan and Deepali shows differences in their ideologies:

Raihan ... how did you make such a shameful compromise, even in Calcutta and here also? She remained fret and fume.

Did you not make the compromise? Did you not compromise in Port of Spain?

I did not sell my conscience.41

Besides Raihan and Deepali, the writer has also illustrated the characters of Yasmin Majeed and Rosy Banerjee who are associated with the movement. While Rosy changed her revolutionary zest by herself, Yasmin met with the irony of time and situation. Rosy was the daughter of a Bengal's Christine clergyman and her mother was a child widow from a Brahmin family. The Clergyman had married with this destitute lady as she became widow in her childhood. Rosy happened to be a class-fellow of Deepali and along with her, she also joined the militant organisation. To continue her political activities, one day she ran away from the house. But soon she was arrested. Basant Kumar Sanyal, belonging to an upper class family, manages to get her released on bail and keeps her in his house as a guest. After undergoing hardships of life in prison, Rosy is magnetised with Basant Kumar's grandiose bungalow and luxurious life. Finally, she marries him according to his will.

From the very beginning, Rosy emerges as a character in a psychological convolution. While Jahan Ara and Deepali Sarkar are also living in same times, Deepali did not fall into this complexity as she was satisfied with her background. Rosy, on the other hand, always considered herself from a lower status due to her family background and economic condition. Though, not consciously aware of herself, she nurtures an ambition for a better and prosperous future. When she sees wealth, social status and luxury,
in the form of Basant Kumar, she keeps her ideals aside and marries him. She in fact tries her best to completely adopt the new way of life in this class to the extent that she does not even have time to visit her poor parents and expresses her pride with her present life in a strangely odd manner.

Yasmin Majeed is another important character in this novel. Initially, the character of Yasmin does not seem to be of much significance but as the novel progresses, her importance and meaningfulness also increase. She comes from a religious background and has nothing to do with the militant movement. She emerges with her own distinct characteristic. Though she belongs to a traditional eastern family, she is passionate towards dance. To fulfil this passion, she revolts and goes against her parents and family. From the very beginning, she proves that she has an ability to take risk. She goes to Madras to learn Bharata Natayam on a scholarship. From here, she demonstrates her art in Karachi and different countries. But after this brief exaltation, she is destined with downfall. She marries an English fashion designer who soon deserts her. Her mother-in-law takes the responsibility for her daughter's upbringing. But she makes the child a Christian. Even her dance troop no longer remains. Becoming insolvent and helpless, she works as a maidservant in different houses and hotels. Finally, after drawing up her will to her family members for offering funeral prayer in absentia, she commits suicide.

Chandni Begum is another novel of Qurratulain Haider in which she has depicted the rapidly changing scenario of the society. The heading, 'Chandni Begum' gives the impression that it revolves around the life of Chandni Begum but this is not the case. The writer presents Chandni Begum unconventionally in an interesting manner. She appears on the horizon for a while and disappears in the valley of death for ever. An incident causes her
death and death of many other characters. In spite of this event, the novel continues to move further.

The novel is divided into 14 chapters with different headings. In the first three chapters, a crumbling feudal family residing at the bank of Gomti River is introduced. The family comprises Barrister Azhar Ali, his communist son Qanber Ali and his mother, Badr-un-Nisa, along with a number of devoted servants. Sheikh Azhar Ali is a prominent, intelligent and rich lawyer of the area. His only son Qanber Ali has a different bent of mind. He is progressive and influenced by communism. In spite of being a product of feudalism, he dreams of a classless society. He refuses to marry with his fiancée, Safiya Sultana only because she is born and brought up in a feudal ambience.

Qanber’s mother Badr-un-Nisa is an enlightened woman who spends a major part of her time and engagements for the sake of women’s rights. She is a well-mannered and helping woman who treats well with the poor and insolvent. A friend of her, Alima Bano is living in her parental home. She is educated and a lecturer in a college but her husband had gone to Pakistan and left her dejected. Her only daughter Chandni Begum is also a lecturer in the same college. She is beautiful and well-mannered. Qanber’s mother thought that an educated girl of a poor family could have become an ideal wife of her son. So, she fixed his son’s marriage with Chandni Begum. However, before tying the knot the mother is dead. Following the death of Qanber’s mother, the narrator of the story expresses his concern in these words:

The mother spoiled him a lot. Even Munshi Jii left no stone unturned. Now, after the death of his mother, will he dare to face the world?42

The later story of Qanber Ali presented in the novel, is mostly about his engagement with the magazine or marriage with Bela in a
very dramatic manner. In such a situation, what “the world” stands for? The meaning of “the world” of course includes his immediate life as in his surroundings there is a large group of loyal servants who offer him hereditary love. They are culture conscious and always concerned for his better future. In the publication of the magazine, he does not face any hurdle which can be said as “facing the world”. Then, what is the meaning of this phrase? The writer has already portrayed Bela as the symbol of reality or market value. In fact, his marriage with Bela in a dramatic manner shows that he has bowed his head down before the reality or the market value.

Bela belongs to a lower family. She along with her father hatches a conspiracy to marry Qanber and after becoming his wife she wants to take his house and other properties into her possession. Buying things and other materials as per the new fashion becomes her daily-routine. Qanber finds himself bound to accept her every demand and fulfil her every desire. Thus, Qanber Ali can't help face the world but despite all his progressive ideas, he becomes the part of that world which now turns into the consumerist world after the end of feudalism. The writer describes him as "armchair leftist" who despite being progressive inherits weaknesses and defects of feudalism. He does not reveal the secrets of his marriage with Bela and her family background before his associates. Thus, he is a captive of dualism.

Qanber Ali stepped in politics and in the field of journalism. Simultaneously, he started publishing three magazines "Red Rose", Gul-e-Surkh and Lal Gulab in English, Urdu and Hindi respectively. A forum "Red Rose" was established and the residential building called as "Lal Kothi" by the people, became the centre and the head-quarter of all its activities. When a group of chanter got information about Qanber's situation, they came closer
to this young progressive man in a way that he had to marry with their daughter, Bela Rani. The marriage was performed secretly. After the marriage, Bela changed the atmosphere of Lal Kothi and became completely dominating over her husband. At first, she entraps Qanber Ali for the marriage and then at the time of Nikah she insists that he should register the house her name saying:

........I have listened a lot about revolution and so on, all bloody nonsense. You would not have faith in private property but like my maternal grand-mother Ja'fer Bandi and mother Allah Jalai alias Chameli, I am not ready to evacuate the palace on one-minute notice.43

She draws the picture of her childhood very honestly before Qanber Ali:

........My mother used to take me after she dressed me a frock embossed with light-brocade lace. That was the only frock which I had to wear on special occasions. She covered my head with a brocade cap, darkened my eyes with soot. We always used to sit near the pile of shoes at the door. She made me stand for singing. Ladies of the house sometimes listened to my songs with keen interest and at other times scolded me very badly and said don't make a fuss, let us talk. I went into my mother's lap with panic. We used to have food with servants. My mother and grand-mother also brought Sheermal and Kabab covering with their shawls to the house. And outside the house my father remained busy in mimicking different animal voices.44

Naturally, why would not Qanber Ali be sympathetic towards her after listening to such words and why would not he make efforts to save her from such environment and provide her a dignified life.
In this novel, Chandni Begum is a powerful character. After the death of her mother, she comes as a helpless person to "Red Rose" with a fancied hope that Qanber Ali may tie the knot. However, when she comes to know that he has already married, she drops her plan to stay there and takes refuge in Teen Katori House as a maid with the help of Bela. Here, she lives a very hard life by sewing and doing other chores of the house. Nevertheless, she does not reveal her identity or her family's relationship with that of Qanber's. She gets an opportunity to live a happy and prosperous life by marrying Vikky. However, when she senses a kind of plot to entrap her, she comes back to "Red Rose" where an incident occurs turning it into debris.

In this way, Chandni Begum is an ideal or a dream which can only be imagined in the contemporary world. This is the girl known as Chandni Begum whose entire life is surrounded by misery and hardship. This is not only a paradox but an imaginary reality standing against the world as light and force. This does not disappear with Chandni Begum's physical end but remains as it is immortal. In this world, some people welcome this light, for instance, Vikky and Safiyya. They are a personification of Chandni Begum. A long period after her death, she remains in Safiyya's unconscious. Safiyya thinks of her:

Who sent her here? An absurd girl,
Absurd life, Meaningless death, well, is death ever meaningful?
Who is she?
Bint-ul-Jabal i.e. a great pain, hardship, trials and tribulations
Bint-ul-Jabal i.e. a resonant echo
What kind of echo she was?
The voice of mountain range,
Innocence mountain girl, silent, intelligent, tolerant
And when she laughed, she kept laughing like children. How miserable and wretched she was! And how enduring and thankful she was!

St. Chandni, St. Moony, St. Moonies Convent, Dali Bagh.45

Thus, the writer has consolidated the character of Chandni Begum against the world and this is the reason that the story has not ended with her but presented honestly the existing realities before the world, as though, the world at hand is an absurd place where the people have to face uncertainties and vicissitudes of life at every moment. In this absurdity, however, Chandni Begum and like her, other characters create sensibility. Here, the writer appears as a moralist. And hence, she is a moralist and a philosopher as well.

No outstanding characters — men or women — can be found in this novel that can be attributed as the main protagonist. For this reason, it is very difficult to decide if the most important male character is Qanber Ali or Waqar Hussain. The same goes about the female characters, specifically Safiyya or Chandni Begum. In fact, Chandni had been betrothed to Qanber Ali but Waqar cherished her love in his heart till his last breath. On the other hand, Safiyya was in deep love with Qanber Ali but he died without giving proper attention to Safiyya and she continued to embrace his memory till her death. She could not enjoy marital life and died as an ascetic sorceress.
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