Looking for the 'Women Intellectual': The Literary World of Qurratulain Hyder in Post-Colonial South Asia

Koushiki Dasgupta[1]

Abstract:

This paper explores the nuances of writing an intellectual history of women within the existing historical narratives of gender and society with an aim to analyse the writings of a 'post-colonial' woman writer named Qurratulin Hyder--once a part of the Progressive Writers circle in Pakistan. It looks into the problems of locating women as 'thinker', focuses on the institutional constraints that have denied an autonomous ideological agency to women and attempts to grapple with the question of locating women's writing inclusive with broader historical scholarship in India and Pakistan. Keeping in mind Charles Darwin's propositions on women's existence outside an essential intellectual framework, this papers revisits the so-called propositions on mind-body dualism in gender specific references and attempts to trace Hyder's life and writings beyond the stereotypes of a 'feminist writer' or simply as a 'progressive writer' of her time. Despite facing major displacements all through her life, Hyder's journey offered important insights as to how a Muslim women-writer turned intellectual surpassed all ideological limits and challenged the existing social realities in her own unique ways.

Key words*: Intellectual, progressive, women, post-colonial, gender, Pakistan*

'Where are the intellectuals'? Each time there is a political incident in the country causing grave social injustice for certain sections of the society, we can see people asking for the intellectuals to comment on it or help in framing public opinion on the subject. This is a question asked multiple times at social media platforms, television debates or in casual public gatherings in the spirit of questioning their commitment to a certain social-political cause and often ended up in ridiculing their absence from the discussions. Public intellectuals being the most important pillar of a free society are capable of putting insights into existing socio-political anomalies in a matured way and help to develop the tradition of critical thinking and reasoning to get engaged with worldly affairs in a unique manner. Thinkers, philosophers, writers, academics, artists all are involved in making the tradition of critical thinking exclusive to their ideological moorings, they are the ones who passed on the lineage of knowledge tradition to successive generations to invent and modify further. However, the creative intellectuals in a post-colonial country are expected to play on different levels other than pointing critical thinking or creating a certain knowledge discipline to be carried on by successive generations. Exercising some amount of power by the intellectuals might have brought into attention what a post-colonial intellectual

1. Dr. Koushiki Dasgupta, Vidyasagar Chair Professor & Head, Department of History, Vidyasagar University.

should look like or act like since the notion of power is itself self-regulatory in countries with a colonial past. Since the post-colonial intellectuals hold a kind of mastery over their own colonial experiences and defend or promote those experiences exclusive to others' experiences, they create one essential grand narrative of power which allows them to build a critique of the power but holds them close to it simultaneously. With the coming of the independence in 1947, India might have expected much from its intellectuals because, they were the people who challenged the colonial government, raised questions on socio-political inequalities and engaged in long-drawn debates on the future progress of India. Despite owing a huge debt to the European knowledge system, the post-colonial intellectuals looked for their own unique voice in the newly emerging public spaces which brought them closer to their own indigenous histories. Interestingly the new intellectuals neither worked from a disconnected zone, nor did they evolve independent of the aura of universal modernity. They rather attempted to produce knowledge on their 'own' 'modernity', so that they could reclaim and rethink the histories of the people who had hitherto remained subservient to their colonial past. Creating a separate niche away from Gandhian or the Congress mode of politics seemed essential for these intellectuals since the Congress brand of nationalism hardly acknowledged the growing tensions between the 'modern' and the 'pre-modern' in society, combined at a level of conflicts between traditional institutions and new industrial--economic developments. Despite having a strong desire to transform India into a modern secular society, the Nehruvian project of nation building often clashed with pre-modern sensibilities, accommodated a few, and ultimately chose to follow one elite-centric model of development which failed to muzzle up religious fundamentalism, traditional orthodoxies and anti-state movements at different corners of the country. A gradual disconnect from the masses transformed Nehru into a prisoner of his own visions and ideologies, so that, a break with the past, a real fight for complete emancipation from traditional orthodoxies could never become a reality.

My interest in this paper is to revisit one post-colonial 'woman intellectual' who surpassed the banalities of her time with strong socio-political messages. Coming to the broader question of why women writers and especially those of a post-colonial South Asian origin did not get any rightful agency in the broader intellectual history of that region, one may trace the serious problem of identifying 'women intellectuals' as a historical category. The so-called disassociation between the mind and the body or simply embodying women as a gendered category often created the assumptions that women are somehow *more* biological than men. They did not evolve in the way men evolved. This notion shares a striking resemblance with the way Charles Darwin *explained* women's intellectual inferiority and men's intellectual excellence. 'The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shown by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands'.[2]Going a bit further Darwin claimed that,'… partly through natural selection, that is, from success in the general struggle for life; and as in both cases the struggle will have been during maturity, the characters gained will have been transmitted more fully to the male than to the female offspring'. [3]

[2]Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex,* 2nd edn (London: John Murray, 1896), p. 563.
[3] Darwin, Descent of Man, p.565.

The transmission of intellectual qualities from one generation of male to the other came as a natural/ gendered selection which denied women superiority over men and this explains why women could never think like men. Subsequently, women's bodies as objects for others' appraisal also came outas a source of vulnerability – prone to illness, early death and at a risk of pregnancy when celebrated as a source of sensual pleasure The so-called opposition between mind and body when correlated with an opposition between the male and female, with the female regarded as enmeshed in her bodily existence, makes attainment of rationality questionable. If one has to believe man not as a natural species but a historical idea, women must re-view the essentialities of her womanhood not as a woman but as a human who is not left at the mercy of her body or the nature. Women as embodied subjects appear to be a political subject too because they appropriate racial, religious and national identities and provide different approaches to femininity in their everyday experiences. The problem is, women's embodiment or gender-specific construction had never been a subject of scientific discussions since biological science always took keen interest in strengthening men's control and desires over the so-called 'non-human' 'others'. However, when talking gender inequality and mainstreaming gender in a post-colonial society like India, one see show the mind and the body, society and nature, culture and matter absorb each other and create greater avenues of discussions on women both as an embodied subject and as a liberating sprit/power. Mainstreaming women's intellectual history became an essential task in unveiling the potentials of women's political and social writings as part of the greater transformations in society. Both in colonial and post-colonial countries women's intellectual contributions must not be counted solely on the basis of her literary/feminist writings; rather the woman as a serious 'thinker' should be freed from the banalities of her gendered approaches which restricts her 'originality' in a greater extent. What I propose here to be 'original' often gets restricted ether by psychoanalytic propositions or by women's bodily presence dominating her intellectual faculties. Identifying women with the body, nature or earth alienates them from the understanding of nature as a source of power. This made them passive 'feminine' subjects to the social and cultural interpretations of the existing time. Following the publication by Bruno Latour's, '*We Have Never Been Modern'* (1993)[4], on the constitution of modernity as a dualistic interpretation of nature and society, the explanations on nature/culture dualism in our imaginations have been contested for a better understanding of what constitutes the discourses of nature and culture, or nature and society. It also invented the paradox of scientific power and political power, a distinction between nature and culture and also the separation of the masculine from the feminine. 'Mothering' the nature tends to produce what we call 'women' as external objects, and the idea that nature could be controlled or dominated survived through the ages of human history. Western psycho-analysists engaged in analysing the crisis of the 20th century, discussed the domination model in length, while context-specific narratives on masculine/feminine relationship appeared powerful in non-western societies like India, where the spirit of a sacred nature or a secured female body appeared important in nurturing one totalising paradigm of collective knowledge on nature-culture/mind-body interconnectedness. The three dominions of knowledge, i.e. experiencing, knowing and enjoying give an integrated understanding of society in everyday life. This integrated vision helps human beings to develop dialectical reasoning on the cause and effect relationship in the world. Problems appear when reasoning or rationality occupies an omnipotent position in the thought

[4] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1993).

world rejecting alternative ways of dealing with the world. Rejection of alternative means to reach the truth, often trim down the possibilities of knowledge to get transformed into wisdom. It happens only when the superiority of an instrumental rationality dominates the human mind and knowledge, for example knowledge becomes an instrument of power and control. This is the fundamental problem with masculinity all over the world. Despite having a long drawn legacy of consuming beliefs and practises at every stage, it tends to reject each available alternative of knowledge systems especially those coming from women. Putting man at the top of the material world encouraged man's exploitation of the rest of the world and nature, and in the absence of the sense of integrity and interconnectedness between the masculine-feminine/ mind-body/nature-culture, it would be difficult to realise the complex web of interactions between all elements of the universe in the form of absolute knowledge or '*purna-gyana'*.

As far as the components of modern scholarship are concerned, it is becoming highly problematic to reach closer to absolute-knowledge or *purna-gyana.* For example subject-specific or context-specific discussions on women's history muzzled down the necessity of reading women as 'intellectuals' or to look for women's intellectual history as such. Even if women show the possibilities of transforming their knowledge into wisdom by scientific, rational propositions, they themselves find it difficult to surpass their existence as emotional-vulnerable beings always representing their lives, withering the contours of family, sexuality, marriage, regularity, depression and dreams. Let me come straight to the point that women as thinkers must be treated separately than women as scholars or performers.

Women as creative intellectuals emerged as an undefined category in post-colonial South Asia. However, we can see them as influential agents of change who appeared at moments of crisis to take a public stance on an issue of general concern. The term intellectuals carries the essence of being a complicated concept from the Dreyfus affair in France in 1898[5] when a group of thinkers, scientists and wirers showed their commitment to French captain Alfred Dreyfus against the State. In later years they defended the national liberation movements in the so-called third world countries and the universalization of French intellectualism expanded the scopes and possibilities of radical leftism from the latter half of the 20th century. Majority of the intellectuals in France celebrated socialism as part of France's civilizing mission, started long back at the time of the French Revolution. Radical leftism influenced a variety of creative, cultural movements in the newly emerging post-colonial countries and both Soviet and French intellectuals appeared to be a guiding force for them. These people took cognizance of the war issues, ethnic rights, minority rights and protested against the neo-imperial model of exploitation by the Western countries in the post-colonial world. A group of writers and artists in South Asia too asked for a massive transformation of the orthodox social order, showed solidarity against all sorts of fascist aggressions and attempted to bring all leftist creative intellectuals on one platform. The Progressive Writers' Association, started much before the Indian partition and independence, successfully introduced the spirit of an anti-imperial, anti-fascist movement within the mosaic of leftist politics and continued to celebrate Marxism and Socialism through wide-ranging literary

[5] For details see, 'Introduction' in Yadullah Shahibzadeh, *Public Intellectuals and Their Discontents: From Europe to Iran*, 1stedn, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

and cultural activities. Nurturing the narrative of being a 'progressive' movement, writer Ahmed Ali wrote,

…as progressive writers it is our duty to produce literature which will not be bloodless and anaemic, but pulsating with fresh blood, throbbing with new life—a literature which will envisage the future, herald its advent and directly work for the healthier and better life after which all of us are aspiring today. We should not write for just a section or class, but join hand with the struggling humanity, and address those millions of human beings who are living in hunger, poverty, and squalor for they are our public today, and they are our audience of tomorrow.[6]

This movement could be traced as a unique opportunity for upholding the cause of women's emancipation since the writers unequivocally addressed the issues of social injustice, gender discrimination and patriarchal oppression in society. Progressive writers were happy to welcome women as part of the movement and encouraged women writers to join the association meetings frequently. A good number of writers like Sarla Devi, Ismat Chughtai, and Hajira Masrur, Khadija Mastur, Siddiqa Begum Seoharvi, Shakila Akhtar and others joined the movement and started a new trend for the future generation of women writers in South Asia. Unfortunately women writers especially women poets from the Urdu literary circle did not get as much recognition and appreciation as they should have. Existing scholarship on the subject hardly acknowledged the social activism and literary dynamism of these writers who cultivated their lives purely on the basis of intellectual pursuits and not simply as feminists or as 'women'. Qurratulain Hyder (Hyder afterwards), was one such writer who successfully conveyed strong socio-political messages while keeping her progressive activism intact. Scholarship on the Progressive movement, however, contributed little to evaluate the role played by women within the movement, and their importance as thinkers, who could have transcended all ideological limits. Hyder explored her identity both as a Muslim woman and as a writer-turned-intellectual who had developed her own understanding of the social realities without having a strong inclination towards any political ideology. This is why Hyder must be treated as one of the strong intellectual voices of her time in both India and Pakistan. However, she ended her life in a state of 'homelessness'. None of the existing literature on South Asian history marked her journey as an intellectual; rather, they boxed her either as a mass writer of feminist genre or simply as a deranked 'progressive writer' who refused to take a clear political stand unlike her male contemporaries from the Pakistani Progressive writers' circle.

Coming from an upper class liberal Muslim background, Hyder (b 1927, Aligarh)) studied English literature at Isabella Thorburn College and joined the Progressive Writers Association at an early age. It was mostly because of her parents that she developed an interest in writing and gradually entered the literary circle. After moving to Pakistan following the partition in 1947, Hyder started writing her magnum opus *River of Fire* or *Aag Ka Dariya,* reflecting all her experiences and knowledge on partition, migration and Indian history. Her other noted works were *Mere Bhi Sanamkhane* (*My Temples, Too*); *Safina-e-Gham-e Dil* (*Ship of Sorrows*); *Aahkir-e-Shabke Humsafar* (*Fireflies in the Mist*); *Gardish-e-rang-e-Chaman* (untranslated); and *Chandni Begum* (*Chandni*

[6] Paper to AIPWA conference on 10th April, 1936, 'Progressive View of Art' in 50 years of PWA, Golden Jubilee Celebrations, Lucknow, 1986, p.46.

Begum). Most of her works were historical novels. *Mere Bhi Sanam khane*, *Aag Ka Darya* and Aa*hkir-e-Shabke Humsafar* formed a kind of a trilogy, exploring Indian history over the ages. *Kaar-e-Jahan Daraz Hai*—the three volumes non-fiction by Hyder framed up the socio-political approaches of her family from generations. An annotated photo album, *Kaf-e-Gul Farosh*, chronologically fashioned up her sketches and paintings.

Hyder was deeply influenced by the works of Rashid Jahan.[7] Her own journey as a 'woman' writer was often informed by the memory of Jahan who was acclaimed as one of the most notable radical minds and the most notable feminist Urdu writer of the 20th century. *Aag Ka Dariya*, the novel—published in 1959[8] weaved together periods of Indian history through stories of different women characters representing the facades of misogynist practises prevalent at different layers of the Indian civilization. One of her critics Syed Khalid Qadri rightly pointed out,

Taking off from the Mauryan or symbolically speaking, the Buddhist India, the narrative sweeps across centuries to culminate in the tumultuous times of India's Partition. This mega narrative, or if one could also call it a modern epic in prose, cuts across generations presenting through large and vivid slides, the political, social and cultural life of a cross section of people living at various points of time in the subcontinent. On the part of the author, this is a giant effort to portray and project, through her unified vision of history, events and people, as part of the great flux of time.[9]

Other than highlighting the plight of women, Hyder's work emphasised the importance of communal solidarity and the uniqueness of ethnic cultures and it built on the contributions of each period of Indian history as the perfect time of the history of the region. One could identify radical feminist trends in the writings of Hyder. However, what really proved her intellectual worth of being a political thinker was her critique of the catastrophic effects of partition and independence and the superficiality of the nation-state formula. *River of Fire* exposed those characters in the city of Lucknow who wanted India to remain united and consolidated in every sense. They were the characters, trapped in a state of sheer dilemma and despondency, found nothing promising in the idea of partition and succumbed to the realities of the time. It must be mentioned here, that Hyder was not writing back to the empire, she was not like a stereotyped post-colonial writer who was deconstructing her colonial past and writing her new identity. She did not fall in the category of a diasporic writer either; she hardly lived in a colonial past or a

[7] For details on Rashid Jahan see, Carlo Coppola and Sajida Zubair, 'Rashid Jahan Urdu Literature's First Angry Young Woman', *Journal of South Asian Literature,* 22, no 1 , 1987; Rakshanda Jalil, *A Rebel and Her cause: The Life and Work of Rashid Jahan*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); ShadabBano, 'Rashid Jahan's Writings: Resistance and Challenging Boundaries, Angaree and Onwards', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies,* 19 no, 1 , 2012; Ahmed Ali and N.M Rashed, 'The Progressive Writer's Movement in its Historical Perspective', *Journal of South Asian Literature,* 13 no. 1977

[8] The original Urdu version was published in 1959, the English 'transcreation' came out in 1998.

[9] Syed Khalid Qadri, 'QurratulainHyder: A Tribute', *Indian Literature*, Vol. 51, No. 5 (241) September-October 2007,p.16 Another critic of Hyder, Masood Ashraf Raja expressed that the novel builds on every period of Indian history---from ancient Vedic history, the arrival of the Muslims and colonial rule, to partition---but does not privilege any single era as the most defining or traumatic period in the region's history. See, Masood Ashraf Raja, 'QurratulainHyder's River of Fire: The Novel and the Politics of Writing Beyond the Nation-State', *Interactions*, 15, no.2, 2006.

colonial present, barely faced the tension over the choice of language she would write in, but in an extent redefined the nomenclature of the new 'nation state' of Pakistan as a male-dominated space which involved the problems of defining what constitutes a 'true-home' for the women, especially in case of the migrated Muslim women.

The reasons I should call Hyder an intellectual, not merely a writer, streams from the fact that her writings in a true sense rejected the so-called colonialist-imperialist model of constructing Indian history from a fragmented point of view. *Aag Ka Dariya* set out an example among other partition narratives, if one might say so, by putting more emphasis on the saga of a shared past and on the experiences of a living present in a new political situation. Unlike other Urdu works of her time, *Ag Ka Dariya* reflected less on the violence or trauma of partition, but unfolded the histories of pre-colonial India by adopting a popular approach of writing people's history. Knowingly or unknowingly, Hyder participated in the post-colonial project of recovering the indigenous histories in a nuanced manner so that a new kind of history could be written on the lives of the commoners, their experiences, desires and aspirations. Furthermore, Hyder's non-parochial approach towards the alternative narratives of Indian history opened up a new fictional universal of historical narratives where Muslim rulers appeared to be as tolerant as their Hindu contemporaries, while the sufferings of the commoners in the face of the political disturbances evolved around a timeless saga of human tragedies where religion or religious identities hardly mattered. Hyder penned down the narratives of the partition differently from the mainstream historical accounts. She brought out those characters that often clashed with the so-called history from the top, became segregated or accused for being Muslim. She looked for those voices that never supported the idea of partition, but lost in jeopardy because of the so-called generalisation of historical narratives in one way or the other. Caught in the middle of the catastrophe, thousands of lives both of Hindus and Muslims failed to challenge the high politics of that time and thus looked meaningless in front of a larger political force. Hyder's rendering of thoughts in a secular way, personification of the characters through personal experiences, as well as her efforts of writing an alternative history of the subcontinent inculcated the spirit of a new intellectual culture which reframed historical conciseness through one unique syncretic world view.

Much of Hyder's syncretistic past is a revision of the narratives of Muslim sectarianism, projecting an evident anxiety to disprove the allegations piled on the Muslims as intolerant and separatist. Hyder's narrative is thus primarily a rewriting of Muslim experiences over the trajectory of history, projecting them as equally victimized (Kamaluddin), equally eager for synthesis (the nawabs of Lucknow), equally wronged by the British (Vajid Ali Shah), equally fired by ant colonial revolutionary zeal (Kamal) and equally tormented by Partition (Kamal, Champa) as the Hindus claim to be. The plight of post Partition characters in India like Kamal and Champa elucidates this anxiety of being excluded from the larger narrative of secular India and their craving to be a part of it.[10]

Aag Ka Dariya was published at a time when the new establishment in Pakistan was flushing out the non-Islamic elements present in the country and fuelling up religious tensions. The

[10]Swaralipi Nandi, 'Reconstructing the Contested Past',*Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 14:2,2012, p. 294

Progressive Writers unit in Pakistan might have represented the voice of the secular left in Pakistan and supported the new nation-state as the natural outcome of Muslim political aspiration in the subcontinent; restrictions over the press, state surveillance on the writers for their alleged Communist connection and over all the changed political atmosphere in the country after the demise of Jinnah almost spoiled the spirit of the so-called liberal promises made earlier. The indigenous ruling elites as well as those who were brought into power at the behest of the Pakistan movement did not correspond to the intellectual-liberal elements of the Progressive Writers Association.[11] One can recall how a disillusioned poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz lamented about 14th August, 1947 while staying in the jail in Pakistan later in 1951 –

This leprous daylight, dawns night's fangs have mangled/This is not that long-looked-for break of day,...But now, word goes, the birth of day from darknessIs finished, wandering feet stand at their goal'. [12]Facing tremendous atrocities from the new state of Pakistan led to an era of broken promises for the Progressive writers that the Communist hardliners preferred to take an extreme attitude towards non-conformist/ non-Progressive/ right wing writers present in the association. 'In carrying a unanimous motion stipulating that progressive writers were not to write for anti-progressive journals and right wing writers should be banned from contributing to progressive journals the PWA created a clear cleavage between right and left and this had very serious implications as progressive writers were left isolated from the community.

Hyder seemed to have been one of those victims who came out as a non-progressive-reactionary mostly because of her indifference towards endorsing hardcore Communism. 'Literature for literature' or to say 'art for art's sake' did not fit her well into the category of a radical leftist; rather her highly intellectual and so-called 'apolitical' writings alienated Hyder from her progressive contemporaries. Being progressive meant being a critic of capitalism or a supporter of the proletarian revolution, while Hyder continued to write on the nation, family, history and politics based on individual trajectories. Her *Aag Ka Dariya* received intimidation both from her so-called 'progressive' friends, and also from the conservatives of the Pakistani establishment. Her love for India, her views on religious harmony and her secular world view questioned the existence of Pakistan as a separate nation. Her critics portrayed her as 'anti Muslim', while Hyder simultaneously fought the battle against sexism and male chauvinism. In an article 'Why Did

[11]From The Criminal Investigation Department records, Punjab and from other sources it is now clear that the state monitored the activities of the association, arrested few prominent members and took all precautionary measures to curb the communist influences until the association was finally banned in 1954. In the report, 'The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action' , it was mentioned – 'After the partition, the Communist Party in Pakistan lost all its veteran workers and was left without financial resources; yet within three years a powerful party machine has been built up. The budget of the party is perhaps only next to that of the Muslim League. It employs more paid workers than any other political party. New links have been forged and work organised amongst students, factory workers, other labourers, Kisans and writers, including journalists. '……. 'The Progressive Writers' Association had been in existence before the partition. In fact Sajjad Zaheer came to Lahore in 1947 ostensibly for addressing the Progressive Writers. The Association had built for itselfsome reputation. Several well-known writers called themselves progressive. The public does not realise perhaps even to this day that the P.W.A. is not quite so innocuous and that it is in reality a front for the Communist party'. That is why meetings of the P.W.A. are often attended by persons who ordinarily despise communism'.M.A. Ali, *The Communist Party ofWest Pakistan in Action,* Lahore: 1952. Volumes 1, p. 1.; vol. 2, p. 411. For details see, Talat Ahmed, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Writers' Movement in South Asia, 1932-1956,* Unpublished Ph.D thesis, London: SOAS, 2006.

[12]F.A. Faiz, 'Freedom's Dawn' (August 1947), *Poems by Faiz Ahmad Faiz,* selected and trans. By Victor Kieman, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 2000, pp. 123-125.

Qurratulain Hyder leave Pakistan for India', Akhtar Balouch pointed out that the collective impact of sexism and growing political turmoil's in the country forced Hyder to first move to Great Britain and then to India.[13] It was Ayub Khan's martial law that curbed individual freedom of the writers and Hyder after being tagged as 'non-progressive' by her peers, faced the anxieties of writing freely in a society under threat and control. She left Pakistan and later took citizenship in India. Hyder's departure marked the hollowness and fragility of those promises which once aspired to make a progressive society based on equality of the classes. Sajjad Zahir, noted writer of the Progressive movement once mentioned,

…we were gradually drifting towards socialism. Our minds searched for a philosophy which would help us to understand and solve the difficult social problems. We were not satisfied with the idea that humanity had always been miserable and would always remain so. We read Marx and other socialist writers with great enthusiasm. As we proceeded with our studies, solved the historical, social and philosophical problems through mutual discussions, our minds became clear and our hearts contented.[14]

Creation of two nation states in 1947 might have given a new lease of life to the project of social transformation; however, what we call the idea of progress, barely matched with the tensions of the 'modern' meeting with the pre-modern in a structured condition. Battling against social injustices was meant to be a fight against everything which was pre-modern or anti modern, but the ambiguities present in the new nation states failed to solve the conflicts between rational patterns of social interaction and fast-changing social necessities of a developing country. The life journey of Hyder explicated the delusional trajectory of the progressive movement which failed to acknowledge or recognise the intellectual potentials of this lady who unearthed the history of several centuries like a true historian, criticised the Islamic society while staying in Pakistan and faced sinister campaigns against her workers all alone. In recording the concocted tales published against the author and her novel, Hyder mentioned in her autobiography *Kar-e-Jahan-Daraz-Hai (The Affairs of the World Go On)* that,

as a corollary of general indifference for allusions and symbols, various journals offered bizarre interpretations, clamming that the author believed in reincarnation, that she was a Buddhist or a Hindu, or that she was a Zionist….that the novelist had been persecuted in Pakistan after the publication of her work, so much so that she had to free to India….that the novel had been banned in Pakistan…[15]

Hyder's presence as an unmarried 'progressive' writer in the patriarchal Pakistani society juxtaposed to be a prelude to a wider crisis called misogyny – the most critical anti modern value living happily with the modern nation state. Despite that, Hyder set out a journey of a rebel thinker, provided radical critique to the gender stereotypes present in society. However, she

[13] Akhtar Balouch, 'Why Did QurratulainHyder Leave Pakistan for India', Dwan. Com, October 05, 2015, quoted in Mehr Ali, *'The Women of the PWA: The Politics and Writings of Rashid Jahan and QurratulainHyder'*, Undergraduate Honours Thesis Paper, 1234 https.://schilarworks.wm.edu/honorsthese/1234, 2018.
[14]S. Zaheer, 'Reminiscences',*Indian Literature,* vol. 2, (Bombay: Peoples Publishing House, 1952), p. 49.

[15] Akhtar Balouch, Why Did QurratulainHyder Leave Pakistan for India', (Dwan. Com, October 03, 2015), accessed on 2nd March, 2020. https://www.dawn.com/news/1210454

stood apart from those feminists who ended up in struggling with their embodied identity as women in a male dominated society. Hyder, in no way should be historicised as a feminist writer or an activist writing about the world of women through her characters, but she was the one who portrayed patriarchy as part of the same oppressive system which spoils the real spirit of modernity or progress in general. In a similar manner Hyder brought her own critique of the nation state model which forced the common people to surrender before the greater political destiny and erased those unheard voices , those unspecified value systems which once upholded the syncretic cultural fabric of the Indian civilization. The unfortunate chemistry between Hyder and her progressive Communist friends in Pakistan, however, opened the trickiest question about the emancipation of women in leftist discourse. Hyder's silence on the prospects of a Socialist revolution, or her so-called apolitical stance over the essentialities of radical feminism faded in importance to the hardliners of the Progressive movement. It appeared more to be a male chauvinistic agenda and less of a socialist proposition, which denied her entering into the so-called puritan circle of old literary comrades at a time of growing political certainties in Pakistan. It indicated the death of a dream which once thrived with an objective of self-autonomy and individual freedom. Her bitter experiences with the Pakistani Progressive association exposed the intellectual vacuum created inside the movement and the actual merits of Hyder remained unnoticed. Women like Hyder or Jahan perhaps failed to conform to their positions in society both as radical feminists and as intellectuals because both feminism and leftism or any 'ism' as such always set up structures that were likely to mobilise the intellectual potentials of women to expand their theoretical propositions in different milieus. Denying or rejecting the alternative means to reach the truth or simply ignoring the autonomous world of knowledge by the women themselves demonstrated the problems of identifying 'women intellectuals' as a historical category and a neglect of her (un) embodied autonomous existence as an ideological category.

Throughout her life, Hyder worked as an information officer, a journalist, an editor and also as a visiting professor at various universities in India and abroad. She earned many awards, honours and accolades; translated several English texts, worked with the BBC and travelled widely all over the world. The intellectual world of Hyder surpassed the spatiality of her geographical destiny and she had moved from history of words to history of ideas in an unconventional way. She was one such writer who explained her own relation to the historical events and situations, exercised her own sense of 'freedom' after adopting a critical stance towards mainstream histories of the subcontinent. Mostly like the post-colonial intellectuals, Hyder continued to remain 'unsettled' throughout her life, experienced the politics of location, and drew on her experiences of displacement metaphorically as an 'outsider'–a member of a 'tiny tokenized minority of marginal voices'.[16]Interestingly, growing up as a Muslim woman, Urdu writers provided her the possibilities of representing different identity groups; however, she was not the one who worked as a representative of the consciousness of the marginalised. Following the arguments put forward by Deleuze,[17](Foucault and Deleuze 1977, 206) it could be concluded that she did not have any moral responsibility to speak for her community or group because any

[16] Edward Said, *Intellectuals in the Post Colonial World,*(Salmagundi, 70/71), p.52

[17]Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, 'Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze', Donald F Bouchard ed.*Language, Counter Memory, Practise: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, (Ithaca: Cornel University Press, 1977), p.206.

ideological or sectarian inclination, as in case of Hyder might have produced a sense of false representation deploying a new language of power and struggle. She played with the autonomy of the cultural field, reviewed its relation with the social and political fields, while, at the same time, carving out her own individual intellectual space, away from the waves of Eurocentrism in a post-colonial context. Hyder's life journey served to highlight the influence of the colonial past on post-colonial identity formation in a post war male dominated space and strived to recreate the boundaries of the new nation state through her strong anti-state critique. She offered very interesting expiations of the 'post-colonial' that was asserted on communal solidarity, cultural pluralism and the (un) making of the nation state formula. The self-critical stance of Hyder enabled her to transcend the ideological restraints, locational limits towards a balanced understating of the relationship between her embodied identity and mental faculties within the political praxis called 'post-colonial'.