

Breaking Stereotypes: Life and Works of Begum Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai and Begum Khurshid Mirza

ABSTRACT

In the west, 19th century witnessed various social reform movements like movement against slavery, fight for public schools, humane prisons, greater political representation and the movement for women's civil, political and economic rights. Indian society during 19th century was experiencing political transition and by becoming Britain's colony India began to experience the impact of western ideas on its society as well. One such impact was that of feminism which demanded greater social, economic and political rights for women all over the world. Indian society was dominantly patriarchal in nature and so, these western ideals of women freedom and social equality were not very much welcomed among the masses of India. During the late 19th century and the early 20th century there were a few brave women who broke the customs, taboos and social stereotypes and set an example of courage and bravery. These women at that time came out of seclusion and became active on the social podium. In this article the courage and bravery of some of those Muslim women is presented and how they became an example and symbol of female social liberation during early 20th century in Indian Subcontinent.

Keywords: 19th Century, Patriarchal Society, Indian Women, Muslim Women, Purdah, 20th Century, Female Emancipation, Feminism, Gender Inequality

* PhD Scholar, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Introduction

*Qabus-nama*¹, written around 11th century, by Keykavus the ruler of Tabaristan and dedicated to his son Gilanshah, is widely considered as a classic Persian book of ethics and morality. In one of its chapters Keykavus regarding upbringing of a daughter advised and counseled that;

If you have a daughter, entrust her to kindly nurses and give her a good nurture. When she grows up, entrust her to a preceptor so that she shall learn the provisions of the sacred law and the essential religious duties. But do not teach her to read and write; that is a great calamity. Once she is grown up, do your utmost to give her in marriage; it were best for a girl not to come into existence, but being born she had better be married or buried... .., as long as she is in your house, treat your daughter with compassion (Bullough, Shelton, and Slavin, 1928, p. 122).

A similar message about female education was conveyed in another Persian work, the *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, by Khwaja Nasir-ud-din Tusi dating from the thirteenth century. *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, was not only one of the most widely read book but was also a part of Persian curriculum in India before the introduction of English education (Minault, 1998, p. 20). If scholars like Tusi say that teaching women to read and write is not a good idea, elite Indian Muslims trained in the Persian literary tradition would definitely consider him and think twice before doing so.

As children, Muslim girls of Indian subcontinent studied Quran along with their brothers from an elderly male tutor, but when the girls grew older, *ustanis*² used to come to their homes to teach them. These women or *ustanis* were mostly wives or widows and daughters of *moulvis*³ and generally had limited literary skills (Minault, 1998, p. 23). Girls mostly received no education beyond memorizing few Quranic verses while others learned to read some Arabic, Persian or Urdu from their fathers or brothers. They also had little time at home for additional studies and education, as mostly they were busy helping their mothers cook, sew, and look after their younger children, or helping to supervise the servants charged with these tasks. In this

¹*Qabus-nama*, is a kind of travelogue book written in Persian Language by Keykavus in 1082 A.D. dedicated to his son Gilan Shah. This work that comprises from forty chapters occupies lots of fundamental and beneficial instructions that can be applied in any field in daily life. Some of that information are about playing chess, larking, bathing, hunting, playing ball, having a concubine and slave, understanding horse breeds, medicine, astrology, sciences such as geometry, and being prepared for the administrative authority like becoming vizier or king.

² Traditionally this term was used in Indian Subcontinent for female teachers or tutors.

³ A person who teaches Quran and Religion.

way, daughters learned what they most needed to know for their future roles as wives and mothers (Minault, 1998, p. 23-24).

Among *ashraf*⁴ women of the 19th century India, knowing how to read was unusually enough, but knowing how to write was very rare indeed. The taboo on writing was based on the anxiety and apprehension that if a girl knew how to write, she might write letters to *ghair-mahram* (forbidden person), and thereby she may violate the rules of *purdah* and might cause damage to her family's honor or *izzat*. The protection of girl's chastity, and hence the family's *izzat*, was substantively more important than the development of her mind. Not until the religious and social reformers began to point out the connection between education and correct religious observance or adherence did some families begin to decrease restrictions on their daughters' knowing how to read and write (Minault, 1998, p. 24).

The end of the 19th century witnessed the rise of feminism around the world and India also had its effects and impacts on its society. Gradually Indian women on lines of their western counterparts, also, started raising their voices for socio-political and economic equality, justice and freedom. They started creating exclusive clubs and organizations for women and on these forums, they discussed the issues, matters and evils they were facing in the society. The most effective way to educate masses, and to convey the message of gender equality and social uplift of women was through writing stories, anecdotes and columns in magazines and journals which at that time were a source of mass-communication. A large number of periodicals for women were established by the end of 19th century, intended primarily as a means of educating women in *purdah*.

Initially, Women writers and socio-political activists of the period displayed a number of common characteristics. First, they were usually from socially upper-class families. Secondly, their husbands were social-progressives and permitted or in many cases even encouraged their wives to write on these issues. Thirdly, their writings displayed profound concern for social issues. There were indeed few extraordinary characters among the women of that time who, belonging to ordinary and humble financial background with no political backing, broke away from the traditions of *purdah* and even flaked away various other social taboos of Indian society and worked tirelessly for the social equality, uplift and emancipation of female masses of India. These women, who were self-educated, self-made, self-reliant and independent; were criticized and condemned by the very society for which they were working. But still their passion to work tirelessly is evident and later they were praised for their resilience as well as their spirit. The purpose of this paper is to note and discuss the struggle of those few

⁴ Landed Muslim gentry of the Indian Subcontinent.

courageous, bold and daring Muslim women who are considered as pioneers and forerunners in eliminating injustice and gender inequality from Indian society.

Begum Rashid Jahan

The first women whose struggle and contribution to female emancipation stood out was Begum Rashid Jahan. She was born on 25th August 1905 in Delhi, eldest daughter of Shaikh Abdullah and Wahid Jahan Begum. Shaikh Abdullah, a Kashmiri Brahman convert to Islam, had been educated at Aligarh and from his youth had been concerned about the education of the Muslim women. In 1906 Shaikh Abdullah founded a school for girls in Aligarh, the precursor of the Women's college, Aligarh. Rashid Jahan attended this school in the city and as the school grew to be a high school, she did her high school there too, completing the course in 1922. From 1922-1924 Rashid Jahan studies in inter-science at Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow. She then entered Lady Harding Medical College, Delhi in 1924, completing MBBS in 1929 (Poulos, 1975, p.14).

Rashid Jahan started writing short stories for school magazines from her early years when she was in high school and one of her earliest was entitled "Salma" which appeared in the Isabella Thoburn College publications *ChandBagh Chronicle* around 1923-24. After her college days Rashid Jahan devoted a considerable amount of time to writing. A few stories are believed to have been published in Urdu magazines of the time (Poulos, 1975, p.14-16).

After completing medical education, she entered Provincial Medical Service of the United Province in 1929. By 1931 Rashid Jahan was posted to Lucknow where she remained until 1934 when she was transferred to Bahraich a district in UP, where she ended her service. The most significant event in Rashid Jahan's literary career was her participation in the formation of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu literature. In 1931 when Rashid Jahan was assigned to Lucknow she made the acquaintance of the younger Urdu literary crowd, in particular Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmad Ali and Mahmud-uz-Zafar (Mahmud, 1996, p. 447). All were firmly committed and devoted to a Marxist position. These four then set out to establish a new trend in Urdu literature that would at once upset the dull and stodgy traditionalism of that literature and also to promote a social consciousness aimed at overturning and upsetting the then existent social system. After they made an alliance they decided to contribute stories and publish an edited work entitled 'Angare'. It contained ten short stories five by Sajjad Zaheer, two each by Ahmed Ali and Rashid Jahan and the one by Mahmud-uz-Zafar. All of these stories were controversial primarily because of their underlying attacks on traditional Muslim society (Mahmud, 1996, p. 448).

The outcry against *Angare* among religious and civil establishment was incredible and one of outrage. Newspapers and journals published angry

editorials and articles denouncing the book *Angare*. The *Hindustan Times* of 21st February, 1933 carried an article entitled 'Urdu Pamphlet Denounced: Shias Gravely Upset', quoting a resolution passed by the Central Standing Committee of the All India Conference, Lucknow, which declared that they 'strongly condemns the heart rending and filthy pamphlet called *Angare* ... which has wounded the feelings of the entire Muslim community by ridiculing God and his Prophets and which is extremely objectionable from the standpoints both of religion and morality'(Mahmud, 1996, p. 448). *Maulvis*, clerics and even ordinary Muslims declared the stories and their authors to be anti-Muslim and against the ethos of Islam. The authors received threats both in person and by mail daily. But the four stuck together and never backed down. Their stories represented a new feeling for the masses and for the personal feelings of people both poor and rich. A true and realistic state of society was portrayed in this edited work. As a reaction by the *maulvis* and traditionalists, the book was banned in UP government and copies of it burned (Poulos, 1975, p.17-18).

Angare established Rashid Jahan's reputation as a radical. In Progressive homes she became a symbol of emancipation for women and in conservative homes an example of all the worse that can happen when a woman is given formal education, not kept in *purdah* and allowed to pursue a career, even though she came from a highly respectable family. Her family and friends stood by her though they too were subject to vilification and in fact many in her family did not agree with her viewpoint, yet they all defended her right to that opinion or at least never spoke against her (Poulos, 1975, 18). Throughout the 1930's Rashid Jahan devoted her time to writing. Generally, Rashid Jahan in her writings was concerned about the problems of women and often more specifically those of Muslim women. The uncaring and indifferent treatment of women by men is depicted in '*Dilliki Sair*', '*Aurat*', '*Istazara*', '*Pardeke Piche*'. '*Asif Jahan ki Bahu*' and '*Chiddaki Maan*' showing a similar indifference to the well-being of daughters-in-law in particular and women in general. Other problems of women that Rashid Jahan poses are poverty (*Garibon ka Bhagvan*), Political non-awareness (*Iftari*), Widowhood (*Garibon ka Bhagvan*) and arranged marriages (*Salma*) (Coppola and Zubair, 1987, p. 173-74).

Rashid Jahan was trained as a gynecologist and obstetrician. Her medical practice covered the years from 1929 to 1950 with certain periods of interruption from her own illness and treatment. The years 1929-1934 were spent in the UP Provincial Medical Service and the remaining years in private practice, first in Amritsar and then in Dehra Dun and Lucknow (Poulos, 1987, p. 112-13). Her concern throughout her life was with the common people, particularly with women. This is visible in her writings and her political activity as well as in the medical sphere of her life. Four of her stories, '*Istazara*', '*Pardeke Piche*', '*Asif Jahan ki Bahu*' and '*Vah*' reflects her medical career. The

first three deal with pregnancy and childbirth, probably the area of greatest medical concern for women in India at that time. Rashid Jahan writes about the need for qualified medical help and the stupidity of relying upon old beliefs and methods. Rashid Jahan wrote with compassion about health problems and hazards that she encountered daily in her profession (Poulos, 1987, p. 113).

The publication of *Angare* set the stage for the development of an organization that was to be the mouthpiece for the progressive development in all Indian languages. The Progressive Writers Association came into being in 1936 in Lucknow with Premchand presiding and Rashid Jahan as an active member of the body. She remained faithful and close to the Progressive Writers Association and its policies until her death. In 1937 Rashid Jahan's collection *Aurat* was published by Hashmi Books Depot from Lahore. It was a collection of one play, "Aurat" and six short stories that she had written over the preceding several years. The original edition of *Aurat* went out of print quickly and was not available until a second edition was put out in 1963 at the insistence of her father Sheikh Abdullah. The only other collection of Rashid Jahan's work, *Shula-e-Jwala* was published by India Publisher Lucknow, posthumously in 1974 under the editorship of her sister-in-law Dr. Hamida Said-uz-Zafar and Naeem Khan, an associate of Rashid Jahan and Mahmud-uz-Zafar. This collection included previously unpublished stories, as well as memories and recollections about Begum Rashid Jahan (Said-uz-Zafar, 1987).

Other than writing, one of the important channels of Rashid Jahan's literary energy was All India Radio. During her years in Lucknow she was often invited to write plays for All India Radio (AIR) which she then generally produced herself. She was also an active member of the Indian Peoples' Theater Association (IPTA) (news18, 2013).

Rashid Jahan also contributed a good deal of political writing to various journals in addition to initiating an Urdu language political journal, *Chingare*, with Mahmud-uz-Zafar from late 1938. And thus apart from her literary and medical activities Rashid Jahan also became active in politics. Her husband Mahmud was jailed in August 1940 because of his communist activities and was not released until 1942. From 1942 until 1950 Rashid Jahan lived in Lucknow. She set up her own clinic there, a house in which the front part was given over to a Party bookstore and the remaining part divided between clinic and living quarters. During these years in Lucknow she was heavily involved in Party politics (Poulos, 1975, p. 21).

In 1948 Mahmud, who was General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in UP, and other Communist leaders were forced to go underground, in this case for three and a half years until 1951. Rashid Jahan herself went to jail for approximately three months from March to May 1949 when she participated in a strike in UP that paralyzed the railways. In 1950

after her second operation for cancer Rashid Jahan's health no longer permitted her an active political career. Although her condition was clearly beyond help, the Soviet government offered her the medical resources of the USSR and she flew to Moscow with her husband in July 1952 at the age of 47 years. Rashid Jahan died three weeks after arriving in Moscow without ever having left her hospital bed. She was buried in a Moscow cemetery (Poulos, 1975, p. 21-22).

Rashid Jahan covers the spectrum of her experiences and her socio-political beliefs in her writings. She intended her short stories to be educational and followed the progressive line in her choice of subject matter. As a woman, a Muslim and a doctor, she utilized those areas to provide her material and to direct her attention back to correction and readjusting the values and inequalities that she saw there. Rashid Jahan knew that her education, background, connections and energy made her a most influential person in her class, and she determined to take full advantage of that for the betterment of the society.

Rashid Jahan was the first Urdu woman writer to address directly, consistently, and forcefully numerous problems of the middle and lower middle-class women in Indian society. She is remembered by many people for numerous reasons: her charismatic personality, her empathy for suffering humanity, especially poor women, her capacity for hard work both as a doctor and political organizer, her considerable personal charm and beauty, and as a writer of Urdu short stories and plays. In this latter capacity, she was a member of the "Angare Group" and thus one of the founders of the progressive movement, probably the most important literary trend in Urdu literature of the mid-20th century. (Coppola and Zubair, 1987, p. 180)

Ismat Chughtai

Born on 21 August 1915 at Agra, Ismat Chughtai was the ninth of ten children born to Qasim Beg Chughtai and Nusrat Usmani. Ismat's childhood and her early education were at Aligarh. When she was in her teens, her father died, and her family moved to Jodhpur, where her uncle was Inspector-General of Police. Ismat from the beginning rarely observed *pardah* and used to travel in train to go to her school. Her uncle, seeing unveiled, scolded and criticized her for such behavior, but she rarely paid any heed—except to her father—and by then, he was gone. When she went off to Isabella Thoburn College, for higher studies she totally refused to wear either a *burqa* or carry a *chader* (Minault, 1996, p. 98). Her uncle threatened to marry her off, but she opted for further education, arguing that she needed to teach in order to support the children of one of her siblings, who was ailing. She chose to go back to Aligarh for a teacher's training course. She was prepared to attend classes

with men, but several other women students were not, so they persuaded the principal of the men's training college to screen off part of the classroom so that women students could attend the lectures (Minault, 1996, p. 99). In 1941 Ismat was appointed Superintendent of the municipal Girl's School, Bombay where she remained for two years until she married Shahid Latif in 1942 who was a writer and director in Bombay film industry.

Chughtai wrote her early short stories during late 1930s and her first published work was a drama that appeared in the magazine *Saqi* in 1938. Next year story '*Genda*' was published but she was not well known in the literary circles until 1942, the year '*Lihaaf*' was published in '*Adab-i-Latif*' from Lahore. Its central theme was female homosexuality, a story about two women, one of whom is deprived of her husband's love and the other is a maid servant (Chanana, 2005, p. 173). Traditional Indian feminine sensibility of the 18th and 19th centuries demanded them to be virtuous, modest and obedient to their parents and eventually husbands while IsmatChughtai in her stories stressed that real feminine emotions and sensitivities are hardly ever understood in an orthodox, male-dominated Indian society. In the history of Urdu fiction such thoughts were never expressed so articulately and vividly as did Chughtai in her writings. This story '*Lihaaf*' sent tremors across the Indian subcontinent and Chughtai had to bear scathing criticism for it. She was even summoned by the court for the alleged 'obscenity' in the play.

'*Lihaaf*' was published just few months before Ismat's marriage. As discussed above that the reaction to the story was hostile and violent. People started writing vile letters by the hundreds. However, since Ismat was an unmarried girl, the publishers, to whom the letters were directed, refused to forward the letters to Ismat. So, while an enormous storm was brewing over the story and its author and threats on her life were an everyday event, Ismat herself knew almost nothing of what was going on. After her marriage the publisher than apparently decided that as a marriedwomen she was a mature person and started to forward the letters that they were receiving about '*Lihaaf*' directly to Ismat. She was horrified by what she read, as much by the language and tone of the letters as by what they implied about the minds of those who wrote them. She herself recalls that experience in an interview;

When I first used to get these sorts of letters, the editors never sent them on to me. They would open them, and considering that I was a girl, would destroy the letters with obscenities in them. But when I got married, they said that I was a responsible person, so they sent me all the letters. I was married just after '*Lihaaf*' was published; I wrote it in 1942 and got married two months later. Then I received these huge bundles of letters... I never was so frightened and I never wrote that way again; I never repeated this mistake (Chughtai, 2012, p. 163).

She was so shocked that she determined that she would never write a story like that again. Shahid, her husband also ordered her to completely stop writing after the reaction of '*Lihaf*', Ismat agreed and then a couple of months later wrote another story and published it without telling her husband. When Shahid saw the story he was of course angry but he realized that nothing could be done to stop Ismat from writing. Ismat writes in her autobiography that "'*Lihaf*' had made my life miserable. Shahid and I had so many fights over the story that life became a virtual hell" (Chughtai, 2012, p. 40). She also writes that after writing *Lihaf*;

I have been branded as obscene writer. No one bothered about the things I had written before or after *Lihaf*. I was put down as a purveyor of sex. It is only in the last couple of years that the younger generation has recognized that I am a realist and not an obscene writer (Chughtai, 2012, p. 40).

TehriLakir published by Nayaldarah from Lahore in 1944 was perhaps Ismat's best and most famous novel written during the war years. Some of her other iconic writings were "*Ek Bat*", "*Chui Mui*" and her novel "*Ziddi*". After her marriage Ismat also began to write for the films. From the beginning she and her husband worked as a team. Prior to their marriage Shahid Latif had been with Bombay Talkies⁵ but in 1943 he helped to set up Filmistan⁶. He was a promising young director in those days and as a team he directed while Ismat wrote the scenes. Their last film together was *Sone kiChiyiya* done in 1957-58 which was a critical success but an enormous financial failure. As a result of this film Shahid Latif went into bankruptcy and Ismat and Shahid broke up as a team, Shaid Latif died in 1967. After his death in 1967, Ismat continued to live in Bombay and publish her stories, developing a reputation as an outspoken and free spirit whose works were inhabited by a series of unforgettable characters.

The two most important literary influences on Ismat's career and personality were Rashid Jahan and Saadat Hasan Manto. Ismat had known Rashid Jahan since she was a child at Aligarh. Rashid Jahan was ten years older than Ismat and her career, her independence and her writing were an enormous inspiration to Ismat. As discussed earlier Rashid Jahan was the first woman writer in Urdu to step quite definitely into the modern period and to assert her own individuality. Rashid Jahan's attitudes were distinctly progressive and the direct attacks that she made on contemporary society left

⁵ 'Bombay Talkies' was a movie studio founded in 1934 by Himanshu Rai and Devika Rani in Bombay (Mumbai) India.

⁶ This film production studio was established in Gurgaon, Mumbai.

a strong mark on Ismat. In an interview given in 1968 Ismat discussed at length the influence upon her thinking and work of Rashid Jahan. She says that;

When I was doing my B.A. in 1936, I attended the first meeting of the Progressive Writers in Lucknow which Premchand attended. I didn't understand much then, but I had read *Angare*. Then, of course, there was Rashid Jahan. She actually spoiled me. That was what my family used to say. She spoiled me because she was very bold and used to speak all sorts of things openly and loudly, and I just wanted to copy here. She influenced me a lot; her open-mindedness and free-thinking. She said that whatever you feel, you should not be ashamed of it, nor should you be ashamed of expressing it, for the heart is more sacred than the lips. She said that if you feel a thing in your mind and heart and cannot express it, then thinking it is worse and speaking it better, because you can get it out into the open with words (Mehfil, 1972, p. 172).

And we can see from Ismat's writing that indeed she carried great influence of Rashid Jahan on her personality and her writings as well.

The other was Manto whom Ismat met for the first time in 1942. Manto was unconventional and determined to shock his public. They were mutual admirers from the start and indeed Ismat was one of the very few friends that Manto ever permitted himself for any length of time. Manto wrote a thirty-page pamphlet on Ismat in 1948 that relates all sorts of experiences and feelings they shared. In 1944 Government of the Punjab brought obscenity charges against both Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasna Manto. Ismat was charged for the publication of "*Lihaf*" and Manto on his story "*Thanda Gosht*". They travelled from Bombay to Lahore twice to stand trial and both times the case was dismissed (Poulos, 1975, p. 26).

Many of Chughtai's stories revolve around the odds faced by women in the society. Oppressed women fighting it out on their own always fascinated Chughtai and she very well and skillfully portrayed them in her writings. In most of her short stories she points a finger at society and highlights the unjust treatment towards women. Though she did write about the problems of women from underprivileged classes too, it was women from middle-class families she was truly interested in portraying. One can say that the themes of her stories are neither notably political nor that of a social-reformist. Rather, they treat the everyday struggles of ordinary but original people.

Begum Khurshid Shahid Mirza

In early 20th century India, acting in films was not considered an honorable profession for anybody, and for married women from well-educated and

respectable Muslim family, it was forbidden to even think about it and working in such way was scandalous and outrageous. Begum Khurshid Mirza, the daughter of the founder of the Aligarh Women's College Shaikh Abdullah was too free-spirited to be tied down by any social norm like her sister Begum Rashid Jahan. She was bold, progressive and revolutionary who flouted tradition to act in Hindi films, she writes in her memoirs that;

Women observed strict purdah and were completely dependent on their husbands' or fathers' whims for their maintenance, even if they were wealthy in their own right. Generally speaking, women from affluent homes were uneducated and spent their time gossiping and planning trousseaux for their daughters while lazing on couches and *gaotakias*, large, reclining bolsters, while their legs were massaged by their numerous maid-servants. They took no part in the important decision-making of the household and their conversation consisted of finding ways and means of accumulating as much gold jewelry as possible (Kazmi, 2005, p. 41).

She further writes that when she started working as an actress;

Criticism and prejudice reared its ugly head and articles began to appear in local journals about Muslim girls from educated families setting a bad example to others. The newspapers were particularly vicious about Sheikh Abdullah, who was advised to stop his daughter from any further work in films. My father had to make a public statement to the effect that the responsibility for the behavior of a married woman lay upon her husband and not on her father (Kazmi, 2005, p. 41-42).

After all these developments Khurshid Mirza's mother wrote her a letter asking her not to visit Aligarh until the hue and cry died down. And as a result she didn't meet her family for about two years (Kazmi, 2005, p. 42).

While being associated with the Bombay Talkies, Khurshid worked in films including *Bhakti* (1939), *Badi Didi* (1939), *Jeevan Prabhat* (1937), *Bhabhi* (1938) and *Naya Sansar* (1941), under the screen name Renuka Devi. Later she associated herself to Lahore film industry and played leading roles in box-office hits like *Sahara* (1943), *Ghulami* (1945) and *Samrat Chandra Gupta* (1945). Besides acting, she also used to sing for her films. Despite being such a successful actor and singer, Khursid witnessed tough time from her own in laws who initially disapproved her of pursuing a career in film industry, but, Akbar her husband allowed her.

During her initial career when Khurshid Mirza worked and sang for a super hit film *Bhabhi*, many of her friends and relatives were deeply shocked. In her memoirs, she recounts how relatives keep looking down at a carpet on hearing the news. She writes that;

When *Babhi* was first screened, my sister-in-law, especially my childhood friend, Asghari, asked her mother, Ammaji, to escort the girls to the

cinema. Unsuspectingly, Ammaji went along. Halfway through the movie, Ammaji was incredulous, and she remarked that the heroine looked just like Khurshid. The girls giggled and said that she was mistaken. Ammaji insisted that it was Khurshid and was furious with her daughters for not telling her about her daughter-in-law working in films. Abbaji was equally shocked and even though he wasn't pleased at all, he said philosophically that it was a matter to be sorted out between his son, Akbar, and his wife (Kazmi, 2005, p. 142).

After the movie, Maqbool Hussain who was a close friend of Khurshid's brother-in-law went to their house and found that the family was sitting somberly and sadly looking down at the carpet, deep in shock and a shamed after what they had just heard. Sardar Daljit Singh, sat down next to his friend, who whispered in his ears, 'very bad news. Babhi has become an actress.' Sardar Daljit Singh joined the family in their display of disapproval by staring at the carpet (Kazmi, 2005, p. 142).

Despite all these reservations Khurshid Jahan continued to work in movies, as Salman Haider her nephew says, 'though her husband was supportive of her decision to act in films, it was she who was on the line. She had the energy and the boldness to take up the challenge' (Kazmi, 2005, p. 232-233).

Begum Khurshid Mirza migrated to Pakistan in 1947 after the partition of British India. In Pakistan she associated herself with All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) as a volunteer helping destitute women. 'When her husband was transferred to Quetta, she took charge of the APWA centre for health care in a rural area called Killi Ismail in Quetta. She also compered and aired various programs about women issues on Radio Pakistan (Kazmi, 2005, p. 177).

Several years later when Pakistan Television Corporation began its transmission and its drama serials started earning household fame, there was a need for adding professionals to the young media crew. A HaseenaMoin's serial, titled *Kiran Kahani*, which rediscovered Khurshid. Her performance gained her admiring reviews. The next serial she worked in was *ZerZabarPesh*, also written by HaseenaMoin. Her performance was regarded by many as one of the finest acting performances in that role, and this set the tone for the rest of her acting career (Kazmi, 2005, p. 126).

She remained a character actress for Karachi Television Centre and worked in many popular series of that time, including *Parchhain*, Uncle Urfi and a special play *MassiSherbate* written by Fatima SurayyaBajia. These drama serials were super hits and Begum Khurshid Mirza became one of Pakistan's best known television artistes, winning many awards including the 'Pride of Performance' which she received from General Zia-ul-Haq. She retired in 1985, with her last performance coming in *Ana*. After her retirement,

she moved to Lahore permanently to be with her daughters and grandchildren (Kazmi, 2005, p. 126).

Shortly before her retirement in 1982, Begum Khurshid Mirza penned her autobiography, which discussed the life of a literary person in British India, journalism education and work in Lucknow, married life, Indian film industry, migration to Pakistan, adjusting to Karachi, and working in television. Her autobiography initially appeared in Pakistani monthly magazine Herald as a nine-part serial, from August 1982 to April 1983, under the title *The Uprooted Sapling*. Later, the collection was compiled in 2005 as a book under the title *A Woman of Substance: The Memoirs of Begum Khurshid Mirza* by her daughter Lubna Kazmi.

Khurshid Mirza did the most unbelievable thing for those days. One can only imagine what her parents must have gone through with the kind of uproar created against this in the Muslim community of Aligarh. But she refused to be tied down by any social norms and continued doing the unthinkable and impossible (Karachiwali, 2011).

Conclusion

The women discussed above had certain things in common; the socio-political environment in which they lived and the discrimination, persecution and oppression which they went through along with the experience that led them to work tirelessly and diligently for women's emancipation in Muslim Indian society. Having come from a relevantly humble economic and social background they were all social and political rebels who bravely pointed and challenged patriarchy and social discrimination being practiced towards women in whatever capacity they were. One can say that they were the true pioneers who worked for emancipation of Muslim women in Indian society. They set examples of being free-spirited, independent and rebellious towards all those social taboos which they considered hindrance in their way of progress. In literature as well as in the history of Indian cinema before Partition, the names of Rahid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai and Begum Khurshid shine bright. No doubt, they were the true emblems of greater freedom and social emancipation for Muslim women in Indian history.

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