

SACH

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Shared History of South Asia: Significant Role of Women

THE history of South Asian nations reflects the struggles of the communities on one hand and the unity among them on the other. Our past and history is not just about violence, it is also about syncretic values and way of life

As discussed in article “How a Museum in Kolkata Is Helping Heal History’s Wounds” written by Arturo Desimone, Jon Baird and Mohammad “memorialisation of history and past is not just about the typical holocaust, it is not architecture of shame and guilt. It is rich with ‘powerful anaesthetics’.” In South Asian context also the goal of memorialisation is about remembrance of the forgotten, reinventing a living heritage and helping it bloom once more. The museum in Bengal is one of the examples that help in healing wounds of 1947 partition of India. It helps in confronting the truth of this past and invites visitors to rediscover their common heritage.

Shared heritage and culture has always been a critical component in uniting people and nations. The art literature and poetry contributed by prominent personalities during the freedom struggle and nation-building creates such nostalgia among the people that even in present times poets like Rabindra Nath Tagor and Kazi Nazrul are still most beloved icon for both countries.

The historical tales and memories from the past tell us about the valuable contribution of people of the century and the lost culture that is being revived by gathering knowledge of folk and culture. Such as the tale of Pashto speaking Hindus from Baluchistan, which tells us about the endless pain of cursed partition, mixing of culture and at the same time it tells us how transfer of such knowledge among the younger generations develops a sense of pride.

Present historical evidence shows that there have been many male heroes, poets, writers and leaders who fought for their country and contributed in art and culture. Among these stories, women are harder to find. But if we go beyond these pieces of evidence, we see that women have played a vital role in various movements and historical struggles, they were the part of nation-building and their contribution to the field of culture, literature and art was unequivocally recognized by society and different scholars. Toru Dutta a pioneer of English writing and the first Indian French writer left behind a remarkable legacy, she was phenomenal in the history of literature. Begum Hazrat Mahal was much more than just an ordinary Begum who rose to become a leader. She managed to unite Hindus, Muslims, women, courtesans, landlords, landless peasants and Dalits, and got them to come together for the great rebellion, which found an important place not just in Indian history but in world history. The Begums of Bhopal are remarkable for sustaining a determined succession of women monarchs. Despite the religious and political odds against them, their reign was marked by benevolence and modernity.

Women in history have always been considered as the torchbearer of culture and tradition; they have shown their significant role in history and culture. Hence learning from the past, especially where women have given their full contribution, gives strategic ideas and strength to fight against all odds, it shows how through historic shared struggle and memories attached to it, community and nation feels united and most importantly it gives courage to women of this era.

An Introduction

By **KAMALA DAS**, INDIA

I don't know politics but I know the names of those in power, and can repeat them like days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru.

I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in Two, dream in one.

Don't write in English, they said, English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in any language I like? The language I speak, becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses all mine, mine alone.

It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest, It is as human as I am human, don't you see? I

It voices my joys, my longings, my hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing is to crows or roaring to the lions, it is human speech, the speech of the mind that is here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and is aware.

Not the deaf, blind speech of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the incoherent mutterings of the blazing funeral pyre.

I was child, and later they told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.

When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask for, he drew a youth of sixteen into the bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me but my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank Pitifully.

Then ... I wore a shirt and my brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored my womanliness.

Dress in sarees, be girl be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, be a quarreller with servants. Fit in.

Oh, belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit on walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.

Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to choose a name, a role.

Don't play pretending games. Don't play at schizophrenia or be a nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when jilted in love.

I met a man, loved him. Call him not by any name, he is every man who wants. a woman, just as I am every woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,

The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and, everywhere, I see the one who calls himself I in this world, he is tightly packed like the sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns, It is I who laugh, it is I who make love and then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying with a rattle in my throat.

I am sinner, i am saint. I am the beloved and the betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no aches which are not yours.

I too call myself I.

Courtesy : Poem Hunter

How a Museum in Kolkata Is Helping Heal History's Wounds

By ARTURO DESIMONE, JON BAIRD AND MOHAMMAD KHAIR, INDIA

A museum in Bengal can help India confront the historical traumas, resentments and tensions of Partition and the long, unexplored shadows of 1947.



EVERY year on August 15, Independence Day brings great celebrations and festivals all over India. “The day after,” however, brings eerie silence: an unspoken memory of devastation earning little recognition from either side of the estranging fault lines. Because independence also meant the ensuing Partition of India into two states, India and Pakistan, that brought loss, violence, and displacement along with it.

Today, India has a religious-nationalist

federal government that champions historical revisionism, combined with fundamentalist pride, as the ultimate anaesthetic. That’s why it has never been more important to resist cheap attempts at distorting the legacy of an event as traumatic as India’s Partition.

It is in this context that Rituparna Roy co-founded the Kolkata Partition Museum — the first contemporary Bengali museum devoted exclusively to the subject of Partition: its cataclysm, its victims and perpetrators, its

aftermath, and the path to healing. Roy asked herself: “Can museums, art, and literature help to heal history’s wounds — to imagine a shared future beyond political hatreds?” The history taught at school growing up in Kolkata offered her an incomplete picture of the shadow cast by the 1947 Partition of India, especially its impact on the province of Bengal. In that historic turning point, Bengal was politically radicalised, impoverished, and tested by violence. “We have literature, we have films on Partition, but no public commemoration,” Roy explains.

Ritu, as Roy is affectionately known, tells of how her project began while completing research abroad in Amsterdam and at the University of Leiden. Seeking to better understand the dynamics of fragmentation of countries and cultures, she decided to visit a series of other countries that underwent comparable painful processes: Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, and Berlin, a city that clearly and decisively commemorates both the darkness of the events surrounding World War II, and how it was once left riven by the Cold War. On a bright October day in Berlin, walking randomly through the stone pillars of the Eisenman architectural Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, an idea germinated: “I sat down at one moment and for the first time I was struck by the enormity of the crime... I had read books, seen films, but the way that installation affected me was completely different.”

“I had always believed in the power of literature. I still do, as a scholar. Here in Berlin for the first time, it felt inadequate. What this brought home for me was the power of art — art in a very extended sense” including architectural projections and installations.

Another Berlin exhibition, the Topography of Terror, explores “the perspective of the perpetrators, as well as the victims. Blow-by-blow, year-by-year it gives an account of what happened — Rather than mummified or indoors, this museum grants access to citizens, to say ‘this is our past. It was shameful, this is what we did.’ Acknowledging the shameful past marks a step towards healing.

“Another thought struck me then; it was just the 60th year anniversary of Indian Partition... In India, you celebrate Independence, but you don’t commemorate

Partition, except in academic conferences, after which there will be conference volumes. But why not commemorate Partition in a more public way? Why not have public memorialisation in this way? It was just a passing thought at the time.”

Years after her enlightening journey through European sites of historical partition, Roy resettled in her hometown of Kolkata in Bengal. Soon thereafter, she embarked on another voyage, this time closer to home; Roy became the co-curator of an exhibition hall that bore in itself the seeds of the Kolkata Partition Museum. Although there is no physical museum yet, several events have taken place and more are in the works.

Roy’s work reflects that of the late Nobel Laureate Bengali poet and polymath Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore, who remains a hero in the Bengali imagination today, wrote anti-colonial polemics that at once appealed to a cosmopolitan spirit and a spirit of cross-pollination between East and West.

Decades before Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Tagore forcefully rejected the view of East and West as being isolated, hostile, or mutually incommunicable monuments. “The idea of the Nation is one of the most powerful an aesthetics that man has invented,” he once said. “Under the influence of its fumes the whole people can carry out its systematic programme of the most virulent self-seeking without being in the least aware of its moral perversion — in fact feeling dangerously resentful if it is pointed out.”

Roy also knows how many of today’s resentments and tensions in India and Pakistan arose from the long, unexplored shadows of 1947. A museum in Bengal can help to confront the truth of this past: to invite its visitors to rediscover their common heritage, transcending the sectarian-nationalist rhetoric. A memorialisation is not, as the typical holocaust monument is frequently interpreted in Europe, an architecture of shame and guilt. The latter are all too abundant, and the “powerful anaesthetics” do not subdue it.

In this South Asian context, the goal of memorialisation is that of remembrance of a forgotten, to reinvigorate a living heritage, and help it bloom once more.

Courtesy: The Wire

Nazrul: Bengal's Beloved Rebel Poet

By NEERJA, INDIA

HE is the only person to appear on postage stamps in India, Bangladesh as well as Pakistan, and strangely enough, he wasn't a statesman but a humble poet, whose life's message was that of oneness and universal love.

Kazi Nazrul Islam, popularly referred to as 'Bidrohi Kabi', or 'rebel poet', was one of the most important voices of India's freedom movement and a great source of inspiration during the Bangladesh Liberation War. But while Bangladesh has paid tribute to the power of his words by embracing him as their national poet, in India very few know of him outside West Bengal and Tripura, where his fame remains undiminished.

Born on May 25, 1899, in the village of Churulia in the Paschim Bardhaman district of the Bengal Presidency (present-day West Bengal), Nazrul was extremely sensitive even as a child and was nicknamed 'dukhu mian', or 'sad one'. His initial schooling was in a madrasa, where he also studied Islamic theology.

His uncle ran a travelling theatre group and a fascinated young Nazrul found himself irresistibly drawn to it. It was here



that his writing career unofficially took flight, as he began writing songs and poems for musical plays. He was introduced to a whole new world of folk and classical theatre, music and Bengali as well as Sanskrit literature, including the scriptures. All this was to play a huge part later in his revolutionary poetic

outpourings.

Every phase of Nazrul's life highlights both his childlike passion for learning as well as his unwavering humanitarianism. While serving in the British Army during World War I, he discovered Persian poetry through a Punjabi Moulvi (religious scholar) in the regiment. Such was the impact of Hafiz, Rumi and Omar Khayyam on this young man that he went on to pioneer the ghazal form of poetry in Bengali literature.

However, this brief experience with the British Army also strengthened anti-colonial sentiments in Nazrul, who began working as a journalist in Calcutta, writing impassioned poetry and articles against all forms of oppression. His most famous poems of this time were Bidrohi (The Rebel, 1921) and Bhangar Gaan (The

Song of Destruction, 1924). These words in Bidrohi are just as poignant today as they must have been back then :

"Weary of struggles, I, the great rebel,/ Shall rest in quiet only when I find/The sky and the air free of the piteous groans of the oppressed."

In August 1922, Nazrul started publishing a bi-weekly magazine called Dhumketu (Comet), which was openly critical of the British Empire. The first issue carried the blessings of poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, a man whom Nazrul looked upon as a guiding light. Tagore too had deep affection for the young firebrand, which is :

"Come, my comet,/Build a bridge of fire across the dark./Let your banner fly in triumph/Over the fortress of gloom./Be the night ever so full/Of dark Portents,/Come, rouse those who live half asleep,/That they may wake up with a start."

The bond between the two was so strong that they would often dedicate their writings to each other. On Tagore's 80th birthday, Nazrul wrote a poem for him titled Tribute of Tears, where he says :

"While others regarded me as a mere manifestation of awe, you saw in me disconsolate cries...You alone realized that I was a comet shooting away from your orbit of light."

Nazrul's fiery writings were soon to draw the wrath of the British Empire and barely a month after the launch of Dhumketu, his office was raided for the publication of his political poem Anondomoyeer Agomone(The Coming of Anondomoyee Goddess Durga).

In April, he was shifted from Alipore Jail to a jail in Hooghly, where he undertook a 40-day hunger strike to protest the ill-treatment of prisoners. A worried Tagore wrote to him, saying, "Give up hunger strike. Our literature claims you." He was released in December

and had, in the meantime, written numerous revolutionary poems during his imprisonment, which were promptly banned by the British Raj.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Nazrul's life was that he always walked the path of universalism steering clear of any ideological traps. As he started getting more involved in freedom struggle, he was as critical of the Khilafat Movement's "hollow religious fundamentalism" as he was of the Indian National Congress's hesitation to demand outright independence from the British.

But seeing the need to work on the ground, he did join the Bengal state unit of the Indian National Congress (INC). Here, along with Muzaffar Ahmed, Nazrul helped organise the Sramik Praja Swaraj Dal (Workers and Peasants Party), a socialist political party which worked within the INC from 1925-1929.

At the annual session of the Indian National Congress held in Krishnanagar in 1926, Nazrul sang what went on to be one of his most famous and prophetic songs, 'Kandari Hushair' Helmsman Beware: *"In this dark night, o sentries of Motherland, be alert;/ This helpless nation is drowning – it doesn't know how to swim'; / Helmsman, tell those who are drowning that they are no Hindus or Muslims, for they are drowning as human beings."*

Nothing disturbed him more than discrimination in the name of God.

In his poem Manush (Man), he rages : *"Who are they—hating human beings/yet kissing the Quran, the Vedas, the Bible?/ Snatch away those books from them./The hypocrites pretend worshipping those books/by killing the human beings who have, in fact,/ brought those books into existence."*

No one was better placed to write these words than the man whose poetry simultaneously explored the philosophy of both Islam and Hinduism. Along with

Islamic songs, Nazrul has written over 500 Hindu devotional songs. A skilled musician, he set his songs to Hindustani raga-based tunes as well as folk songs.

Amazingly, this gentle revolutionary also wrote a huge volume of songs and poems for children which are popular to this day. The 4,000-odd songs that he had written are collectively known as Nazrul Geeti and are sung across Bangladesh, West Bengal and Tripura.

Nazrul was also a man who walked his talk and his personal life was never at odds with his philosophy. His marriage to Pramila Devi, a Bengali Hindu woman, attracted criticism from both the Brahmo Samaj (of which she was a member) as well as Muslim religious leaders. The names this unique couple gave their children reflected this same progressive spirit: Krishna Mohammed, Arindam Khaled, Kazi Sabyasachi and Kazi Aniruddha.

The 'comet' was also well ahead of his times when it came to gender equality. His poem Nari (Woman) is a powerful manifesto for women's emancipation and the fight against patriarchy. He writes: *"Woman! Break asunder this dungeon of death/Let the enraged female power of the mythical Naginis be unleashed/Shatter your bangles/Becoming beacons out of darkness towards light/Show your Shakti by overcoming the guard dogs with one mighty thrust."*

Devoted to the love of his life, when Pramila fell seriously ill in 1939, Nazrul mortgaged the rights to his gramophone records and literary works for a sum of Rs 400 to pay for her treatment. Meanwhile, he helplessly watched as his dream of an independent, secular and unified India quickly turned into a nightmarish communal battleground. He publicly wrote against the idea of Partition in 1941 in a poem titled Deshattobodhok (Patriotic):

"Two flowers on same stem, Hindu-Musalman/Musalman the centred eye, Hindu the soul/At night now, we chase and slaughter you, my new enemy/But with dawn, brothers will know what they did to each other/We will race and cry, and ask forgiveness again."

In 1942, Nazrul contracted a mysterious neurological disease, resulting in loss of speech and memory. Some say this was caused by the grief of witnessing communal riots. He grappled with the disease for decades with the help of well-wishers, who tried to get him the best possible treatment. He lost Pramila in 1962 and his youngest son in 1971. After the Bangladesh Liberation War, India sent Nazrul to Bangladesh as a goodwill gesture but he never made it back.

On May 24, 1972, the newly independent nation of Bangladesh brought Nazrul to live in Dhaka with the consent of the government of India. In January 1976, he was granted citizenship of Bangladesh. But personal and national tragedies had already taken a heavy toll on him and Nazrul soon succumbed to his long-standing ailment, on August 29, 1976.

Since his passing away, many centers of learning and culture have been founded and dedicated to his memory in Bangladesh. In India, the Government of West Bengal established the Nazrul Tirtha in 2014 at Rajarhat, which houses archives, a research centre and an auditorium, and is a hub of cultural exchange between India and Bangladesh.

A poet to remmber

It is so apt that even after his death; Nazrul continues to inspire us towards oneness. As he says in his poem Manush: *"Caste, creed, religion – there's no difference. /Throughout all ages, all places, / we're all a manifestation/of our common humanity."*

Courtesy : livehistoryindia.com

How a Kashmiri ‘Merchant and Spy’ Finally Got Out of Prison in 19th Century Tibet

By ANU KUMAR, INDIA

IN August 1830, the acting British Resident in Kathmandu, Brian Houghton Hodgson, received a strange petition. It came from Ahmed Ali, a Kashmiri merchant who had been imprisoned in Lhasa, Tibet, on charges of being a spy by Chinese authorities loyal to the Qing dynasty. Describing himself as a “dependent and servant” of the British, Ali sought help. The Chinese officials (called the Amban) in Lhasa insisted he was a spy, for incriminating documents had been found on him.

The work of historians, in particular John Bray and his essay, *Trader, Middleman or Spy? The Dilemmas of a Kashmiri Muslim in Early 19th Century Tibet*, tells us about Ahmed Ali’s compulsions and his numerous interactions with the British over a 15-year period. Matthew W Mosca’s essay, *Kashmiri merchants and Qing Intelligence Networks in the Himalayas*, details the wider role played by Kashmiri merchants in this region. Besides, there are also accounts provided by British administrators and explorers of the time, William Moorcroft and Brian Houghton Hodgson that shed tangential information on this.

Ali’s story began 15 years earlier, around 1815 or thereabouts. It can be placed within a larger context, that of the wider world of Kashmiri merchants who for 350 years and more (early 17th century to mid-19th century CE, as written documents go) served as trade and cultural intermediaries across a region that encompassed Kashmir, Ladakh, Tibet, and Western and Southwestern China.

TRADING COMMUNITY

They traded in wool, animal skin, silk, spices, and also opium. At a time when Persian

was the main language in trade centres and routes across Central and West Asia and in Mughal and later British India, the Kashmiris were also translators, interpreters and even diplomatic agents.

Their movement across this region, through the passes of the Himalayas and the Karakoram, speak of a time when borders were more fluid or were just being ascertained. It was a time when the science of map-making was also relatively rudimentary. Islam, the religion professed by most among the Kashmiri merchant community, ensured a close-knit and devout community. Kinship networks helped find community across a broad region – though there were instances when they married local women and settled down, as in Ladakh.

Ali’s life encompassed, at various times, these three roles: he was, as Bray writes, a “trader, middleman and then also a spy”.

In the early 17th century, the rulers of Ladakh gave a group of Kashmiri merchants permission to trade in wool, while one group was also allowed to mint coins. Around the same time, the fifth Dalai Lama, Bray writes, wrote to the Mughal emperor (perhaps Shah Jahan or Aurangzeb) for Persian translators and interpreters in his court and Kashmiri merchants stepped in. Their role became crucial beginning the late 18th century. The Kashmiri merchants and intermediaries assisted and even travelled with Italian Jesuit missionaries Ippolito Desideri and Manuel Freyre through Ladakh to Tibet, acting as bank agents and, of course, interpreters.

In a way eerily resembling the present, in the 1770s, when the governor general of the

East India Company, Warren Hastings, realised that the Chinese Qing dynasty was beginning to have a greater say in the affairs of the Gorkha-ruled kingdom of Nepal, he sought a way towards Tibet via the kingdoms of Cooch Behar (North Bengal) and Bhutan. British official George Bogle, accompanied by surgeon Alexander Hamilton and a mysterious Tibetan agent called Purangir Gosain, travelled to Lhasa in 1774. This first British mission to Tibet, immortalised in Tilly Kettle's 1775 painting, had some limited success. Bogle died of cholera but much before this, it is believed, he married a Tibetan woman with whom he had two daughters.

MOORCROFT AND ALI

It wasn't until 1815 or so that the British made more serious overtures. These endeavours were largely spurred by the efforts of William Moorcroft, a British explorer, veterinary surgeon and head of the Company Stud in Calcutta (which bred good quality horses for the Army). It was this need that led Moorcroft to explore North India, Ladakh, Kashmir and beyond. He understood well the value the network of Kashmir merchants and traders presented – for trade and knowledge and information of this area, and about Chinese intentions. In 1815, as Bray and Mosca write, Moorcroft first forwarded a proposal from Ahmed Ali to the East India Company headquarters in Calcutta. Ali was the Patna-based representative of a Kashmiri trading house with branches not just in Ladakh and Tibet but also in Kathmandu, Dhaka and Patna. He traded in otter furs and skins from Chittagong and Dhaka to Tibet. He had a family and owned property in Lhasa.

Yet he, as Moorcroft persuasively wrote, was keen to help the British. Ali referenced his knowledge of Nepali officials being in contact with the Chinese. He also knew the secret roads from the Nepal border with India to Kathmandu. The governor general in council had reservations about Ali. For once, having promised to help the British, Ali began to dither. He feared his being an agent would harm the Kashmiri community in Tibet, who were beholden to the Chinese. He also feared for his family and property in Lhasa. At the end, around 1817, between the British and Ali, or more specifically between Moorcroft and Ali,

certain agreements were made: that Ali would help them in an informal capacity, for he was not formally anointed a British agent. It was Moorcroft who advanced Ali a small loan against his trade interests and as a precaution, in case his goods (otter skins were perishable) suffered because of his initial journey and covert activity.

ALI'S APPEAL

Fifteen years went by before Ali appeared in the news again – in the form of that desperate appeal for help to Brian Hodgson, the acting British Resident in Kathmandu. His mentor, Moorcroft, had died while on an exploratory trip in Bukhara in 1825. Despite this, occasional sightings of Moorcroft continued to be reported. There were stories that Moorcroft had disguised himself as a Kashmiri "Mussalman merchant", for he spoke several languages and had travelled incognito up to Tibet. However, these sightings were eventually confirmed as rumours.

As for Ahmed Ali, his appeal came from a falling out. As Bray writes, two of his brothers in Lhasa reported their suspicions about Ali being a British agent to the Amban. The documents in Ali's possession were handed over to Qing officials, who had the original Persian translated to Chinese, again with the help of Kashmiri interlocutors and translators. The documents, rudimentary maps and survey reports provided an accurate assessment of border roads, the topography around Tibet, the nature of the Chinese presence in Lhasa – data that proved to be very incriminatory.

CONFRONTATION AND RESOLUTION

Hodgson took his time sending Ali's petition to Calcutta. The British response was equally cagey and tactful (though it remains doubtful if it ever reached the Chinese). It suggested that Ahmed Ali was no British agent but a free-wheeler of sorts, and that the documents he claimed to have recorded were no secret but widely known, thanks to, as the British cheekily added, official Chinese gazettes.

The Chinese obviously wished to avoid a confrontation. Hodgson learnt in April 1831, again via the network of Kashmiri merchants and Nepalese officials close to China, that the Chinese had granted Ali's release. They did

Continued to page 11

Partition's Grandchildren : The Pashto Speaking Hindus in Jaipur

By SHUEYB GANDAPUR, INDIA

SHILPI Gulati, the director of *Dera tun Dilli* (Dera to Delhi) documentary, had suggested that, since I had Jaipur on my itinerary, I should meet her namesake there, who had been researching the origins and customs of Hindu Pashtuns in India. Enter Shilpi Batra Adwani, director of a documentary titled *Sheen Khalai* (blue tattooed-dots) on the subject of Pashto speaking Hindus of Jaipur.

I waited for Shilpi Adwani at Tapri Café. Atif Aslam's 'Mori Araj Suno' started playing in the background. She arrived. "Starriya ma se" (May you not be tired), I greeted her as we shook hands. "Pakhairraghle," (Welcome) she replied with a giggle. Tea was brought in an old-style kettle, accompanied by cutting glasses.

As opposed to my Dera Ismail Khan investigation which had been on the agenda of my India trip before it started, discovering this window to a forgotten piece of history of the other part of my identity came as an unexpectedly amazing revelation.

Shilpi Adwani and her work on the preservation of the history and culture of Hindu Pashtuns opened my eyes to the mysterious ways in which languages and ethnicities get scattered around, mixed and merged, only to re-emerge one day to reveal their roots.

Shilpi is the descendent of Hindus from Loralai (in present day Balochistan, Pakistan). There was a similarity in the stories of the two Shilpis in terms of growing up with mistaken identities. Just like Shilpi Gulati accidentally discovered that her ancestral tongue Seraiki was distinct from Punjabi, so did Shilpi Adwani accidentally hit upon the revelation one day that she was not of Baloch

origins, but Pashtun.

Both Shilpis heard the language of their forefathers spoken at their homes and learned it growing up without knowing what the language was called! While majority of the Pashtuns are Muslims living in Pakistan and Afghanistan, there are Hindu and Sikh communities among them as well, that many people may be unaware of.

Like Hindus from other parts of Pakistan, the Pashto-speaking Hindus from Balochistan had to leave their home and hearth behind following Partition. Those Hindu Pashtuns eventually settled in Jaipur, Rajasthan. They realised that in their adopted homeland, they were a minority within a minority, standing out owing to their distinct language, their heavily adorned clothes and tribal traditions. The women of the community had blue tattooed dots on their skin (*sheen khalai*) due to which they were mocked and ridiculed.

As Shilpi became cognizant of her Pashtun roots through interaction with Afghan students at the university where she studied, as she could converse with them in the same language as the one she had learned as a child, she decided to dig deeper to find out more about origins. She remembered the heavily embroidered clothes of her grandmother and embarked on a project to collect and restore them.

Shilpi went around asking surviving grandmothers and great-grandmothers among the Hindu Pashtuns of Jaipur if they still had their traditional clothes. While most women had lost them, as they went out of use, Shilpi managed to secure some pieces, damaged and moth-eaten as they were. With the help of

her husband who has expertise in the textile industry, she set about restoring those clothes, complete with their mirror-work, metal coins and colourful embroidery.

Each dress was a rare piece of art – an art that is going out of practice. Shilpi continued telling me her story, switching between Pashto, English and Hindi, as she showed me clips from the documentary on her smartphone. More tea was ordered to wash down the delectable anecdotes, accompanied by Parle G biscuits. One of the cups had “Chai peene se kaale hote hain” (Drinking tea darkens your complexion) written on it.

In one of the clips Shilpi showed me, an elderly man in their ancestral village in Loralai was being interviewed. The man went around the city, pointing to houses and shops that were owned by the Hindu Pashtuns of the cities. He remembered their names. When the same video was shown to the community elders living in Jaipur, they were able to recognise that elderly gentleman. They were playmates from youthful days.

The result of all of Shilpi’s research will come out in the form of her documentary Sheen Khalai that is not yet released.

Very few among the people who witnessed the gruesome events resulting from the Partition

of India are still alive. Three generations have started their lives since then. They carry the identities of their new current homeland. Their ancestral lands they left behind on the other side of the border are, for them, merely inherited memories, collection of anecdotes or relegated streams of imagination.

But some like the two Shilpis I met, still venture to awaken those memories and revive them among their communities, especially among the younger generations, a sense of pride in identifying with their roots, the places where their elders came from and the suffering they went through getting uprooted from their homes for good. Talk of Partition triggers myriad narratives. It resulted in the displacement and cross migration of 15 million people along religious lines.

Back in Delhi, at the house of a Muslim friend, his mother told me that her father’s older brother had migrated to Karachi during Partition. She recalled the time when her father visited Pakistan to see his brother after many years. The older brother could not recognise his own younger brother! He had lost his eyesight.

Her voice choked and her eyes welled up when she said, “The cursed Partition has left behind a legacy of endless pain.”

Courtesy: nationalheraldindia.com

How a Kashmiri ‘Merchant and Spy’

Continued from page 9

refuse to accede to Hodgson’s later request that Ali’s release be delayed to after the malaria season (after the rains). The British Resident, however, sent an elephant and porters to ensure Ali safely crossed the border into Kathmandu and then on to British India. Little is known about what happened to Ali thereafter. He was compensated to some extent for his efforts – the British dug out old records from 15 years ago. The goods he had with him, fine silks and woollen clothes worn in Tibet and parts of China, were assessed by the then secretary of the Asiatic Society (another Moorcroft discovery), Hungarian scholar Alexander (Sándor) Csoma de Korös, and placed in the museum in Calcutta. The rest, comprising tea and other perishables, were sold off. Csoma would go on to earn fame as the compiler of the first Tibetan English dictionary. Hodgson would make a notable contribution not just as a diplomat but also as an educationist, making a case for vernacular education across India. He also apparently married a Kashmiri woman while in Kathmandu. Charles Allen’s 2015 biography on Hodgson, *The Prisoner of Kathmandu: 1820-1843*, lauds the Briton’s many contributions toward building a valuable knowledge base about Nepal, its languages, flora and fauna – something that rightly gave him the title, father of Himalayan studies.

Courtesy : Scroll.com

Feminists Before Partition

By **RAFIA ZAKARIA**, PAKISTAN

SUCH is the weight of colonial and post-colonial erasure that the girls and women living in Pakistan today have very little idea about the very early feminists who have come before them. Current nationalist intoxications wish to divide all things and everything along the lines of a border drawn by the British and incongruous to the actual groupings of the subcontinent's multitudinous identities. There are persistent efforts, on both the Indian and Pakistani sides, to read current divisions and delusions in the historical past. The consequence has been a history full of holes, large omissions and boisterous erasures where the stories of people should be.

Given that India and Pakistan and Bangladesh are all patriarchal societies, it follows that the histories of these lands that have been resuscitated from the past, and presented to populations that do not have much of an idea of the past, have been male histories. There are many male heroes and leaders, poets and writers, men who gave memorable speeches and men who stood up to the British; the stories of women are harder to find.

Women, however, were present and they were busy. In her essay 'Feminist Inheritances and Foremothers: The Beginnings of Feminism in Modern India', the historian Padma Anagol turns her attention to the women of Maharashtra in India. It is fascinating to consider these intrepid women of the late 1800s who refused to bow to the patriarchal societies in which they found themselves. It is notable that their activities for reform took place in the context of severe criticism from their Western rulers, who saw India as backward and uncivilised. Some of the struggles took place under the larger umbrella of social reform

movements in which individuals of all religions participated and engaged. In Anagol's view, it is these reform societies that were the precursors of contemporary feminisms that exist in the subcontinent today.

In the late 1930s, a woman named Lakshmibai Tilak became one of the first Indian women to write her autobiography. The book, which tells the story of Tilak's life, includes the story of her grandfather who was hanged in 1857 owing to his participation in the uprising against the British. Born in 1868, she was married off at an early age to a Marathi-language poet who was subject to many whims and eccentricities and often just got up and left, leaving his family behind. It is quite likely that it was owing to these events that Tilak advocated for women's financial and economic independence. In an effort to do just this, she began training as a nurse, an endeavour she sadly had to abandon owing to family responsibilities.

Similarly spirited was Rakhmabai Raut, a woman who had been married early, but who refused to leave her father's home to live with her husband. The husband sued in court when Rakhmabai was 19 years old. She still refused to join him, pointing out his lack of education and his dishonest lifestyle. The British judge ruled in favour of Rakhmabai, saying that she did not have to go and live with her husband because the marriage had been arranged when she was a minor and had never been consummated. The decision caused a huge outcry in India, where marriages of minors were often arranged and where asking for the consent of the parties was unheard of. Hindus were particularly incensed by the judge's application of these concepts of consent and consummation because they imagined

marriage as a sacrament for eternity rather than a contract lasting a single life.

The tumult from this case and the continuing agitation by women against abuse, child marriage and other cultural and religious customs that demeaned their existence led to vehement debates in the local press across India. Men and religious figures felt that women had become very rebellious and had overstepped their boundaries. Women on the other hand felt that these issues had remained in the dark for a long time and it was time there was public debate on them.

In a similar manner to the feminists of today, those very early feminists were accused of being puppets of the British. It was the emergence of the nationalist Quit India movement against the British that ended up uniting reform-minded men and women. Ruttie Jinnah, the wife of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was also said to have been active in these movements.

British women who were busy advocating for the right to vote in Britain were eager to have Indian women join their fight for suffrage. They were startled when many Indian feminists from the time expressed no

interest in getting the right to vote, alleging that they did not wish to be equal to Indian men because both the men and they would still be under the thumb of the British rulers. When we are free, they said, we will have the right to vote in our free nations. This was correct; when India and Pakistan were created in 1947, Indian and Pakistani women had the right to vote alongside the men.

The blurring of boundaries between nationalism and feminist reform has proven to be a burden. In both India and Pakistan, women who should be feminists are instead subsumed into expressions of 'patriotism' that are based on intellectual and religious obscurantism. They are eager to wave flags but not hold up banners and to denounce those women who do organise and march as 'bad' women. It is an old recipe of divide and rule, of creating useless definitions where a 'good' woman is just one who kowtows to the toxic masculinity of the state and domestic violence. One wishes that the sheer unoriginality of the critiques of women who wish to control their own would convince women to discard theme. If women in the 1800s could rebel, then so can the women of 2020.

Courtesy: Dawn.com



HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Toru Dutt: Pioneer of the English Novel in India.

By ADITI SHAH, INDIA

*Absurd may be the tale I tell,
Ill-suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell,
So let it stand among my rhymes*

—From the poem *Jogadhya Uma*
by Toru Dutt

FOR over a century, Indian authors have been making waves globally for their contributions to English literature. From Rabindranath Tagore to Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arvind Adiga and Arundhati Roy, they have turned the Indian experiences into compelling works of fiction that have garnered attention and acclaim.

When we talk of the firsts, though, we always forget the young girl from Bengal that started it all. Toru Dutt (1856-1877), a pioneer of Indian writing in English, was also the first Indian writer in French. She died at 21 but had already left behind a remarkable legacy. Torulata Dutt was born on 4th March 1856 into the illustrious Dutt family of Rambagan, Calcutta. The Dutt family was one of the first Calcutta families to be strongly influenced by the British colonial and missionary presence. They were a part of a new class of people referred to as 'Bhadralok', who were upper-caste, liberally educated Indians known for their progressive, Westernised outlook and literary leanings.

Toru's grandfather, Ramasay Dutt, was a judge with the Small Causes Court in the state and a notable educator, who co-founded the Hindu School. Located at Bankim Chatterjee Street in Kolkata, it was a prominent institution during the Bengal Renaissance.

Ramasay Dutt's children were all writers and his son, Govin Chunder Dutt, Toru's father, published *The Dutt Family Album*, the first anthology of English poetry written by a Bengali. Thus, Toru and her siblings, her oldest

brother Abju and elder sister Aru, grew up in a poetically charged environment. In his anthology, her father describes Toru as:

*"Puny and elf-like, with disheveled tresses,
Self-willed and shy ne'er heeding that I call,
Intent to pay her tenderest addresses
To bird or cat, but most intelligent..."*

When Toru was six years old, the Dutt family converted to Christianity. The children were educated at home by private tutors, and they learnt French and English, and eventually Sanskrit, in addition to their first language, Bengali. Their mother, who did not support the religious conversion initially, also told them tales from Indian epics along with those from Christian mythology.

But in 1865, tragedy struck the family when Abju died at the age of 14 due to tuberculosis. Deeply aggrieved, Govin Chunder Dutt felt that a change of location might do his family some good and along with his wife and two daughters left for Europe to settle there.

They first lived in France, where the girls were briefly enrolled at a boarding school and studied French. Then, the family spent some time in Italy before moving to England in 1870, where they were educated in *Bible* reading, music and history as well. It was a transformative period in Toru's life as she engaged directly with British intellectual life, attended 'Higher Lectures for Women' at Cambridge and came in contact with a few English suffragists including Anne Jemima Clough. However, in 1873, the family was forced to return to India due to the girls' failing health. But by the time the Dutt family were back in Calcutta, Toru and Aru had already embarked upon what would become a project ambitious enough to draw on all their recent learning: a series of translations of French poetry for an English-speaking public.

Back in India at age of 17, Toru found it challenging to adjust to culture that now seemed foreign to her. In a letter to her friend back in England, she wrote, "I have not been to one dinner party or any party at all since we left Europe," and "If any friend of my grandmother happens to see me, the first question is, if I am married." Both statements expressed frustration with what she saw as a conservative society.

The sisters' translation work featured in print for the first time, in *The Bengal Magazine*, in March 1874, under the initials 'T.D.' and 'A.D.'. But as Toru was finally beginning to focus on doing what she loved, another tragedy struck the family. Aru became seriously ill and died in July 1874.

On losing her constant companion, best friend and literary soul mate, Toru sought refuge in books, reading and writing with a new voice and intensity. She continued to contribute her translations to *The Bengal Magazine* and even *The Calcutta Review*. Besides poetry, she also translated a couple of speeches delivered in the French Legislative Assembly, including one that focused on a speech delivered by the great French poet, novelist and dramatist, Victor Hugo. In the next three years, Toru produced an impressive collection of poetry and prose, including two essays on the French Romantic poets Leconte de Lisle and Henry Vivian Derozio.

In 1876, at the age of 20, Toru published her first collection of poems called *A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields*. The anthology contained translations of 165 poems (of which eight had been translated by Aru) by about 70 poets, with her critical notes on each piece. Her book was so well received that, within only a few months of its publication, it saw a second edition in 1878 and a third edition in 1880.

But Toru did not live to see these triumphs. The young litterateur and writer died of tuberculosis, which had earlier claimed both her siblings. She died on 30th August 1877, at the age of 21.

Her brief time on this earth and her passing can be best summed up in this verse from a poem titled *On The Death Of A Young Girl* by the French poet Évariste De Parvy (1753 - 1814), translated by Toru herself :

*But God had destined otherwise,
And so she gently fell asleep,*

*A creature of starry skies,
Too lovely for the earth to keep.*

After Toru's death, when her father went through her work, he found many manuscripts of her writings and published them posthumously. One was an unfinished romance in English titled *Bianca, Or, The Young Spanish Maiden*, considered the first English novel by an Indian woman. The circumstances of the heroine of this tale, *Bianca Garcia*, the younger and only surviving daughter of a Spanish gentleman who had settled in an English village, have some touching resemblances with those of Toru's life. Another work was a complete French novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*. It was the first French book by an Indian. It was an amazing feat for a foreigner, that too for a young 'Hindu' woman from Calcutta, to have written a novel in French, which is why this fact was boldly displayed on the title page, just below the title; 'Nouvelle écrite en Français par Toru Dutt, jeune et célèbre Hindoue de Calcutta, morte en 1877' ('A novel written in French by Toru Dutt, a famous Hindu from Calcutta who died in 1877'). Another work of Toru left behind, and which made her famous in the literary worlds, is *Ancient Ballads And Legends of Hindustan*. It compiles her narrative adaptation based on Sanskrit literature like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Vishnu Purana*, along with seven original compositions.

In her research paper *The Enigma of Toru Dutt*, Meera Jagannathan observes that Toru's French novel "is a story steeped in Christian piety and European ethos, in which a young, beautiful heroine suffers in silent martyrdom for the crimes of aman she has loved, where as *Ancient Ballads...*, written in English, seeks inspiration from Hindu mythology and portrays strong-willed women like Savitri, who brings back her husband from the netherworld."

*No weariness, O Death, I feel,
And how should I, when by the side
Of Satyavan? In woe and weal
To be a helpmate swears the bride.
This is my place; by solemn oath
Wherever thou conductest him
I too must go, to keep my troth...*

—From *The Ballad of Savitri* by Toru Dutt

Continued to page 19

Begum Hazrat Mahal : A Revolutionary Queen.

By MADHURI KATTI, INDIA

HERS is a name you come across quite often in Lucknow – Begum Hazrat Mahal, mother, queen and a symbol of resistance during the Revolt of 1857. Yet few who stroll down Hazrat Ganj recall this gutsy royal from Awadh, who rose from humble roots to become a courtesan, a queen and then a leader.

Interestingly, Hazrat Mahal is believed to have been born in an extremely poor family in Faizabad, as Muhammadi Khanum. Her father is said to have been a slave called Umber, who was owned by a certain Ghulam Ali Khan.

At a very young age, she was sold into the royal harem as a khawasin (attendant). Here, she was trained in royal ways and etiquette. She was beautiful, intelligent and very creative, and soon became part of the royal Pari Khana (House of Fairies).

The House of Fairies was an institution set up by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1822 - 1887), the last Nawab of Awadh, to train young and beautiful girls to become professional singers and dancers, or recruits for his experiments in theatre. The Nawab was a great patron of the arts and he turned Awadh into a centre of art, literature, music and theatre. Why, even courtesans or dancers were refined and respected back then.

The young Muhammadi was rechristened 'Mahak Pari' in the Pari Khana, and climbed the ranks to become one of the Nawab's 'Mutah' wives, or 'temporary wife under contract'. It was an alliance that enjoyed legitimacy under Shia variant of Islamic marriage. The Nawab had many Mutah wives, or temporary concubines, and any of these women who would give him a

son was given the title of 'Begum'. These in turn were given 'Mahal' quarters in his palace. These would then become 'official' wives.

Soon after she became his 'Mutah', Nawab Wajid Ali Shah gave Muhammadi the title of 'Iftakar-un-Niss' or *Pride of All Women*. After she bore him a son, she became one of the favourite 'official' younger queens. It was at this time that she became Begum Hazrat Mahal.

Different accounts of that era state that Begum Hazrat Mahal was not very popular in the royal household as she had not entered a marriage alliance through royal family connection. She was also envied by other older, official queens as the Nawab was fascinated by her beauty and talent. By all accounts, she also did not enjoy the trust of the Queen Mother and was often treated less than kindly, but she was much loved by her husband.

LIFE IN AWADH AFTER ANNEXATION

In 1856, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah had to leave Awadh after his kingdom was annexed by the East India Company. Forced to leave Lucknow, he set sail for Calcutta on 13th March 1856 but could not accommodate his numerous wives and servants. Besides, the Nawab had assumed that his move to Calcutta was temporary. He had also planned to visit Queen Victoria, with an official complaint or appeal to regain his lost glory.

His mother, Queen Janab-i-Aliyah, played a crucial and supportive role in this move. In fact, she made it to England and met the Queen, in futile attempt to persuade her to clear her son's name and return him his power. She died in Paris on her way back.

Those who were left behind in Awadh

included Begum Hazrat Mahal, her son and young heir to the throne Birjis Qadr, and Wajid Ali Shah's other wives and 'Mutah' wives.

As the drama unfolded in Awadh, elsewhere there was growing anger among sepoys over rumours that the bullet casings of the new assault rifles had been laced with grease made from animal fat. This went against the sepoys' religious beliefs.

Resentment was also mounting among royals all across India over the infamous 'Doctrine of Lapse', which the British used as a flimsy excuse to annex kingdoms across the board. Awadh was one of these. The hanging of Mangal Pandey in Barrackpore on 8th April 1857 acted as a trigger and what started as a mutiny soon spread like wildfire. This was the Revolt of 1857 or India's First War of Independence.

The people of Awadh, already furious that their ruler had been deposed, were adamant to stand up and be counted as rebellious soldiers from Meerut and Bengal (as most British army recruits were from Awadh) poured in. There were increasing attacks on British camps but there was also a lack of coherence and confusion. The local jagirdars and policemen had joined the revolt but they needed a central authority to rally around. With Wajid Ali away, the rebels began to look to the young Birjis Qadr, son of Begum Hazrat Mahal, who was barely 12 years old at the time.

Although he was the official Crown Prince, he was too young to lead and it was Begum Hazrat Mahal who took over the reins of the administration and strategic planning during this crucial period. She led from the front, which was a big surprise as these were, after all, women who were always behind the purdah or veil.

CAPABLE ADMINISTRATOR & WAR STRATEGIST

The Begum proved her mettle as a leader. She began by uniting Hindus and Muslims against the British. She then motivated women to become warriors and join the war, and appealed to all sections of society to donate funds.

In one go, she razed religion, gender and class differences and united everyone in the revolt. She also united and coordinated all three military fronts – cavalry, artillery and infantry. Her army commander was a Hindu King Raja Jai Lal Singh; her confidant Mammu Khan was superintendent-in-charge; and women units were led by able commander Uda Devi, a Dalit woman. Uda Devi played an exemplary role as a sniper and has a memorial in the place where she was taken down by the British after she killed 32 men from a vantage point.

According to an account by James Taylor, an ex-officer of the British Indian army who authored several books on 1857 revolt -

The rebels under her leadership took the city of Lucknow on 30th May, forcing Sir Henry Lawrence, newly appointed Chief Commissioner of Awadh, his troops and all Europeans to seek refuge in the Residency and fortify it. Begum and her troops kept attacking the Residency as Henry Lawrence waited for reinforcements and assistance.

The Begum's troops not only confined them to the Residency for a long time, she also took other measures to defend the city from the British. The latter did enter the city but could only help in evacuating the Residency. But the resistance from the Begum and her army was so strong that they had to flee Lucknow. Anticipating fierce retaliation, the Begum started building strong walls around the city. The Lucknow Siege started on 30th May and lasted till 27th November 1857. Sir Henry Lawrence lost his life to a grievous injury on 4th July 1857 and is buried within the Residency. As most Indian sepoys in the British Army had defected, the siege lasted a very long time.

Begum Hazrat Mahal proved to be very proactive as she issued proclamations regularly, encouraging people to unite and fight against the British. In fact, the Begum was determined to evict the British from her soil and records say that she attacked Lt General James Outram, who had been summoned to reinforce the army and his soldiers who had been stationed at Alambagh

palace nine times!

According to Lucknow historian Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, who has extensively researched the era, the Begum contemptuously rejected Outram's offer of a peace treaty with Queen Victoria and the promise of a pension of one lakh rupees. She made repeated calls to her troops and rebels to fight.

She even rode on an elephant along with her soldiers in one of the attacks, literally leading from the front.

All her efforts went in vain when King Jang Bahadur of Nepal agreed to send Gorkha troops to help the British army. Also, her supporters had run out of patience and they betrayed her trust by switching sides. Finally, Kaiserbagh Palace was lost but not before Begum Hazrat Mahal escaped to Musa Bagh, a country house outside Lucknow, on 15th March 1858. She finally fled towards the Nepal border, where she was joined by Maratha leader Nana Saheb. She had still not lost hope and continued to administer and organise her troops!

After the Revolt of 1857, power was transferred from the East India Company to the British Monarchy. In response to Queen Victoria's proclamation issued on 1st November 1858, promising better governance and the right to religious freedom of all native princes, Begum Hazrat Mahal sent a scathing rebuttal, which is well recorded.

After losing Lucknow, Begum Hazrat Mahal retreated to Faizabad and joined Maulavi Ahmadullah Shah, Nana Saheb and others in the battle of Shahjahanpur. But as Gorkha forces arrived, fearing capture and humiliation, the Begum fled to Nepal. The same King Jang Bahadur, who had betrayed India, provided her safe passage and refuge in Kathmandu. Historic accounts mention that she had carried her jewels and a little wealth with her, and she bought her asylum to live with dignity. In spite of repeated appeals to return to India, and the promise of official pardon and pension by the British, Begum Hazrat Mahal was adamant. She did not want to return and live on their terms.

The Begum's great-great-granddaughter, Manzilat Fatima, who lives in Kolkata, said

in an email interview, "*Begum Hazrat Mahal was promised entitlement, wealth, property and an attractive pension by the East India Company, not once or twice but at least four times! She refused to accept their offer because, first, she did not trust them (the treachery by which they had framed her husband Wajid Ali Shah and compelled him to step down from his throne was the best example).*

Second, the Queen's proclamation had loopholes and bindings for an obvious submission of powers under the British monarchy. So she decided to stay back in Kathmandu and live a free life in a foreign land rather than die a slave under the British. This is one major decision that distinguishes Begum Hazrat Mahal and Wajid Ali Shah from the rest of the royal families, who surrendered to the British to earn their goodwill and retain their status!"

BELATED RECOGNITION

The valour of Begum Hazrat Mahal did find mention in the historic accounts of Sir Henry Lawrence, who died in the battle at the Residency, and there were positive reports of her valour in the British and Western press. According to a reference by Taylor, "*The Times in London briefly chronicled her history. At the end of 1858, it was saying, like all the women who have turned up in the insurrection she has shown more sense and nerve than all her generals together.*"

Begum Hazrat Mahal died in exile in 1879. She was buried in an unmarked grave close to the Jama Masjid in Kathmandu. She had helped build the mosque and named it 'Hindustani Masjid'. Her country lived within her as she continued to follow all the developments back home, wrote poetry and involved herself in noble causes. She persistently refused to return to India on British terms. However, her son Birjis Qadr did return to Indian soil, to Metiabruz, Kolkata, after the death of his father Wajid Ali Shah in 1887. He died under tragic and mysterious circumstances after attending a dinner along with his son, Khursheed, in July 1893, but luckily his pregnant wife, Mehtab Ara survived.

Due to fear of conspiracies over legal heirship (as Wajid Ali Shah had many wives and children who were also claiming to be a legal heir), she too has disappeared from the

public gaze. It was only much later that Birgis Qadr's son Meher Qadr returned to claim that he was the legitimate heir. Begam Hazrat Mahal's great-grandson Kaukab Qadr still lives in Kolkata and Begum Hazrat Mahal has all but become footnote in history.

According to a history researcher, Aarti Johri, who wrote her Master's Liberal Arts thesis titled *Paternalistic Politics and Feminine Fates: The Legacies of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh* in June 2012, at Stanford University:

"Begum Hazrat Mahal's legacy was diminished in the changed landscape of India post-1857. Her humble beginnings as a courtesan made her an inadequate role model. The courtesans at the zenith of Lucknow's court were no petty 'nautch-girls' as described by the Victorian sensibilities of the colonists. They were sophisticated women, well-versed in the arts of dance, music and poetry. Their association with the courts made them extremely wealthy and 19th century British records indicate that they were in the highest income-tax bracket before 1857.

While the British derided the courtesans and the culture they espoused, they did not hesitate to tax them on their 'ill-earned' wealth. During the Mutiny, the courtesans monetarily supported the rebels, and their homes became rebel hideouts and secret meeting-venues.

Yet, this courtesan culture, the associated decadence and 'debauchery' became a source of embarrassment for late 19th-century Indian nationalists, social reformers and the emerging middle-class English-educated 'elite'. Indian nationalists believed that it was decadence and indolence that had helped the British uproot power in the princely states," Johri writes in her thesis.

But Begum Hazrat Mahal was much more than just an uncomfortable figure who rose to become a leader. She managed to unite Hindus, Muslims, women, courtesans, landlords, landless peasants and Dalits, and got them to come together for the great rebellion, which found an important place not just in Indian history but in world history as well. She was a woman way ahead of her time!

Courtesy: livehistoryindia.com

Toru Dutt : Pioneer of the English...

Continued from page 15

When Ancient Ballads.....was published in 1882, English poet and critic Edmund Gosse wrote an Introductory memoir for it, "...She did not Anglicize her ideas but kept close to the ethical values of the original tales while her understanding of modern life and dedication to craft helped her to make these ideas of yore relevant to posterity."

Toru's interest in Indian mythology grew largely out of curiosity when she had, as a child, witnessed her mother recite stories from the Hindu scriptures and whose recitation brought forth tears, simply due to the charm which lay in the ancient lands of India, as mentioned by Toru in one of her letters to a friend.

While Toru has gone down in literary history as a pioneer of English writing in India, she has attracted her share of criticism for her very stark style, shortcomings of meter and over-sentimental writing. But none of this can take away from the fact that she was a brilliant young woman with a talent that made the people in Europe take serious note of Indians writing in English. Also, her contribution to the French language and literature is commendable along with her storytelling of Indian folklore. In just a few years, Toru was able to produce so much of lasting worth. Nineteenth-century French critic James Darmesteter pays her a fitting tribute, "The daughter of Bengal, so admirable and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, and an English woman by education, a French woman at heart, a poet in English, prose writer in French, who at the age of 18 made India acquainted with the poets of French herself, who blended in herself three souls and three traditions, died at the age of 21 in the full bloom of her talent and on the eve of the awakening of her genius, presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel."

Courtesy : livehistoryindia.com

The Remarkable Begums Who Defied Patriarchal Norms to Rule Bhopal for More Than a Century

By PRIYA MIRZA, INDIA

THE heiress apparent to the throne of Bhopal, Abida Sultan, wore her hair short, played the saxophone, had her own band, sped around in a Daimler, and when her husband announced that he'll assume custody of their son, threatened to kill him with the pistol she kept in her pocket. All the while, she remained pious and committed to Islam.

Abida Sultan's autobiography, *Memoirs of a Rebel Princess*, was unabashed and far from removed from the stereotypical picture of an oppressed Muslim woman. In the book, she wrote frankly about her conjugal life and her inability to be the good, dutiful wife. But could one expect any less from the child of a feminist royal lineage?

This matrilineal reign, which began in 1819, lasted more than a hundred years, with the lone interruption in 1926, when Sultan Jahan Begum abdicated in favour of Nawab Hamidullah Khan. Hamidullah Khan's daughter Abida Sultan was to succeed to the throne, but when she chose to leave for Pakistan after the Partition of India, her younger sister Sajida became the Begum of Bhopal.

Unlike the Queen-Regent of Travancore,



whose brief radical rule ran only till her son came of age, these women ruled for unexpectedly long periods, facilitated by the absence or death of male contenders to the throne, and through sheer grit. A photograph taken in 1872 of Nawab Shah Jahan Begum, Abida Begum's great-grandmother, shows a booted woman staring straight at the camera, much in the manner of a Vogue cover shoot. The Begums of Bhopal practised feminism much before it gained prominence. They were interesting, headstrong and opinionated, but their

wars weren't fought on the battlefield.

Archival records are filled with the Begums exhibiting their commitment to Islam: donating money to build a mosque in Basra, Iraq, funding the Muslim University at Aligarh, and opening a school for girls in Delhi in the early 1920s. At the time, it was unusual to have a ruler devote time and money to women's education — even a progressive thinker like Syed Ahmad Khan was focused on Muslim men getting Western education — but to do so outside their state was truly remarkable. So much so that when Lord Edwin Montagu, the

British Secretary of State for India, met Begum Sultan Jahan in 1917, he noted in his diary that she was “frightfully keen on education, and jabbered about nothing else”.

FRINGES OF HISTORY

Women and their assumption of political power have always been sidelined in Islamic history, though there is reason to believe that Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, had a role to play in the establishment of the first Islamic state. Razia Sultana’s brief reign as the Sultanah of Delhi in the 1200s and her killing demonstrated the near impossibility and legitimacy of a Muslim women ruler.

Nothing changed over the centuries. Though it was a young woman, Queen Victoria, who reigned over the hundreds of Indian monarchs at the start of the Paramountcy, assuring them gently of their territorial sovereignty, this mattered little in India. Indian monarchies have been patrilineal and patriarchal, guarding the male and natural right to ascend the throne.

Against this background, to have four Muslim women successively rule a state is unprecedented in world history. But what makes it all the more remarkable is that these women administered a state dominated by feudal warlords accustomed to male privilege over the throne.

The modern city of Bhopal was founded in the early 18th century by Dost Mohammad Khan, an Orakzai Pathan from Afghanistan, and it soon became the second-most important Muslim princely state after Hyderabad. Its geographical location — in Central India — was vital for the suppression of the 1858 War of Independence.

In North India, there were several Muslim princely states — such as Bahawalpur, Mahmudabad, Tonk,

Pataudi and Rampur — which were supported by the British under the Paramountcy. Under this policy, while nearly 500 princely states were autonomous and maintained internal sovereignty, their foreign policy and right to wage wars was controlled by the British.

The reign of the Begums began in Bhopal in 1819, when the ruling Nawab, Mohammad Khan, died without an heir and the British decided to crown his young wife Qudsia till her daughter Sikandar came of age. Sikandar Begum’s husband too died in 1844, and she proved to be a competent ruler and a worthy ally to the British, playing a vital role in the First War of Independence in 1857-1858. This compelled the British to make a provision that the Begum was a sovereign in her own right. Three years later, in 1861, she was invested with the Exalted Order of the Star of India, making her, at the time, the only female knight in the British Empire besides Queen Victoria. She was succeeded by her daughter Shah Jahan Begum and then by Sultan Jahan Begum.

Sultan Jahan Begum went on to have a 25-year-long reign, marked by a commitment to progress, education and women’s health reforms. She was the last Begum of Bhopal as the heiress apparent, Abida Sultan, abdicated the throne in 1948.

‘MAGICAL ISLAND’

The first and foremost among them, Qudsia Begum, set the template of the ideal ruler. Spartan and shunning jewellery, she refused to take loans and made sure that any money spent would be solely for education and philanthropy. As the British agent Lancelot Wilkinson in Bhopal noted: “She rides and walks about in public, and betrays her determination to maintain herself in power by learning the use of the spear and other manly



accomplishments. At times she became quite frantic; and as one of the soldiers observed, more terrible to approach than a tigress.”

This “magical island”, as at least one commentator called it, was as rare as it was difficult to create. Like all figures of power, the Begums too attracted people who wanted to manipulate them — and in their case, this meant both the British and the ruling clan.

Qudsia Begum and her daughter, early inheritors of an uneasy throne, responded to the tugs and pulls by quickly learning traditional masculine skills like fencing and hunting. Shah Jahan Begum embraced the *Purdah*, asserting notions of orthodox Islamic femininity. She withdrew from public life into strict seclusion and refused to meet the British Viceroy in 1875. Her daughter would later recount in her autobiography that “even as a young girl, she preferred to meet with other girls of her age to discuss ‘a thousand little points of household duties and of domestic management than to perform outdoor activities’.” None of this though got in the way of being a good ruler, and she proved that a veiled woman could rule as competently as anybody else.

BALANCE OF POWER

The Begums carefully navigated the multiple demands of power by ingeniously playing around with tradition and modernity. They would sometimes opt to let go of the *burkha* and at times wear it to demonstrate a different modernity. In their writings, the Begums constantly acknowledged their mothers and grandmothers, paying obeisance to the strong women who shaped their lives and characters.

Their commitment to austerity and Islam set them apart from the wasted royal lives that were given to overindulgence and dissipation. They constantly drew upon the Quran and respected Islamic scholars, reinforcing the idea that Islam speaks of equity between the sexes. Their spartan lives struck Mahatma Gandhi too, when he visited the state in the late 1920s, on invitation. He was suspicious that the Begum’s cotton clothes and thin mattress had been “put on as a show”, till his travelling companion Sarojini Naidu

assured him otherwise.

The Begums of Bhopal, who styled themselves as “Nawab Begums”, were radical and unconventional (the term ‘Nawab Begum’ itself was ingenious as there is no word for queen in the Islamic political imagination). Nonetheless, with consummate ease and success, they proved they were no less. Keeping in line with the Islamic tradition of maintaining a diary, like the founder of their state used to, the Begums invested much energy in maintaining records — of the state and of themselves.

Shah Jahan Begum, the third in the line, established a History Office, along with a system for retrieving and maintaining records of important characters in her family. Abida Sultan’s son, Shahryar Khan, a former career diplomat in Pakistan, has carried on this family tradition by writing an authoritative account of the dynasty, *The Begums of Bhopal*.

Like a host of other wealthy Muslim *ashraf* women, the Begums travelled to Europe and to West Asia as part of the obligatory *hajj*. And despite the seriousness of the occasion, they never failed to display flashes of their *chutzpah*. There are anecdotes of Sikandar Begum not disembarking from the ship to Europe without her bottles of pickle. And upon reaching London, she mistakenly wore a dressing gown to meet King George V and Queen Mary, a realisation made only owing to the headlines in the newspapers the next morning.

Many princesses have ascended to power in democratic India by contesting and winning parliamentary elections. The Begums of Bhopal, however, are remarkable for sustaining a determined succession of women monarchs, despite hostility to their gender ruling — the very first Begum, Qudsia, had declared that her infant daughter would succeed after her. Despite the religious and political odds against them, their reign was marked by benevolence and modernity, a radical openness to change, like women’s education and medicine, while maintaining a steadfast commitment to the tenets of Islam. The Begums are icons for women, Muslim or otherwise.

Courtesy: Dawn.com

POETRY'S DREAM WORK

By CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL

....Continued from previous issue



ALTHOUGH we equated dream to poetry, we saw that there were essential differences. Poetry is creative; dream is not. Poetry is creative because it is directed feeling. In dream the associations are “free” – reality’s images are manipulated according to the genotype’s desires, just as iron filings over a magnet “freely” arrange themselves along the lines of force. In poetry, however, feeling is fashioned into a social form by being made to live in the common world of perceptual reality. Poetry externalises emotion. The self is expressed – forcibly squeezed out. Emotion is minted – made current coin. Feelings are given social value. Work is done. Dream-work is precisely not labour, poetic dreamwork is; because one produces social commodities, the other does not.

It is for this reason that poetry’s technique differs from that of dream. Below the surface of the dream lie the unconscious instinctive wishes. Instinct is blind, it cannot alter itself as long as it is unconscious and incapable of self-conditioning, for it has no will but only automatic responses to stimuli. These instinctive wish-patterns dictate the dance of images in the brain, which are associated with the wish-patterns by indirect affective ties. But the ties themselves are suppressed in dream, for everything that wakes the affects to action must be avoided if the dreamer is to sleep on. The vast field of affect-laden images is “out of bounds.” “Let sleeping affects lie” is the motto of dream-wishes. They are suppressed by being phantastically gratified as easily as one makes a thoughtless habitual movement.

In poetic illusion the process is inverted.

Dreams ascend from the unconscious upwards and are therefore blind and uncreative. Poems descend from the consciousness downwards and are therefore aware and creative. Dream fearfully avoids the dynamic region of the emotions, so as not to wake the sleeper to action; poetry explores it courageously, so as to change the inner world.

The memory-images of dream blindly follow the wire-pulling of the instincts. But the words of poetry follow a purposeful path. Their mission is, first to stir up the affects and then to reorganise them. The only result of dream is a temporary and arbitrary pattern of images drawn from reality and changed at the behest of the instincts. “The world is not thus but thus,” say the instincts, and remould it in their dream, but sometimes the instincts are so modified that they quarrel with themselves, and the contradictions of the dream explode in affects that wake us.

Poetry, however, takes its words and arranges them in such a way that the affects are roused and forced to take up a new organisation towards reality, a new emotional attitude. Dream moulds reality to the instincts, and is therefore of little use except to guard the dreamer from external reality and so keep him sleeping. Poetry moulds the instincts to reality, and is therefore useful, for it does not protect the reader from reality but puts him in good heart to grapple with it. Poetry is inverted dream – inverted in direction, in aim, and therefore in technique. Poetry flows from reality down to the instincts stopping only on the last outpost of perception where it encounters the instincts face to face. Dream flows from the instincts to the boundary of reality, at the limit of attention, and stops there, short of actual achievement, because it stops short of action.

We need not be surprised, therefore, that

poetry is public and dream private, for consciousness is a social construction. The conscious psychic contents which the ego holds together are socially given contents. True, they cohere because the body which contains them is materially one object, but the materials that cohere – morals, knowledge, culture, aspirations, duties – are all socially given. Unsocial man is brute, unconscious, instinctive, and therefore without will. An instinctive unconscious organism has no will, but only an automatic reflex, responsive to internal or external stimuli. It has no freedom, for freedom requires a will. The essence of willing is that consciousness is aware of those reasons that make its choice inevitable, and it is just that inevitability which is will. The fulfilled will is the conscious dialectic of the psyche in which the strife between the instincts of the body and the necessity of outer nature is resolved by a conscious action which contains both feeling and perception. This conscious microcosm is creative because it can act voluntarily, for ultimately conscious action and creation are the same. Creation, as opposed to accidental appearance, is the will moulding instead of blind necessity evolving. Accident carves the rocks into strange unpremeditated shapes, but the will hews the stone into a desired sculpture. Both are aspects of necessity.

The poet, then, must be a man sensitive above all to the associations and affective tones of words – not the personal but the collective tones. How is he to differentiate between personal and collective tones? He cannot consciously, and no poet can avoid the danger of writing verse which is meaningful to himself but meaningless to other people. All he can do is to live his affective life socially; to live with words. For indeed he can only live with words socially. He will meet them in books, in

literature, in scientific papers, in journals, in speech, but always they will be met in public. Thus if he lives with words instead of memory-images, he will master the technique of poetry, for poetry is written with words.

The poet's mastery of word associations gives him his tools for his creative task. His task is this. An emotional reorganisation must be made public, must be expressed by words in a collectively accessible form. Let us give our phrase – emotional reorganisation – a more current psychological form. Psycho-therapy has evolved the conception of the autonomous complex. A complex is a constellation of contents in the psyche which gather to themselves psychic energy. They become organised and full of dynamic power; they occupy a large part of the psychic. The psyche has many small complexes, but they only become complexes in the therapeutic sense when they are repelled by the chiefly conscious contents of the psyche (repression) and are unknown to the "ego," that is, to the consciously thinking and feeling portion of the psyche. They become dangerous when they develop a "will of their own," influence the actions of the psyche unknown to the consciousness, and give rise to neurotic conflicts, doubts and strange anxieties. The man seems torn in half. He has two motives and two wills. Similar symptoms are seen in Pavlov's dogs when they have been conditioned to make two different responses to, say, a square and a circle. If an object midway between these shapes is presented to them, they exhibit a canine caricature of the neurotic's hesitation. An emotional reorganisation is the resolution in some degree of an autonomous complex by making it socially conscious.

to be continued...

Courtesy : Illusion and Reality

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