Chapter-4

PROGRESSIVE WRITERS’ ASSOCIATION: AIMS, OBJECTIVES, FOUNDERS, ASSOCIATES AND SYMPATHIZERS

One of the significant events in the history of modern Indian literature is the formation of Progressive Writers’ Association. It was an all India association and included in its ranks writers of major India’s languages. But in no other language did it exert so great an influence as it did in Urdu and the writers, who joined this Association or sympathized with its aims, made new contributions of enduring value to the stock of Urdu literature. Prior to PWA the only other All India Literary Association was the Indian chapter of PEN started by Sophia Wadia (1901-91) in 1934 along with the British playwright Hermon Ould (1886-1957) whose one act play The Discovery was a text in many Indian universities for a long time. K.M. Munshi and Kaka Saheb Kalelkar also started an Indian Literary Association1 in the same year, known as Bhartiya Sahitaya Parishad but it actually started working in April 1936.

Before the establishment of the Progressive Writers’ Association it is important to note that the situation was changing in India. Young and conscious writers had diverted their pen from sentimental and religious to social problems. This association was the culmination of moods, efforts and initiatives that began in 1930s and expressed in Angare (Embers). Angare was a collection of ten works by Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Ahmad Ali and Mahmuduzzafar, written in Urdu and extremely radical in temperament. It was published in Lucknow in December 1932.

Angare was the first ferocious attack on society. It was a declaration of war by the youth of middle class against the prevailing social, political and religious institutions.2 All the writers of Angare except Ahmad Ali were communists. The publication of this book raised an uproar among the people. The religious and civil circles strongly reacted to the publication of Angare.

---

Newspapers and journals published angry editorials and articles denouncing the book. The Hindustan Times dated 21 February 1933, carried an article entitled 'Urdu Pamphlet Denounced: Shias Gravely Upset', quoting a resolution passed by the Central Standing Committee of All India Conference, Lucknow, which declared that "the meeting strongly condemned the filthy pamphlet called Angare, which had wounded the feelings of the entire Muslim community by ridiculing God and his Prophets and which was extremely objectionable from the standpoints both of religion and morality. The Committee further strongly urged upon the attention of the UP Government that the book be at once proscribed". Consequently the book was banned by the Government of United Provinces under section 295A of Indian Penal Code on 15th March, 1933. Nearly all the stories included in the book-contained account of intimate sexual relationships which even today would shock the readers. There were satirical attacks not only upon religious leaders but on religion. In one story God himself was portrayed in scathing and sarcastic terms. Because Angare was seen as a challenge to the accepted literary values, its appearance was regarded as a landmark in the history of Urdu literature.4

There was widespread resentment against the authors. Funds were collected for the prosecution of the authors and the punishment sought for the authors included 'stoning to death' and 'hanging by neck'. Moulvis issued fatwas against the book and the authors5. But the authors were not at all discouraged. In reply to this widespread resentment they issued a statement, drafted by Mahmuduzzafar, which was published in The Leader (Allahabad) dated 5 April, 1933 under the title, 'In Defence of Angare, Shall We Submit to Gagging?' It reads:

Some five months back four young authors, among them a young woman, brought out a collection of short stories in Urdu under the title Angare. I happened to be one of the contributors to this collection. This book at once raised a storm in Muslim circles. It was said to be a shamless attack on Islam and everything decent in society. The book has already been proscribed by UP Government under section 295 A of the IPC.

3 Ibid., p. 448.
5 Sabana Mahmud, op. cit., p. 449.
It was even said that the funds are being collected to start the prosecution of the authors. Shall we submit to such gagging?

That is the question I wish to raise here. Referring to the contents of the book itself, the stories of my friend, Sajjad Zaheer are concerned chiefly with the criticism and a satire of the current Muslim conceptions, life and practices. His attack is directed primarily against the intolerable theological burden that is imposed from childhood on the average Muslim in this country.... Ahmad Ali essays into the realms of poverty, material, spiritual and physical, especially the poverty of Muslim women and imagination and admirable boldness breaks through the veils of convention to expose the stark reality. Rashid Jahan, who is also a doctor of medicine drawing on her practical experience, also portrays boldly the ghastly plight of the women behind the purdah. My own single contribution is an attack on the vanity of man, which seeks to find an outlet on the expense of the weak and defenceless womanhood. No body can deny the truthfulness of those portraits.... The authors of the book do not wish to make any apology for it. They leave it to float or sink of itself. They are not afraid of the consequences of having launched it.... We hope that others will not be discouraged. Our practical proposal is the formation immediately of a League of Progressive Authors, which should bring forth similar collections from time to time, both in English and the various vernaculars of our country. We appeal to all those who were interested in this idea to get in touch with us.6

In this statement, the authors announced the idea of forming a League of Progressive Authors and the publication of Angare in 1932 paved the way for the formation of Progressive Writers’ Association in 1936.

The practical move towards the formation of Progressive Writers’ Association was made in Nanking Restaurant, on Denmark street, London in November 1935. A number of Indian students and intellectuals of different political views, ranging from radical socialist nationalism (of which Jawaharlal Nehru was the chief representative), to the communism of Sajjad Zaheer, Jyoti Ghosh, Pramod Sen Gupta and M.D Tasir, participated.


Radical changes are taking place in Indian society. Fixed ideas and old beliefs, social and political institutions are being challenged. Out of the present turmoil and conflict a new

6 *The leader*, April 5, 1933, Allahabad, p. 9 (The full text is reprinted in Sabana Mahmud, ‘Angare and the Founding of the Progressive Writers’ Association’).
society is arising. The spirit of reaction, however, though moribund and doomed to ultimate decay, is still operative and making desperate efforts to prolong itself.

It is the duty of Indian writers to give expression to the changes taking place in Indian life and to assist the spirit of progress in the country. Indian literature, since the breakdown of classical culture, has had the fatal tendency to escape from the actualities of life. It has tried to find a refuge from reality in spiritualism and idealism. The result has been that it has produced a rigid formalism and a banal and perverse ideology. Witness the mystical, devotional obsession of our literature, its furtive and sentimental attitude towards sex, its emotional exhibitionism and its almost total lack of rationality. Such literature was produced particularly during the past two centuries, one of the unhappiest periods of our history. A period of disintegrating feudalism and of acute misery and degradation for the Indian people as a whole.

It is the object of our association to rescue literature and other arts from the priestly, academic and decadent classes in whose hands they have degenerated so long; to bring the arts into the closest touch with people and to make them the vital organs which will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future.

While claiming to be the inheritors of the best tradition of Indian civilization, we shall criticize it ruthlessly in all its political, economic and cultural aspects, the spirit of reaction in our country and we shall foster through interpretive and creative work (with both native and foreign resources) every thing that will lead our country to the new life for which it is striving. We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today- the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation, so that it may help us to understand these problems and through such understanding help us to act.7

Keeping the above-mentioned aims in view, the following resolutions were passed.

1. The establishment of organizations of writers to correspond to the various linguistic zones of India and coordination among organizations by holding conferences, publishing of magazines, pamphlets etc;
2. To co-operate with those literary organizations whose aims do not conflict with basic aims of the association;
3. To produce and to translate literature of progressive nature and of high technical standards;
4. To strive for the acceptance of a common language (Hindustani and a common script (Indo-Roman) for India.

5. To protect the interests of authors; to help authors who require and deserve assistance for the publication of their work;
6. To fight for the right of free expression of thoughts and opinions.  

The Hindi version of this Manifesto was published in the issue of Hans edited by Munshi Premchand in October 1935.

The responsibility to establish an organization in limited time with such above-mentioned ambitious aims was discharged primarily by Sajjad Zaheer and a number of his associates. Sajjad Zaheer was a communist at heart and had no secret views. His colleagues too were either already communists or were shortly afterwards to become communists. Their main concern was to promote the communist and socialist views in literature through PWA. In 1930, a movement among Muslims influenced by socialist views was started in NWFP and joined forces with Indian National Congress (INC). This was known as ‘Red Shirt Movement’ because its associates wore red shirts and marched with banner bearing the symbol of crossed banner and sickle with slogans ‘Workers and peasants of the world unite’ and their objectives were to ‘win freedom for country’ and ‘to feed the hungry and clothe the naked’. Within a couple of weeks it became evident that remarkably wide support for the aims of the projected Association would be forthcoming. In a short span of time some of the most prominent writers of verse, prose, fiction and literary criticism declared their sympathies for the movement. They were not only supporters of the left but also Congress supporters of predominantly Gandhian outlook. People, who were sympathetic to national sentiment, had held aloof even from Congress, supported the move with no explicit political views.

A few days before the formation of PWA in India, a large gathering of Indians, young and old, merchants, doctors, lawyers, as well as students, men and women, at the symposium, was organized by the Indian PWA on 11th April in London. The gathering discussed the problems of communalism.

---

9 Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian literature*, p. 87.
10 Sabana Mahmud, *op. cit.,* p. 455.
in India from different points of view. Members from the majlis of Oxford and Cambridge had made a special trip to London to take part in that discussion. Although the speakers dealt with different aspects, yet there was a striking unanimity on three major issues, namely that the whole communal problem had at its root, economic motives; that the vested interests, including the government. They played a considerable part in intensifying the tension to achieve their own ends; and that the only way out of the present impasse lay through sterilizing the dangerous virus of communalism by shifting the emphasis from political controversy to the economic sphere. The speeches of V.K. Krishan Menon, Mulk Raj Anand, Som Nath Chibb, Pramod Sen and V.J. Rao had the lucidity and clarity of thought. All of them belonged to young India-India that was earnest and sincere.

Owing to the wishes expressed by several speakers, the Secretary of Indian Progressive Writers’ Association, decided to publish a pamphlet outlining the history and nature of the communal problem in India with a view to placing the issue in its proper perspective. Incidentally, when PWA was set up in India, the Association in England published its first booklet entitled, “New Indian Literature”. In not more than 22 pages, the editor had given the readers plenty of matter to digest. Written in admirable style by young Indians, it had notes on Urdu literature by M.D. Tasir, Prologue for a positive attitude to life by Mulk Raj Anand, and an extract from a novel in progress by Raja Rao. Dr K.S. Shelvankar had in his own inimitable language, in not more than 20 words, given a thought provoking review of Mr Subash Bose’s Indian Struggle.

In India, the formation of PWA was gaining much sympathy. Pandit Amarnath Jha, then Vice Chancellor of University of Allahabad and Dr. Tara Chand, then Secretary of semi-official Hindustani Academy expressed their sympathy apart from most other prominent writers of verse, prose, fiction and literary criticism. Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Mahmuduzzafar, Ahmad Ali were a great force behind the PWA. Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander, Ali Sardar Jafri, Maqdoom Moinuddeen, Razia Sajjad

---

13 Ibid., p.6.
14 Ibid., p. 6.
15 Ralph Russell, How Not to Write..., p. 72.
Zaheer, Niaz Hyder and Kaifi Azmi were the supporters of PWA and set a new trend of producing powerful and useful literature. To produce a complete list of the associate writers is hardly possible. Rajinder Singh Bedi, Upender Nath Ashk, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Abdul Sattar, Ahmad Nadim Qasmi, Suhail Azimabadi were actively associated with PWA. Among the poets who were associated with PWA were Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Josh Malihabadi, Firaq, Sahir Ludhianvi. Hasrat Mohani had already started writing against the foreign government.

It was on April 13, 1936 that a dream of the progressive writers came true. Munshi Premchand presided over the All India Progressive Writers’ Association at Rafah-Am Club, Lucknow. It was the scene of a gathering of writers from various parts of India who came there to discuss the progressive viewpoints towards literature. The PWA, which promoted this conference, aimed at establishing organizations of writers corresponding to the linguistic zones of India and bringing about a closer contact with the writers of different provinces who held a similar standpoint. They also aimed at producing and translating literature of a progressive nature, and above all to fight for the liberty of expression of writers in all parts of India.

In the midst of a hall hung with slogans such as “Literature must serve the people”, “Freedom of thought and expression” and “Free education for all”, Munshi Premchand delivered his Presidential address to the writers present. In the course of his speech, unique both in language and thought, Munshi Premchand emphasized, “Literature was no longer the mere effort to improve language but the expression of a true idea and must have the power of moulding the mind of man. It must be critical of contemporary life and tackle the realities of our day-to-day existence instead of frittering itself away in futile romanticism. If literature talks only of amusement and sex, and strikes only a note of poverty, despair and hopelessness, it reflects the pathological and alarming state of the nation’s mind”.16

In perfect Hindi, Munshi Premchand expressed the view that in the writing of a story the author must be direct, must study the psychology of his people and create living characters so that the story could be read like a biography of human beings and not as a series of imaginary pen pictures. He

16 The Tribune, April 15, 1936, p.13.
emphasized that literature was in fact the psychological autobiography of the writer. His definition of beauty as the harmony of elements for which our soul craves, was the central point of the latter part of his speech. “You should try to find out beauty of woman in her hardships, problems and struggle, not in dyed lips and threaded eyebrows. If you don’t see beauty in a poor woman who is feeding her child sitting on farm-boundary then, it is the fault of your narrow sightedness”.17... A true artist who strives after this beauty can not be affected by the ugliness of social degradation, economic poverty and political slavery in the society around us. The outlook of PWA is influenced by the world around it, so much so that in our lives today, “Literature can no longer be considered as mere amusement but according to our present standards, literature must have thought, it must have the feelings for liberty, and appreciation of beauty, and impulse towards social reconstruction, the power to reflect the hard realities of life, in short, we want a literature which may produce in us movement, change and restlessness.”18

“Literature that is being produced today is mostly of stoical, mystical and romantic type which is doing more harm than good. There is a great need for the evolution of the popular literature, which is in close contact with the naked realities of life, which is free from the dreamy unreal haze of this pure romanticism and which stirs in us our dormant energies to action, to conscious realization of our backwardness, helplessness, and national humiliation.”19 Thus declared Munshi Premchand, presiding over the First All India PWA Conference held in Rafah-Am Club, Lucknow, where authors, novelists, poets, editors and journalists from all over India gathered. Munshi Premchand also stressed that the power of pen was great and it was the duty of all authors not to misuse it but to rebel against the tyranny of form and figure of speech of existing standards of literature and to resurrect our dead literature into something more vibrant, truthful and inspiring to progress.

After his Presidential address a number of resolutions were discussed and adopted. The first among them was for the adoption of a manifesto, which laid down the aims and objects of the formation of PWA. Another

18 The Tribune, April 15, 1936, p. 13.
19 Ibid., p. 13.
resolution adopted protested "against the restrictions placed by the Government on the freedom of thought and expression by promulgating repressive Press Laws, the Custom Act, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act and in this way arbitrarily suppressing hundreds of journals and magazines, proscribing progressive literature and stopping entry into this country of a large part of radical literature from foreign countries." This resolution was moved by R.S Pandit.20

This resolution included the assertion of the right of writer's freedom of thought and expression. The conference called upon the writers of India to beware of the impending dangers of imperialist war, it requested the Indian University authorities to give liberty of expression to students, by way of organizing journals and associations, and it protested against the restriction on higher education as contemplated by the Sapru Committee Report.

Besides the young writers, who addressed the conference, was Mrs Kamla Devi Chattopadhaya. The veteran nationalist writer Maulana Hasrat Mohani participated in the discussion.21 Sajjad Zaheer wrote about his experience in Roshnai that he was very much worried because of the shortage of funds with PWA, and to avoid expenditure on the boarding and lodging of delegates, arrangements were made with friends and relatives. Munshi Premchand stayed with him. But after its formal formation he was relaxed.22

Sajjad Zaheer was appointed as General Secretary of PWA and Bisham Dev and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas were appointed as Joint Secretaries. Mama Warerkar was the treasurer. After the formal establishment of PWA the prime task was to raise funds through membership subscriptions and donations etc. Any writer who accepted the aims and objects of the association was eligible for membership. The admission fee was fixed Rs. 1 and subscription for membership was Rs. 2 p. a.23

In the Punjab, Mian Iftikhar-ud-deen, a wealthy Punjab landlord and prominent progressive who later became popular as the owner of the

20 The Tribune, April 14, 1936, p. 16.
21 The Tribune, April 15, 1936, p. 13.
Pakistan Times, became helpful in getting the PWA organized in Punjab. In Aligarh, Mohammad Ashraf, Khwaja Gulam Syaddin, Bashiruddeen, Manjoor Hussain and Prof. Mohammed Zeb were staunch nationalists and socialists.

They were the supporters of manifesto of PWA in Aligarh and a branch of PWA was organized in Muslim University in 1936, whose first meeting was held at the house of Manjoor Hussain. Dr Mohammad Ashraf was the chief architect. Ali Sardar Jafri read an article, 'Zadeed Adab Aur Naujawanon Ke Rujhanat' Abdul Alim who was a the lecturer in Arabic was also present in the meeting. When in April 1936, the first All India PWA conference was held, Dr. Abdul Alim participated in it on behalf of Aligarh unit of PWA.

Sabat Hasan organized the branch of PWA in Hyderabad with the support of Abdul Gaffar. It was on the pattern of 'London manifesto' which was sent to them. Akhtar Hussain Raipuri set up a unit of PWA at Delhi. In Bombay, the progressive writers used to meet at the "silverfish".

By 1936 a few Hindi writers apart from Premchand declared their support for the PWA though quite a number of writers had expressed sympathy for the movement. It was amongst Urdu writers that the most striking headway was made. Mohammad Iqbal was contacted and his active sympathy cannot be gained because of his untimely death (on 20 April 1938).

The reason behind the widespread support to PWA and its rapid expansion was its aim of harnessing literature to social and political aims. Though, by 1920s themes of revolt against imperialism, of nationalism, of radical social reform had become common in literature but PWA represented the continuation and development of such themes in a more vibrant way. It took support of the greatest ghazal singer, Hasrat Mohani, a fiery worker for India's complete independence, Josh Malihabadi, the self-styled, 'poet of Revolution' and Firaq Gorakhpuri, who was equally eminent in Hindi and Urdu. In literary criticism, Abdul Haq, secretary of society for advancement of Urdu Anjuman Taraqui-i-Urdu supported the new movement.

The PWA made the most solid gains in Hindi-Urdu speaking areas where in 1937, 1938 and 1939 it held joint conference of Hindi and Urdu.

---

25 Ibid. pp. 240-241
27 Ralph Russell, How Not To Write..., p. 78.
writers. The earlier aloofness of Hindi writers was overcome to some extent. In 1938, prominent Hindi poet, Maithili Sharan Gupta attended the Allahabad Conference and read a poem. Jawaharlal Nehru also attended Allahabad Conference and spoke at this conference. The movement scored greater triumph when Sajjad Zaheer succeeded in getting a declaration of support and message to the conference from Rabindera Nath Tagore, which showed his changed outlook regarding PWM. It reads: "To live in seclusion has become second nature to me but it is a fact that the writer who holds himself aloof from society cannot get to know mankind. Remaining aloof, the writer deprives himself of the experience, which comes from mingling with a number of people. To know and understand society, and to show the path to progress, it is essential that we keep our finger on the pulse of society and listen to the beating of its heart. This is only possible when our sympathies are with humanity, and when we share its sorrow. New writers must mix with men and recognize that if they live in seclusion as I do they will not achieve their aims. I understand now that in living apart from society so long I have committed a grave mistake... This understanding burns in my heart like a lamp and no argument can extinguish it."

To see the growing popularity of PWA, the British took a serious note of its activities and tried to find out the originators of this association. J.M. Ewart, D.I.B, Home Department reported that "the membership is drawn largely from the suspecting or unsuspecting friends of a few persons such as S.S. Zaheer (the son of an ex chief Judge of the Oudh, Chief Court), Zainul Abedin Ahmad (the son of a D.I.G. of police in Sind) or Pramod Rajan Sen Gupta, son of the public Prosecutor, Krishnagar, Bengal." J.M Ewart suggested that " PWA is rather more than it advertises itself to be and should be approached with caution by people who do not wish to be involved in extremist left wing politics. The association is a typical example of the methods of infiltration now being pursued by communists in all countries in accordance with the current policy of Comintern." In order to curb the

28 Ibid., p. 79.
29 Ibid., p. 80.
30 Home Political Ho. 7/9/36 NAI, P.2 (The original has been reproduced in Appendix-B, pp. 217-221).
31 Ibid., p. 5.
activities of Association and stop its expansion, the Secretary to Govt. of India, Home Department, warned all local Governments on 28th August 1936.

The full text of the letter reads:

I am desired to address you in connection with an organization known as the Indian Progressive Writers' Association. This Association held its first conference at Lucknow simultaneously with the annual session of Indian National Congress in April 1936. Since then S.S Zaheer, the General Secretary and the other members of the executive committee have been active in forming local branches of the Association and such branches are known to exist in Aligarh, Allahabad, Andhra, Calcutta, Hyderabad, (Deccan) Poona and the Punjab. The Association also has contacts in a number of other education centers.

2. This association owes its origin to an association of the same name formed in London about a year ago. The London Association is closely connected with and to a great extent controlled by the British section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. S.S Zaheer, the secretary of the association in India, was one of the signatories to the original manifesto defining the aims of the association when it was first started in London.

3. The proclaimed aims of the association are comparatively innocuous and suggest that it concerns itself solely with the organization of journalists and writers and the promotion of interest in literature of a progressive nature. Its inspiration, however, comes from and it has close contacts with organizations and individuals who are in some cases avowed and active Communists and in others advocates of policies akin to those of the communists. There is a reason to believe that the association has already attracted interest and some support from persons of an intellectual type who are unlikely to have any sympathy with communism or other revolutionary theories. The association is however, a typical example of the methods now being pursued by communists in all countries in accordance with the current policy of the communist International. This method is, for a few convinced and trained communists, to establish contacts with all sorts of organizations and societies having interests in intellectual, cultural and social subjects with the object of spreading communistic ideas and gaining converts. Though it is not suggested that the Indian Progressive Writers' Association as a body is necessarily subversive or revolutionary organization, it is desirable for the reasons given that its development should be watched with some suspicion and that it should be approached with caution by individuals who do not wish to be involved in extremist left wing politics. I am desired to suggest, therefore, that suitable opportunities may be taken to convey about this association to journalists, educationalists and others who might be attracted by its ostensible programme.32

---

32 Ibid., pp.6-11.
The PWA continued its activities with vigour and zeal. The Calcutta Conference in 1938 opened with the Rabinder Nath's address and adopted a new constitution embodying the plans for a better and more regular organization. It resolved to issue a quarterly journal from Lucknow with the general secretary Abdul Alim as ex officio-editor, and an editorial Board consisting of representatives of all-important languages of India. The journal entitled New Indian Literature came out in 1939 and discontinued after two issues due to commencement of Second World War. The other publications of the PWA were: Parichaya, (Bengali), Naya Sahitya (Hindi) and Abhudaya (Telugu).33

The movement was revived again in 1942 when illegal communist party decided to extend its support for the war after much internal discussion and continued till 1946-47. But the vigorous anti-communist move launched by its one time Congress allies in 1946-47 and ultra left line, which the communist party itself adopted, radically changed the conditions in which the PWA had to work.34

Ismat Chughtai opined that her proximity with the communist party brought to her the knowledge of class differences and sectarianism. But when her stories were branded obscene and when the policy of party rigidly stipulated that progressive literature was that which was written about peasants and labourers, she disagreed.35 The progressive movement started dispersing.

The PWM was the target of criticism from the very beginning. The literature, created under its influence, was much hard to digest by conservatives and slow pacers. The critics objected to its linguistic patterns and declared that literature as fake and fabricated. They called PWA-less literary and more political and issued an appeal that pure and original writers should abstain themselves from it. They observed that Progressive Writers were seeking truth in ideology of Marx and thinking about Indian societies in terms of foreign societies and their ideals. The ideas of PWA had their roots

33 Directory of Organisations in India, p. 243.
34 Ralph Russell, How Not to Write..., pp. 80-81.
35 Sukrita Paul Kumar, op. cit., p. 131.
in alien lands. But the writers of progressive group continued to write. Their contribution to enlarge the range of themes especially gender-issues and destruction of the social taboos with the artistic skills, had a remarkable value in Urdu world as well as in the history of Indian society.

II

Biographical and literary sketches of eminent Progressive Writers

Sajjad Zaheer

Sajjad Zaheer (1905-1973) – full name was Sayyaj Sajjad Zaheer, popularly known as Banney Bhai, was born on November 5, 1905 at Golaganj in Lucknow (now known as Uttar Pradesh) in a well-to-do family. He received his higher education at Oxford University. During his stay in London as a student, he was exposed to Marxism. He met several leftist writers, including Ralph Fox (1900-1937) whose The Novel and the People became popular among those who were influenced by Marxian ideology. During his conversation with Fox, the idea of a Progressive Writers’ Association was mooted. The intellectual and literary development of Sajjad Zaheer had started among the elites of London. He was inspired by the revolutionaries like Shyam-ji Krishan Verma, Vinayak Damaodar Savarkar and Madam Bhika ji Cama who had already been challenging the British Empire and had helped in founding the ‘Gadar Party’.

He returned to India in 1931 when Communism was gaining ground in political circles. The reflection was in Angare (1932) a most sensational and significant work in Indian literature. This book was a collection of ten stories in Urdu. Sajjad Zaheer’s five stories included in the book were Nind Nahin Aati, Jannat Ki Basarat, Garmion Ki Ek Raat, Dulari and Phir Yeh Hangama. Sajjad Zaheer’s two stories Nind Nahin Aati and Jannat Ki Basarat were extremely provocative and offensive to the sensibilities of the devout. In the first story the protagonist meets a prostitute who makes sacrilegious remarks to God and in the second a hypocritical priest falls asleep over a copy of holy

38 Sajjad Zaheer, Roshni Ka Safar (ed.) Naresh Nadim (Hindi), New Delhi, 1994, p.3.
book and dreams of making love to a houri in paradise. His third story is about a clerk in Government office and his needs and poverty. In Phir Yeh Hangama he describes various unrelated incidents. The other stories included in the book were equally provocative and critical of middle class attitude to words sex and religion. Khalil-ur-Rahman, a critic opined that youthful enthusiasm, lack of moderation, boldness and rebelliousness pervaded in these stories. Although it created an uproar in the society and many scholars felt that it crossed the limits of moderation yet it gave momentum to the formation of PWA and explored new frontiers of man-woman relations and behaviour which were considered totally forbidden. It opened the floodgate to Marxist and Freudian ideas and imitation of James Joyce.

Sajjad Zaheer left for London and his co-writer Rashid Jahan, a Muslim woman, had to face the ire of reactionaries, and a fatwa was issued against her in a mosque. Under pressure from religious leaders, the UP Government banned the book. Before the formation of PWA in India, a meeting was held in Paris in June 1935. It was an International Congress of writers, organized by Andre Gide, Henry Barhouse, Romain Rolland and Andre Malraux. Most of the participants had some connection with India. Gide was the translator of Tagore’s Gitanjali; Barhouse knew M.N. Roy, Rolland wrote books on Ramakrishna and Vivekanand and was associated with Tagore and Gandhi. Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand were the two Indian writers present in the meeting attended by a number of European writers.

This Conference encouraged Sajjad Zaheer to move towards his mission to form the Progressive Writers' Association in India. A draft manifesto was prepared by Mulk Raj Anand. Its edited version was published in Left Review (London) in February 1936 and a revised version in Hindi appeared in the issue of Hans edited by Munshi Premchand in October 1936. During these days Sajjad Zaheer had finished his studies in London and was busy in writing his novel London Ki Ek Raat. It was published in 1937. Zaheer

---

39 Sisir Kumar Das, op. cit., p. 274.
40 Ibid., p. 274.
41 Sisir Kumar Das, op. cit., p. 87.
had bitter taste of the British subordination when he was in London. The insulting behaviour of the British towards Indian immigrants always reminded them of being a slave country. In this novel Sajjad Zaheer depicted the deplorable condition of India under imperialism and the obstacles in the way of Indian struggle for freedom. The hero said, “in a slave country where 80 percent population is hungry, where the epidemics are so frequently spread that in the whole country hardly any healthy face is seen, where education is limited, where the faces of children are like dry flowers, where hunger, empty stomachs, sorrows are clearly visible on the faces of people, where sluggishness, effortlessness and hatred is evident, in these circumstances, the search for romantic gifts would be like a dream”.42

In November 1935, a number of Indian students and intellectuals of radical temperament gathered and drafted the original manifesto and made plans to establish the PWA in India. Sajjad Zaheer returned to India and landed in Bombay, spent only a few days and then went straight to Allahabad where his parents were living at that time. He remained in regular correspondence with many Indian intellectuals from 1930 onwards. The next step was to seek support of writers and intellectuals who had already become established on the Indian cultural scene and if possible to get them sign the draft of manifesto of the movement.43 It was due to Sajjad Zaheer’s efforts that he succeeded in getting the support of great personalities like Munshi Premchand, Mohammad Iqbal, Rabinder Nath Tagore and even Jawaharlal Nehru. Zaheer’s hopes were fulfilled when in April 1936, the first conference of All India Progressive Writers’ Association was held in Lucknow. Munshi Premchand delivered the Presidential address. Sajjad Zaheer became the General Secretary of the association. He sent the manifesto to many young writers of other states to establish its branches throughout India. His mission bore fruit and branches were opened in Aligarh, Lahore, Bombay, Hyderabad and Punjab.

Sajjad Zaheer was a staunch communist. He was editor of Chingari published from Saharanpur; it was an Urdu monthly magazine containing socialist and Marxist ideas. (The Photocopy of the cover page of this

43 Ralph Russell, How Not to write..., p. 71.
بنیادستان پژوهشی دکتر امیررستم شریعت‌دشت

بنیگلای

محفظه

مجله‌ی ثبت

سال ۱۳۵۹

مجله‌ی ثبت

سال ۱۳۵۹
موہب روستی! ریاست کے طالب علموں کو اور سوسائٹی پیرل میں جانے کے لئے ہم بہت بات کہ دیں ہیں۔

سبھی کو ہم اسٹیٹس اور خدمات میں تعلیمی فیز میں دیکھنے کا موقع دیں گے۔

یہ کہا ہے کہ یہ پروپر فیز کی اسٹیٹس کے لئے ہم دوسرے سال کے لئے شروع کریں گے۔

دنیا بھر میں مدراسس کے طور پر مہربانی کی سہولتیں ممکنہ ہیں۔ فیز کی انجام دہندہ ہونے والی مرحلہ کی براعظم کی ضرورت ہے۔

ایک مبتلا مدارس کے نوازندے منہ کے لئے جاپانی جنگی کاؤنٹی کے ساتھ کے چند شاہرے نے مدارس میں مدد کی۔

ایک روز میں کئی مدارس کے مقام پر کھلا ہو رہے ہیں۔ ۔ زمین کی سرحدیں اور جریان کے ساتھ متعارف ہونے لگے ہیں۔

امہا ان پریس پریمیئر کا کریم۔

بیکھا ہے کہ یہ عمل دابض کے دامن میں واقع ہے۔

آپ کا خالق کا خصوصی ہے جسنوں نے بات کی کپتان کے دامن میں واقع ہے۔

چڑی مفت سے ہی اہم ہے جسے بات کی کریم نے بات کی میں دوبنے دیکھا ہے۔

جب کہ کسی کا کچھ بھی ہے تو کپڑے کے پھر بھی بات کی کے دوبنے دیکھا ہے۔

جب کہ سچھداسی کے کے کریم نے بات کی کے دوبنے دیکھا ہے۔

امہا
It was banned by the British Government because the British Government in India was against the development of communism. He was sent to jail three times for his instigating speeches against foreign Government. A collection of his letters written to his wife from jail, *Naqush-i-Zindan* was published in 1942. His book *Roshnai* is a detailed account of the formation of Progressive Writers' Movement. He wrote this book after independence while he was in Pakistani jail. He was entangled in Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case as General Secretary of Communist Party in Pakistan. He was not given the citizenship of Pakistan even after completion of punishment. Therefore, he came back to India and reorganized the PWA. He participated in the first Afro-Asian Writer's Conference at Tashkent in 1958. Since 1959 he remained the Chief Editor of the weekly newspaper *Awami Daur*. This great literary personality died of heart attack in Russia in 1973. Though he wrote less but it is of high standard. He wrote some poems, which were published under the title *Pighla Neelam*. His writings are the mirror of contemporary society and a valuable heritage of the country.

**Rashid Jahan**

Rashid Jahan (1905-1952) was the eldest of the five daughters of Sheikh Abdullah of Aligarh and Wahid Jahan Begam. She was born on 25th August 1905 in Delhi. Sheikh Abdulla was a Kashmiri convert to Islam. He attended Aligarh College and obtained a law degree. He established his practice near the college. He married the educated sister of one of his classmates from Delhi family of Mughal descent. At that time the plight of women particularly Muslim women was miserable which deeply hurt Abdulla. Abdulla was close to Sir Syed Ahmad but the latter had indifferent attitude to womens' education. Due to his own efforts in 1902 Sheikh Abdulla was appointed Secretary of the Womens' Education Section of All India Mohammedans' Education Conference. The main aim of the Womens' Education Section was to start a normal school to train teachers. Some were of the view that opening a primary school for daughters of Ashraf would be more useful and it would attract more patronage. The Aligarh authorities

---

allocated the job of raising funds for the school to Shiekh Abdulla. He proved to be a born fund-raiser and organizer.\footnote{46}{Gail Minault, \textit{Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India}, New Delhi, 1998 p. 123.}

In 1904, Sheikh started the Urdu monthly \textit{Khatoon} (Gentle Women) as the journal of the Women's Education Section. Its purpose was to advocate women's education with an emphasis on raising funds. The inside covers of the journal held the list of aims and need to promote women's education. (The photocopy of the title page is reproduced on facing page) Abdulla encouraged women to send letters and articles written in simple and correct Urdu.\footnote{47}{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 125.}

The Abdullas went to establish Aligarh Girls School in 1906 and by 1914 had raised sufficient money to build a hostel. Wahid Jahan devoted her energies to running the school and supervising the hostel. She started living in the hostel with girls. Her efforts bore fruit and the school attracted girls from other cities. She was known as Alabi with love and respect.\footnote{48}{Shahida Bano, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 65.} She used to write articles and gave occasional speeches and helped to organize women for their cause. She also raised a huge family (five daughters and two sons) and superintended the girl's school and women's college. She was a remarkable woman.

Rashid Jahan had the courage to mould public opinion. She seemed to have inherited this habit from her parents. She grew up in a home where all the women were involved in educational and literary pursuits. Her mother and aunts taught at Aligarh Girls School and wrote for Urdu magazines including their own journal \textit{Khatoon}. Due to the keenness of Abdullas in promoting female education, they educated their daughters generously and devotedly. According to Abdulla Begum's biography, at the time of opening of girls hostel those who took admissions were three daughters of Sheikh Abdullah, three were nieces of Mrs. Abdullah Begum, one was her friend's daughter and two others.\footnote{49}{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 67.} Rashid Jahan and her sisters dared to discard \textit{purdah}, but only after leaving Aligarh to go to college. They used to wear their burqas to the railway station in Aligarh, but once in the train and away

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Khatoon} (Gentle Women)
\end{itemize}
from home they took them off. Rashid Jahan and her sisters were pioneers in women’s professional development. She became a doctor and author, two of her sisters, Khatoon Jahan and Mumtaz Jahan served as principals of Aligarh Women’s college. Khatoon Jahan also served as principal of Shekhawat Memorial Girls College in Calcutta in mid 1930s, another sister Khurshid Jahan became an actress in films and television in Pakistan and wrote radio and television scripts.\textsuperscript{50}

Rashid Jahan was bold and outspoken from her early age. While she was studying science at Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, she distinguished herself as the author of short stories in Urdu and English. These were published in the college magazine. Her first story \textit{Salma} published in college magazine at the age of seventeen. \textsuperscript{51} In this story she depicted the social condition of average Muslim families in which girls were treated as fully wrapped items. Their consent was never obtained for marriage. \textsuperscript{52} Her radical ideas influenced her fellow students in lady Hardinge College (Delhi) which she joined in 1924.

There she organized students to run literary classes and free medical clinics for the poor women of the city. She could not give up her love for literature and she directed a drama \textit{Lalah Rukh} in English that became very successful. She completed her medical degree in 1929 with a specialization in obstetrics and gynaecology and joined the UP Medical Services, which took her back to Lucknow.\textsuperscript{53}

In Lucknow, the atmosphere was different, the glimpses of Hindustani society could be seen here. The youth attracted by communism were trying to discover new heights and objectives. Rashid Jahan was also in the same stream. On a call by Gandhi ji she began to wear \textit{khadi} for sometime but attracted by revolutionary activists, she started dreaming of armed struggle.\textsuperscript{54}

Soon she became acquainted with politically-conscious circle of young Urdu writers. They included Sajjad Zaheer, Justice Wazir Hasan’s son Ahmad Ali and Mahmuduzzafar, who was the son of Dr Saiduzzafar, Principal of

\textsuperscript{50} Gail Minault, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{51} Shahida Bano, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 141.
\textsuperscript{53} Gail Minault, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{54} Shahida Bano, \textit{op. cit.}, p.70.
Lucknow Medical College. These young progressives were devoted to both Indian nationalism and socialist revolution and their loyalties influenced their writings. They were highly influenced by Marxism. Rashid Jahan's writing acquired the similar direction. In addition, her medical profession brought her into close contact with women of all classes and her writings reflected her deep social concern and compassion for oppressed women.

The four friends decided to publish a collection of short stories reflecting the social and political concerns. The result was Angare (Sparks or Embers, 1932) a work that became the opening salvo of the Urdu Progressive Writers' Movement. It became very sensational as well as significant in the history of Urdu literature. Rashid Jahan contributed two stories Dilli Ki Sair (A Trip to Delhi) and Parde Ke Pichhe (Behind the Veil). In addition, she portrayed the plight of purdah women with great economy and irony. The book sparked off a bitter controversy among the conventional readers, some of whom were extremely infuriated. The stories were designed to challenge conservative and orthodox religious opinion. The authors sought to set a new trend in literature away from sentimental language and romantic situation by addressing the problems of social inequality, life of oppressed segments and women. This book was a direct attack upon social conservatism. Due to controversy, the book was banned by UP Government. Rashid Jahan's participation in the Angare identified her as a rebel and a symbol of emancipated woman among progressives. She faced the severest blow at the hands of conservatives. A fatwa was issued against Rashid Jahan Angare wali in Masjid.

Rashid Jahan and Mahumuduzzafar were married in 1934. She continued her medical practice throughout 1930s and 40s and simultaneously she wrote stories and radio plays. Her pre-occupation with medical practice and formation and organization of All India PWA took up much of her time. Her early death from cancer in 1952 meant that her literary output was necessarily small. She was a doctor and her intimate knowledge of the lives

55 Sisir Kumar Das, op. cit., p. 274
of Indian Muslim women is evident in her stories and one act plays.\textsuperscript{57} Her many stories appeared posthumously. Her stories are notable for their portrayal of social themes rather than for the development of character. The pitiable position of women in the family as well as in society and the attitude of people towards disease and medical care was a recurring theme of her stories. Lack of awareness made them indifferent to medical aid and believe in petty cures and superstitions. In her profession she encountered many unfortunate cases either of neglect or of superstitious reliance upon bogus cures.\textsuperscript{58} She exposed these problems in her small bulk of stories. According to Hajira Begum, "Rashid wrote twenty to twenty five stories during 1932-1952 and about twenty plays or dramas and numerous essays. \textit{Aurat} (1937) is a collection of seven dramas and \textit{Shota Jwala} is a collection of her short stories.

Though Rashid Jahan could not write in a big way but she will be remembered as the pioneer of a new trend in literature. Her role in \textit{Angare} and her pen pictures gave jolt to the Indian society by boldly portraying the position of women of middle class households.

\textbf{Saadat Hasan Manto}

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) was born on 11\textsuperscript{th} May 1912 at Samrala \textsuperscript{59} (Ludhiana). Saadat Hasan Manto got his early education at high School Amritsar. He had no interest in textbooks. He was fond of those books, which teachers regarded as objectionable and taboo for students. With great difficulty, he passed the matriculation in third attempt and in third division.\textsuperscript{60} He lost interest in studies and fell in bad company. During the period of his carefreeness, he came in contact with Bari Alig and Ata Mohmad Chiahti who had come to Amritsar to take up the editorship of the daily \textit{Siv}, and started \textit{Masawaat}, which had been founded by Ghagi Abdul Rahman\textsuperscript{61}.

\textsuperscript{58} Gail Minault, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 20.
Under the guidance of Bari Alig he translated Victor Hugo’s *The Last Days of the Condemned* in Urdu and published under the title *Aseer Ki Sarguzasht* (The Life story of a Prisoner). He also translated some stories of Gorky, which were subsequently published in Urdu. Encouraged by this success, Manto’s first original story *Tamasha* appeared anonymously in *Khulk* (magazine) in which Manto described the Martial Law of 1919 with the eyes of a child. In January 1936 he got a message from Nazir Ludhianvi, the proprietor of *Mussavar* weekly in Bombay to join him. To begin with he was appointed the editor of *Mussavar* on a salary of Rs 40 per month. In 1941 Manto left Bombay for Delhi where he joined All India Radio. He had colleagues like Upendra Nath Ashk, Krishan Chander, Devendra Satyarthi and N.M. Rashid. His talent blossomed. He wrote more than hundred plays that were broadcast over the All India Radio in one and a half year. At the same time, he devoted his attention towards story-writing and again returned to Bombay in 1942 and rejoined *Mussavar*. In Bombay, he was also associated with some of leading film studios, including Imperial Film Company, Bombay Talkies and Filmistan. He wrote over a dozen films including *Eight days*, *Chal Chal Re Naujawan* and *Mirza Ghallib*. Among these films *Mirza Ghallib* was a great success.


---

till his death on 18th January 1955. From 1947 to 1955 Manto wrote at a
great speed. The magazine editors exploited his talent to the fullest. During
this period he published twenty-two collections of short stories, one novel,
five collections of radio-plays beside a full length play. Many films produced in
India and Pakistan, were based on his stories.66

Manto had started his literary career by translating stories of
European and Russian masters. He was greatly influenced by Maupassant. He
was also influenced by Marxian thoughts and Gorki’s techniques. He was also
associated with progressives but his own predilections led him away. He drew
his characters from the lower strata of Indian society and were marked by
stark reality. Though he had written romantic and political stories but he is
best known for his creations of deserted, destitute and fallen women. He has
shown great sympathy for the neglected and rejected women, prostitutes of
the filthy lanes and slums. The touts and pimps rub shoulders with tarts
drawing customs into their coils. Manto unfolded their lives layer by layer
without hiding anything. He also unmasked those hypocrites who claimed to
be the custodians of society and doled out moral homilies but in reality were
the lords of oppression and solely responsible for the degradation of women.

Manto’s radically different view of literature shocked his
contemporaries. No Urdu writer was so clear in his approach as Manto.
Published in *Saqi* a noted Urdu magazine, his two stories *Kali salwar* and
*Dhuan* came under litigation during his attachment with All India Radio, Delhi.
He was acquitted for the first but a case was launched against *Dhuan*. Out of
Manto’s two hundred and fifty stories, six were declared obscene for which
Manto was hauled up before law time and again. Besides, above mentioned
two stories the other were *Boo* (Odour) *Khol Do, Thanda Gosht* and *Upper,
Niche aur Darmian* were dubbed as obscene. In a short life of forty three
years, Manto’s literary life spanned over twenty-two years and of which he
spent about ten years rotting in law courts in connection with his stories.
During this period, he faced great hardships and suffered physical as well as
financial loss67

p. ii.
While dragged to courts, time and again Manto’s patience was stretched to the utmost. On such occasions he seemed to favour reformist role of literature. He said, "If you cannot tolerate my stories, this means the times are intolerable. There is nothing wrong with my stories. The wrong which is ascribed to my stories is, in fact, the rot of the system,... if you are opposed to my literature then the best way is that you change the conditions that motivate such literature." In this statement Manto seemed to support the view that literature is a product of social condition and whatever the writer feels, that is created by his pen. In another defence Manto emphasized that the neem leaves are pungent but they cleanse the blood. So was the case with his harsh writings.

Manto pointed out that "A Veshya is a woman as well, but every woman is not a Veshya'. The people do not go to the prostitutes' quarters to offer namaz, they go there and buy the commodity they want to buy (Safed jhoot in Dastavez) Manto's concern is not the commodity but the pain, hardship, suffering, the hollowness and loneliness of the human soul who sells it. Manto seems to be a feminist when he laments over the attitude of many people for whom the very existence of women or the very nature of man-woman relationship is considered obscene. If this were so, why did God then create woman? Manto is equally critical of the man-made codes of morality, which are different for both. He hit the society that did not equate man and woman. "Why should I take off the Choli of society, it is naked as it is; of course, I am not interested in covering it up either because that is the job of tailors, not of writers"

Kali Salvar, Bapu Gopi Nath, Hatak, Boo, Foba Bai, Burhami Ladki etc are his best known stories. Besides Manto’s fiction on the partition of country and its painful impact on Indo-Pak-ethos is an invaluable treasure not only of Urdu literature but of history. He moved to Pakistan in January 1948 and his greatest work was produced in those last seven years of his life. At the same time he faced great financial and emotional hardship. Manto took stock of the tremendous and disturbing communal strife and tried to comprehend all its

69 Ibid., p. 16.
70 Ibid., p. 6.
dimensions and put them in proper perspective. He depicted the pathos resulting from partition where women were the worst victims of gruesome communal incidents.

One of his greatest stories on partition is *Toba Tek Singh* in which along with the transfer of population, assets, the division of lunatics also took place. But one Bishan Singh refused to go to India because he wanted to live in the town of *Toba Tek Singh*. He was left in no one's land where he died when morning broke. The *Dog of Titwai*, *The Last Salute* relates to the war in Kashmir after the partition. In *The Dutiful Daughter*, *The Mozai*, *Khol Do*, *Thanda Gosht* *Women in the Red Coat*, Manto portrayed the cruel realities of partition.

In addition to his finest and most powerful masterpieces on the tragic events of partition Manto's sketches were published soon after the division under the title *Syah Hashiye* (Black fringes). The sketches, some of them no longer than a line or two, bring out the enormity of the tragedy caused by partition. They are deeply ironic and often deeply moving. In one sketch two men bought a girl because she was from a different religion, but after they had used her, they were mortified to discover that they had been cheated as 'she belongs to the same religion as they do.' "I want my money refunded, one of them declares."71 After the publication of the book, *Syah Hashiye* Manto was subjected to harsh personal attacks, accused of bad taste, cynicism and even cruelty.

Manto was of the view that social oppression and economic deprivation were responsible for the plight of various characters of his stories. He never pretended to be a philosopher and preacher. He accepted sex as one of the basic and instinctual aspects of man's existence. He wrote to Ahmad Nadim Qasmi, "Life should be presented as it is, not as it was or will be or ought to be (1938)."72 Manto left for Pakistan but he could not find the green pastures he was awaiting. He was jailed and none protested, he had

---

gone mad and was left in mental hospital. He wanted to come to Bombay as he wished in one of his letters written to Ismat Chughtai.73

You know me as a story writer and the courts know me as an obscene writer. The Government sometime calls me a communist and sometime a great literary figure. Sometimes the doors of livelihood are closed on me and sometimes they are opened for me. Sometime I am declared a persona non grata and considered an outsider, sometimes when the powers that be are pleased, I am told that I can be an insider, I am still troubled as I have often been in the past over the question like: who am I? What is my status? What is my role in this country, which is regarded as the largest Islamic state? You may call my concern fictional, but for me the bitter reality is that in my country, which is called Pakistan and is very dear to me, I have yet to find a place. That is why my soul is restless. That is why I am sometimes in a lunatic asylum and sometimes in a hospital. I have still not found my rightful place in Pakistan....”74 Saadat Hasan Manto.

Saadat Hasan Manto has the distinction of the most maligned, controversial and most widely read short story writer of Urdu literature. He was one of the finest writers and craftsmen of our age. It is unfortunate that he could not get due place in his lifetime. He was praised less and denounced more. His ruthless manner of exposing the hollowness of middle class morality and its sordid aspects could not be digested. Manto always provoked contradictory responses. He was a difficult man to understand. He was touchy, introverted and egotistical that often made him lonely and depressed.

**Krishan Chander**

Krishan Chander (1913-1977) was born on 26th November 1913 in Bharatpur (Rajasthan). His father Dr. Gouri Shankar was employed in Bharatpur and after that in Punch. Krishan Chander received his primary education in Punch. After 1930 he went to Lahore for higher education and took admission in Forman Christian College. He passed his M.A in English from Punjab University in 193475.

Krishan Chander’s literary life started from Adbi Duniya Lahore where he was vehemently encouraged by Salah-ud-din. During those days he got

---

75 Sabir Dutt, *op. cit.* p. 309.
employed in All India Radio Lahore and within one year he was transferred to Delhi and then to Lucknow. Lucknow was the center of Progressive Writers’ Movement, so it was natural for him to associate with this movement but dissatisfied as he was with Government service he moved to Bombay. He was powerfully influenced by the PWM. He also made two films in which he presented his progressive views. There was no question of success at the box office since films of that nature were not popular. These were *Rakh* (Ashes) and *Dharti Ka Lal*. Though these can be appreciated today not due to those being hits but due to the theme. But it was waste of money and energy at that time.

Krishan Chander’s stature was the highest among progressive writers who dominated literature at that time. He used to attend the meetings of PWA regularly. Krishan Chander wrote novels, short stories, dramas, reports, essays, etc. But basically he is known as a short story writer. He was popular for his romantic flair in short stories, which is incomparable in Urdu literature. He practised law and did freelance writing in English and Urdu for the *Ambala Tribune* and the weekly *Northern Review*. Starting with humorous stories, he switched over to romantic ones. On the publication of *Tilsim-e- Khayal* readers discovered an astounding freshness, simplicity and a robust frankness in his short stories. He gave tongue to layman’s aspirations, dreams and sufferings. He became the most polished writer of progressive group. As the leading writer of progressive school he dedicated his art to show up the capitalist and the ruling classes in all their brutality and bestiality. His stories ranged from romantic, social and psychological themes to political, national and international themes. He enjoyed a larger readership in Pakistan than in India. In most of the Urdu journals his stories were appearing. His popularity can be estimated by an excerpt of Ismat’s portrait of Krishan Chander *Chirag Roshan Hain* (The Lamps are Lit). Ismat pointed out that his wife had very different nature. “Did you find her?” Krishan Chander asked. “I found her but we did not really meet. She disappeared like the heroine from Mahal”, Ismat said. “Is she angry with us”?

---


When Krishan left the room for a minute Mahendra (a Urdu writer) said furtively, "She is angry with the whole world." Why?" Because the world loves Krishan Ji."78

His popularity had caught the attention of the masses. In Pakistan his fame touched new heights. His works were translated into Russian and other languages. A journal in Pakistan conducted a public survey which proved that Krishan Chander was the best and most popular writer on the subcontinent.79

To present the suffering in reality he occasionally disappeared for days for spending his nights on the footpaths, sharing the pain of the downtrodden by mingling with them. Ismat says, "When he returns with cough and fever his wife thinks he has spent night in the arms of his beloved. She doesn’t know his real beloved is actually his writings whose love compels him into being oblivious to everything else."80

Krishan Chander wrote more than one hundred and fifty volumes of short stories, novels, travelogues, belles letters and plays. The popular books are: Tilsim-e-Khayal, Anna Datta, Teen Gunde, Zindagi Ke Mor Par, Tute Huye Tare, Shikast, Dadar Pul Ke Bachey, Ham Vahashi hein, Hawai Qiley, Ek Gadhe Ki Sarguisht, Bawan Patte, Ek Aurat Hajar Deewane, Jab Khet Jage, Dil Ki Vadiyan, Sogain, Foot Path Ke Farishte, Aadha Ghante Ka Khuda etc.81 His other notable collections are Asman Roshan Hai, Meri Yadon Ke Chirag, Ek Violin, Samandar Ke Kinare, Chandi Ke Ghao, Kaghaz Ki Nao, Nazare, Samandar Door Hai, Ajanta se Aage, Main Intezar Karoonga, Dil Kisi Ka Dost Nahin, Kitab ka Kafan, Ek Rupya Ek Phool, etc.82 He has written three reportages – Paude, Subah Hoti Hai and Waraq Waraq Kho Gai Zindagi Meri.82 Gopi Chand Narang and Ali Jawad Zaidi numbered his published books about eighty.

Krishan Chander wrote about various problems and human relationships. He treated the art of writing as criticism of life and a vehicle for social upliftment. Sometimes he was carried away by intense emotion and thus lacked in depth. Despite his penchant for romanticism he found the basis

78 Ismat Chughtai, op., cit., p. 227.
79 Ibid., p. 235.
80 Ibid., p. 230.
81 Sabir Dutt, Fun Aur Shakhsiat, Bombay, 1994, p. 305.
82 Ali Jawad Zaidi, A History of Urdu Literature, Delhi, 1993, pp, 399-400.
of story in reality. His readers were pleased over his racy idealism, sentimentalism and sincere exhortation. He remained tender and sympathetic towards the problems of humble men instead of being severe and objective. In his first collection *Tilsim-e-Khayal*, he depicted the natural scene at such a length that it seems that over looking the harsh realities of life he took refuge in nature. But in *Galicha*, *Kalu Bhangi*, *Mahalakshmi Ke Pul* and *Anna Data*, he adopted a satirical tone. *Anna Data* is a story of Bengal famine in a very effective manner. Ismat remarked she had learnt to view the Bengal famine only through the lens of *Anna Data*. *Jab Khet Jage* deals with the problems of Telengana peasants and their attempts to retain land as a result of reforms in land tenure system. Maxian influence is also evident there.

In *A Boat over the Jhelum*, and in other stories, the characters Angi, Buggi, Gomti, Shama heightened the intensity of beauty and sadness together. The sweetness of romance is sometimes blunted by the sharp edge of sorrow.83 With story *At the Hotel Firdaus* his art takes a new turn. Romance became idealized and worthy of being emulated.

The partition of the country provided a new theme to writers. It fired the vision of writers. Literature especially Urdu literature presented the real pictures of depression, setback, outrage, communal hatred and all other atrocities witnessed by the sensitive writers. Krishan Chander wrote stories at breathless pace. During 1947-1948 five volumes of his stories were published. They are *Ham Vahashi Hain*, *Ek Girja Ek Khandak*, *Ajanta Se Aage*, *Sammandar Door Hai*, and *Teen Gunde*.84

The most notable stories are *Ham Vahashi Hain*, *The Peshawar Express*, *Naya Madrasa* and *Mera Bachcha*. In *Mera Bachcha* Krishan Chander describes the Indian child as being subjected to communal prejudices from birth. In *Peshawar Express* the train, which ran through Pakistan and India, is shown as an eye-witness of all inhumanly and ill-deeds. Krishan Chander was more prolific among the contemporaries except Manto. It seemed that the tragic event of partition suited their individual styles.

84 Ibid., p. 10.
Manto was interested in depicting the seamy side of sex while Krishan Chander in dramatizing humanism. The literature he produced at tremendous speed and missionary zeal is of high acclaim and an invaluable treasure not only for Urdu, but for the history of India.

There are many aspects of Krishan Chander’s art of writing. Writing on varied subjects he tried new experiments and techniques. He wrote a new-fangled story *Suraeli Tasweer* and a plotless story *The Carpet*. His language is simple and has a sense of hidden revolt of thoughts. He depicted the overtones of naked romance and stark realism both lying close to each other. His sense of commitment to the ideal of human freedom and peace and hope for happy and better future prevailed through all his works.

Krishan Chander was a very prolific writer. Even in the days of illness, when doctor ordered him to abstain from any kind of cumbersome intellectual activity, he continued writing. He used to say, “When I write, my mind travels to my fingers, the moment I hold the pen in my hand, my mind soars.” However, it was his source of livelihood and popularity. Ismat wrote about an incident occurred while she was in Pakistan. “It was id. A boy arrived on a cycle, flustered and out of breath”. “I have travelled fourteen miles and I have spent fourteen hours trying to find the house. I just wanted to find out how Krishan ji is?” “He is perfectly fine’, I said. He thanked me and left. At that time Krishan Chander had suffered another heart attack and a pacemaker was installed. But he could not survive long with pacemaker and on 8th March 1977 he passed away. He was honoured with Padam Bhushan by the Government of India.

**Ismat Chughtai**

Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) was born in a large middle class Muslim family on 21st August 1915 at Badaun (Uttar Pradesh). Her family name was Ismat Khanam and she was ninth among ten children. She was the daughter of Qasim Beg Chughtai, who was a civil servant in UP and sister of Azim Beg Chughtai who was also a noted writer, humorist, and a satirist of his time. As Ismat’s father was in a transferable job, hence the family moved frequently.

86 Ibid., p. 239.
Ismat and her sisters were taught Urdu and Quran at home by an ill-tempered ustani (teacher) whom she hated.87 Her elder sisters went to Karamat Husain Girls School in Lucknow but Ismat went to Aligarh and then Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow and did her B.A in 1938. When she was in her teens, her father died and the family moved to Jodhpur with her uncle who was Inspector General of Police. During her schooling she used to go to school by train. From the young age she was of rebellious nature and used to take off her burqa in the train. But arriving at Jodhpur when her uncle saw her unveiled, he reprimanded her for her behaviour but she refused to listen to anyone except her father who had died.88 She discarded purdah not only as an act of rebellion but with the sanction of her family. Her uncle threatened to marry her off but she was keen for higher education in order to support the children of one of her siblings who was ailing. She chose to go back to Aligarh in 1938 for her teacher training. Finding no training classes for women at Aligarh she was prepared to attend classes with men. Several other women students were not in favour of it. They persuaded the Principal of the men’s training college to screen off part of the classroom so that women students could attend. Ismat obtained her B.T. in 1939.89 Ismat became Principal of Raj Mahal Girls School, and Islamia Girls School, Bareilly. Later on, she became Inspector of Municipal Girls Schools, in Bombay.90

She was influenced and inspired by Rashid Jahan in her writings. She had met Rashid Jahan at school in Aligarh and was impressed by her outspoken nature and wanted to be like her, though she was stubborn and outspoken from her early age. When she was only eight, she wept for not allowing her to ride the white mare on which her brother rode like a prince. Her father, who was Deputy Collector in the days of Raj, overruled Begum Sahiba’s decision and Ismat got her first ride. It was like having won a fort in a battle. She recounted later. She spent her childhood in the footsteps of her brothers, climbing trees to eat guavas, watching the monkey dance and

87 Gail Minault, Secluded Scholars: Women’s Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India, New Delhi, 1998, p. 278.
88 Ibid., p. 278.
89 Ibid., p. 278.
chasing the hens etc. Her early writing has an influence of her brother Azim Beg Chughtai, an author of Urdu short stories and a humorist. He encouraged her to write and served as her first critic. Her first published work was *Fasadi* (The Troublemaker) that appeared in the literary journal *Saqi* in 1938. 

Ismat had read the banned book, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* by D.H. Lawrence and *Angare* a volume of short stories by progressive writers published from Lucknow and that influenced her very much. She discarded the *Purdah*. She attended the Progressive Writers’ Conference at Lucknow and saw Munshi Premchand and writers of *Angare* from a distance. She was very much a patron of PWM. She was influenced by Marx and Freud. It was under Freud’s impact that instead of moral and religious themes, the progressive writers started discussing sex with frankness and at the same time in a realistic manner.

Books had great influence on Ismat. She looked for solution to many problems, through books and found answers. “Thousands of disappointments, countless dark moments were made bearable by these books,” she recalled. Starting from Hardy and Bronte Sisters she arrived at George Bernard Shaw. By reading Bernard Shaw’s dramas, she also started writing dramas and while studying at Aligarh she used to stage some of her small dramas. “My first written work *Fasadi* was a drama”, she says. Russian writers had the greatest influence on her in the moment of her helplessness and indecisiveness. Chekhov, she read for the blessing of a lesson well learnt. Whenever she could not come to grips with some story and did not know where to start and where to end, she read few stories of Chekhov for mental exercises and her pen started moving. After reading she turned to talking. In a family of talkatives all sense of time was lost when two or three members got together. She enjoyed talking to everyone... shop keepers, grocers, taxi drivers, even beggars. Teasing old men and women, listening to their curses and abuses gave her a strange kind of pleasure. It helped to create a story

---

91 Nirupma Dutt, ‘The Importance of being Ismat Apa’, *Indian Express*, December 5, 1999.
92 Gail Minault, *op. cit.*, p. 279.
within minutes, what she needed was to ask a few straightforward and small questions.93

Ismat wrote on a wide range of subjects e.g. sex, social problems, politics, the fading world of the past and its loveliness and above all expressed women’s issues in practical realism. She was a luminous star on the horizon of the new short story. Her piercing intellect and investigative instinct as a fiction writer surveyed the entire social and moral scene, the feudal society and the plight of women-folk and tried to recreate her entire complex experiences in her stories.94

Though she has unveiled a wide range of themes but her best stories are drawn from the lives of women and are told largely in the specific language of women, since women live in a world so largely separate from that of the men. (She had her own vocabulary and turn of phrases). She wrote her early stories sitting at home. She used to notice minutely the gossiping of women. Its appropriateness to her themes is obvious and works powerfully in bringing the readers closer to the people she is portraying and make them feel that they are real. But sometime she overdoes the use of specific language of women, which distances the characters. So her performance is uneven.95

Her first short story was Gainda which appeared in Saqi in 1939.96 Thereafter several stories were published but the work that brought her fame or notoriety was Lihaf (The Quilt) just two months before her marriage to Shahid Latif, a Bombay based film writer and director. Lihaf caused a sensation and furor, for it was a frank description not only of wife’s sexual frustration but also of the woman’s relation with a female servant with whom she found emotional and sexual companionship. Consorting with a member of lower class was shocking enough and the lesbian theme was too much even for progressive public opinion. Many people doubted that it was written by a woman. They were of the view that in reality it was written by a man.

published under woman’s name. But when it was proved that the *Lihaf* was written by a woman, she was prosecuted by the Punjab Government for obscenity and after two years trial; the charges were ultimately dismissed.

After the trial of *Lihaf*, Shahid Latif’s order to quit writing was of no avail. ‘He might as well have asked me to quit breathing’, she said. She continued to publish novels and short stories based on middle class women’s existence with an authenticity, which no male writer could have matched and in a style that was frank, earthy and colloquial. She depicted her characters vividly, ruthlessly and at the same time with deepest sympathy. Her mastery of spoken word and economy of form is incomparable.

Ismat wrote several novels and a number of short stories. Her first novel *Ziddi* was published in 1941. Ismat’s novel *Masooma* (1962) reveals the under current of life in an affluent Muslim community of Indian society as well as the position of the weaker sex. Her works are as follows:

**Novels:** *Ziddi, Tehri Lakeer, Masooma, Saudai, Junglee Kabootar, Dil Ki Dunia, Ajeel Adami, Bandi, Katra-i-Khoon* (novelette). She wrote *Teen Anadi* and *Nakali Raj Kumar* for Children.

**Collection of short stories:** *Kalian, Chotein, Ek Baat, Chhui Mui, Do Hath, Dojakh, Kanwari* (Hindi), *Badan Ki Khushboo*.

**Dramas:** *Dhani Banke, Shaitan*. Her autobiography was called *Kagazi Hai Pairahan*, deals with her trial at Lahore on charge of obscenity in connection with her story *Lihaf*.

Ismat turned to writing for films and screen plays. With *Arzoo*, *Shahid* and she became filmmakers under the banner of *Filmina*. Many of their films flopped at box office but *Ziddi*, and *Sone Ki Chidiya* made a mark. In 1973 M.S Sathyu made *Garam Hawa*, a film based on Ismat’s short story. She received President award for the best film story. In 1976 she received Padamshri. In 1977 she received Ghalib award from Ghalib Institute for her Urdu play *Tanhai Ka Zahar*. In 1979 she was awarded with Mukhdoom Literary award of Andhra Pradesh Academy.

---

97 Ibid., p. 9.
100 Nirupama Dutt, *op. cit.*,
Ismat Chughtai’s non-fictional writings comprising essays, commentaries and biographical sketches give the readers a good idea of artistic, political and social milieu of the author. She is very honest and passionate in her works. Independence and partition are the principal backdrops against which much of her non-fictional writings unfold.  

Ismat Chughtai was a radical writer and she gave a new direction to the progressive movement in Urdu literature. During the whole course of her life she fought against hypocrisy and religious fanaticism. But these were not enough for a secure existence of a radical woman in society where religious orthodoxy was more powerful than reason. ‘She will be remembered’, as Shahid Brelavi puts it in an obituary tribute, ‘for her courage as a pioneer of the feminist movement in India even before it started in the west.’  

Rajinder Singh Bedi  

Rajinder Singh Bedi (1915-1984) was born on 1st September 1915 in a poor family in Disca (Sialkot.) He got his primary education at Disca and then went to Lahore and passed his matriculation examination in 1931. After matriculation he was admitted in DAV College and passed his Intermediate. But he could not complete his higher education due to the sudden death of his mother and accepted a job of a clerk in Post Office, Lahore. In 1943 he resigned the job and worked in the Central Publicity Department. After that, he joined as staff artist in All India Radio. After the partition of the country, he came to Delhi and was later appointed Station Director of Jammu Radio station in 1948. But his stay at Jammu turned out to be a short one as he left for Bombay and took to writing for films. His success encouraged him to become a film director later. Rajinder Singh Bedi made some films also, among them Dastak became popular. The dialogues written by Bedi for films like Mirza Ghalib, Devdas and Anuradha became very popular.  

Bedi had started writing short stories during his school days. The thirties provided a turning point in fiction writing. The translation from works

---

102 Sisir Kumar Das, A History of Indian Literature, p. 20.
103 Sabir Dutt, Fun Aur Shakhsiat; Bombay, 1994 ,p. 325.
104 Ibid., p. 325.
of Russian writers had become common after the First World War. But the influx of western influences especially English and French had impressed young writers. In 1932, the publication of Angare an anthology of short stories took the Urdu world by surprise. The stories only ten in number written by four newcomers, were characterized by reformist politics and a spirit of rebellion against orthodoxy. With its publication a flood gate was opened to Marxian and Fruedian influences. In 1935, the PWM was launched. Inspired by Marxian ideas these writers imbibed the spirit of socialism. The manifesto of PWM was being followed by young Urdu writers. Around this time the leading trio of Urdu story writers- Saadat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Krishan Chander came into prominence and dominated Urdu fiction for more than two decades.

Rajinder Singh Bedi was closely associated with progressive movement, but he was neither a diehard nor an extremist. He started writing with models provided by Chekhov. He was more interested in ordinary man and presented his characters very sympathetically and tenderly. His stories are deeply rooted in common man's real life. The conflicts and problems which ordinary men and women face in their day-to-day social and economic affairs are brought out with reality and understanding. His dexterous psychoanalysis dissects the misery and gloom in the society. He did not mock at it but ignited the urge among the afflicted to change it for their betterment and to conquer the maladies of life.105 Weaving his plots from common place, his penetrating vision portrayed the character exactly fit in the frames with an ease and grace he wanted to present. His portrayal of Indian wife and Indian domestic life is superb. He did not idealize woman but underlined her enduring and tolerating nature and portrayed and hardships sufferings attached to her character with sanctity and greatness. Bedi presented woman in her different roles as a beloved, as a wife, a daughter, a widow, a suffering soul, etc. In his many stories, the woman filled with a deep sense of abiding love, compassion and devotion, under went through various hardships and pain in order to release joy and happiness to male, the family and the universe.106

106 Gopi Chand Narang, op. cit., p. 130.
In his stories Bhola, Chhokri Ki Loot and Man Hi Man he portrayed women as widows while in Terminus Se Parey she was in the role of a sister. In Chechak Ke Dag the woman depicted by Bedi tolerate all hardships in every condition. In Lajwanti (Touch me not) Bedi portrayed a woman’s suffering in separate situations. She was abducted during riots, later on restored to her husband, who treated her very sympathetically and called her devi. He avoids talking about the past. On the other hand, Lajwanti wants him to accept her as she was before abduction. This transformed behaviour of her husband hurts her.

Bedi peeps into women’s psyche very deeply. It is perhaps his only story on the partition. In Kokhjali, (Barren) Ek Aurat and Eucalyptus he presents woman as a complete mother. In Kalyani Bedi presents sex, although with a prostitute, as the male conquering and female surrendering as a victim.

In the novel Ek Chadar Maili Si, Bedi selects a typical relationship of Punjab, that of widow of elder brother getting into the ‘wedlock’ (Chadar Dalna) of protection with the brother of the deceased husband, without peeping into female psyche, which may revolt against such an alliance. Bedi reveals the intricacies of the mind of heroine who is not ready to agree with such a convention. But at last she agrees for the family’s prestige. In Grahan, the metaphorical use of Rahu and Ketu is for the depiction of social taboos.

There are male characters also who face hardships and tolerate them with grace. The heroes of Garam Kot and Mein Aur Mera Iman endure every hardship. Rahman of Rahman Ke Jutte is a bold male character in Bedi’s stories. But some of female characters like Rano, Indu, Lajwanti have become immortal in Urdu as the most realistic, sincere and sympathetic presentation of Indian womanhood.

Like Krishna Chander Bedi could neither write romantic and picturesque prose, nor deal with sex with the boldness of Manto. Whatever he wrote, that was with great care and after weighing each word. Once Manto said to him, “You think too much. You think before you write, you think while you are writing and also when you have finished writing”. To this Bedi responded in a humorous tone, “A Sikh may be lacking in many things...
but he is sure of one thing: he is a good craftsman. Whatever he builds, he builds to its perfection making sure every part of it rings true."\(^{107}\)


Though not a huge pile of writing but: whatever Bedi wrote is of high quality, linguistically and thematically. He was of the view that art of writing does not gush forth spontaneously from the mind like a spring from the ground. It is not that you go to sleep at night and become a writer in the morning. None can claim to be a born writer. All that one can claim without any fear of contradiction is that a man may have a potential for writing which may be an inborn gift and that can be cultivated with hard work.\(^{109}\) A writer has a sensitive mind and feels more intensely than others. He can endure praise showered upon him and as well as pain if he is being flayed. According to Bedi a writer should not be satisfied with his first draft and should go in for revised one. He was of the view that one should have some knowledge of other arts e.g. music and painting.

Rajinder Singh Bedi tried his hand at poetry but without success. He himself said, "I remained innocent of what poetry could teach me concerning life and its ways. On the other hand life bestowed upon me a host of problems such as domestic bickering and the vicissitudes of daily living which are no less arduous and intricate than the problem of falling in love\(^{110}\) required for creating poetry. These problems create restlessness in mind and a piece like the *Woolen Coat* come out." Therefore, when we go through

---

108 Sabir Dutt *op. cit.*, p. 325.
Bedi’s writings it becomes clear that all his characters belonged to lower and middle class society. He portrayed very successfully the female psyche and protected her dignity. He was more interested in exploring the depth of human mind and making half humorous and half sad comments than adopting to any predetermined line of thinking or interpretation. Most of his stories have a subtle symbolism.

For his contribution to literature, R.S Bedi has been honoured. He is the recipient of Padam Shree (1972), and Sahitya Academy Award (1965), Ghalib Award (1978) and several other academy awards.

The formation of PWA with a view to mobilize literature in depicting human (especially women’s) sufferings, sorrows and miseries, problems and needs was appreciable. The writers, who joined this movement, were numerous but the biographical sketches of selected few give us an idea of their writings and attitudes. The next chapter will acquaint us with their perceptions and attitudes towards various gender-related issues and problems.