

Writing for Change: Rashid Jahan and Marxist Feminist Thought

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A particularly resilient, liberated and self-assured woman, Rashid Jahan inspires epithets like “Urdu literature’s first ‘angry young woman’” (Kazim 104)¹, “a spark that lit the fire” (Amrita Dutta 23rd May, 2014) or “the bad girl of Urdu literature” (Vaishali Mahurkar March 30, 2017 Indian Women in History), and the moniker ‘Angareywali.’ She was the founder member of the All-India Progressive Writers Movement and a leading figure behind the ground-breaking collection *Angarey*. A doctor by profession, a communist by thought and a writer by choice, Rashid Jahan ushered Marxist-feminism in Urdu literature. Though before her coming onto the literary and political scene, many, like her father, Sheikh Abdullah; Justice Karamat Husain; the Begums of Bhopal and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, to mention a few, actively advocated for women’s education, few had talked or written about issues pertaining to women, apart from education.

Born to Begum Wahid Jahan and Sheikh Abdullah, who devoted their lives to lay the foundation of a women’s school in Aligarh, Rashid Jahan was fed on radical ideas from her childhood. Hamida Saiduzzafar recalls in her autobiography, how Rashid Jahan once remarked casually, “We have slept on the mattress of women's education and covered ourselves with the quilt of women's education from our earliest consciousness” (Kazim 87). It is no wonder she grew up to be the woman who “raised the banner of revolt in Urdu literature” (Jalil xviii). When she died at the age of 47, she had lived her life as a devoted member of the Communist Party of India, played a major role in the establishment of All India Progressive Writers’ Association (AIPWA) that brought together

¹ This epithet was first used by Rashid Jahan’s sister-in-law Hamida Saiduz-Zafar in her biography *Shola-e-Jawala* (1974) for Rashid Jahan. Zubair and Coppola later employed it to write an essay on her.

writers who wanted to bring about change for the underprivileged and lent her hand in the establishment of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), that believed in making the arts an expression of peoples' desires for freedom, social and economic justice and democratic culture.

Today, though women have advanced from being homebound to make it to the workplace and challenge male hegemony, certain issues such as women's health, their choice in personal matters and sexuality are still contentious in the Muslim community. Rashid Jahan brought these issues to the forefront almost a century ago and so we cannot but look back at her oeuvre. The task of unveiling adversities which women battled was carried out by Rashid Jahan with resolute dedication. Her stories, when read today are as shocking and unsettling as they were, when they were first published. People who look towards the West for feminist and Marxist ideals will find in her writings an inclination towards these with greater perception and keener sensibility for the Indian woman in the Indian context. This paper explores how Rashid Jahan was instrumental in ushering Marxist-feminist perspectives in Urdu literature and carving out a literary space for other progressive writers to follow in her footsteps.

Rashid Jahan, is believed to have written twenty-five to thirty short stories and fifteen to twenty plays, mostly for radio². Her oeuvre exists in the collections, *Aurat aur Deegar Afsane* (woman and other stories) and *Woh aur Doosre Afsane wa Drame* ('That One' and other stories and plays). Some of her writings also featured in her biography by her sister-in-law Hamida Saiduzzafar *Shola-e-Jawwala (whirling flame)*. On her writing the Urdu story, Rakshanda Jalil comments, "with the genre of the Urdu short story being in its infancy, the absence of an evolved literary canon for the Urdu short story empowered her instead of intimidating or curbing her natural impulse for a new kind of self-expression" (89).

Jahan can be described as Urdu literature's earliest Marxist-feminist woman writer. Her feminism focused on "investigating and explaining the ways in which women are oppressed through systems of capitalism and private property" ("Marxist Feminism"). It is an ideology that focuses on dismantling the foundations of capitalism so as to contribute to women's liberation. A major contributor to this theory Friedrich Engels, who published *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State Property* (1884), talks about how gender oppression is very similar to class oppression and the relation between men and women in society can be compared to the relations between the proletariat and bourgeoisie communities. The subordinate status of women is therefore constant as it serves the interests of the ruling class. Rashid Jahan's stories highlight

² A great bulk of her writings is now lost

these very issues. She wrote with immense sensitivity about the oppression of women within their homes, about women's sexuality, and their treatment as reproductive machines having no control over their own bodies – issues, nobody had dared to touch upon before. Even when she published her earliest play and story in *Angarey*, she was threatened with death. “Parde ke Piche” (Behind the Veil) attacked the foundations of the Muslim household. Rashid Jahan exposed the goings-on behind the purdah, in the women’s quarters or *zenana*. “Dilli ki Sair” (A Tour of Delhi) highlights the anxieties of a woman left alone on the railway platform, by a negligent husband. She insinuates that women have become complacent in their situations as overlooked or ignored members of the family.

Rashid Jahan made her stand as a feminist, stressing that the community needed to put a stop to the oppression of women. Several of her stories reflect trajectories of women’s oppression and unveil the oppression meted out by patriarchal systems. Where in the play “Parde ke Piche” she has a protagonist who can do no more than bemoan her fate, her protagonist in the play “Aurat” (Woman) stands up to speak for her rights. In the story, “Mard aur Aurat” (man and woman), we see the woman not only speaking for herself with the support of her male cousins, but also becoming adamant on keeping her job for whatever it costs. These stories hint at the three stages of the evolution of feminism. The first ‘feminine stage’ or the ‘imitation stage’; where women imitated the writings of men. We have the stage reflected in Mohammadi Begum of “Parde ke Piche”, who doesn’t imitate in a literal sense but speaks up about her oppression to her fellow woman and this in itself is a big step towards change. The second ‘feminist stage’ or the ‘stage of protest’ is one when women raise their voice against men who subjugate them. This stage is best reflected through Fatima in “Aurat”, who stands up against her husband and protests against his decision to remarry. The third or ‘female stage’ when women have left behind all worries of oppression and subjugation, and no more look at men for influence but function as individuals, is reflected in “Mard aur Aurat”, where the woman protagonist representative of all women, is independent and capable of taking her own decisions.³

³ In her essay “Towards a Feminist Poetics” (1979), Elaine Showalter states various phases of women's writing. The first phase, the feminine phase (1840-1880) is when women writers were more focused on equaling the intellectual standards set by men's culture and internalized men's views about women. In the Feminist phase (1880-1920), women writers protested against male standards and values and advocated their rights. In the Female

In the essay, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” (1981), Elaine Showalter attempts to study literary criticism from women’s points of view. Writing about factors that distinguish a woman’s work, she cites biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural models. In Rashid Jahan’s works, one can find these models of difference at play. Being a gynecologist, Rashid Jahan’s works naturally incorporate biological imagery. One of the stories that strikes the reader as radically different describes a scene of a midwife supervising a delivery. This scene could not have been written by anyone other than a doctor. She writes, “The midwife was holding the cord (umbilical) in her right hand that was loaded with grimy silver rings and bangles, and with the other hand she was mopping up the mess” (Jalil 127). Another aspect about women’s writing Elaine Showalter highlights, is their language. She also calls for separate feminine language to write about female issues. Till date, many issues related to women do not find representation in dictionaries. For instance, one may wonder what the pain related to menstruation or pregnancy may be called and even if such terms which were never used outside the sphere of the *zenana*. She also worked relentlessly towards showcasing a female culture and criticizing the inferior position of women based on the belief that they have inferior psyche or brain-power. In “Parde ke Piche” she satirically comments on the belief held by men that women lack sexual drives.

In story after story, Rashid Jahan presents a bleak picture of women in Muslim society highlighting how they are considered no more than play things by men. In stories like “Woh” (That One), “Bezubaan” (Mute), and “Asif Jahan ki Bahu” (A Daughter-in-law for Asif Jahan) she presents the woman as wordless, battling with her feelings as the world around her decides her fate. In her essay “Castration or Decapitation?” (1981) Helene Cixous, says that women “would have to speak, start speaking, stop staying that she has nothing to say!” (Cixous and Kuhn 50) Rashid Jahan who was writing half a decade before Cixous’ essay was published, was already at work, articulating women’s silences and their achievements. Though Rashid Jahan wrote about and for women before Helen Cixous, she didn’t develop her views into theories but tried to incorporate them into her writings and radio plays which were quick and deft media of communication for the Urdu reading public. Rashid Jahan brings in her writings what Cixous says is, “excluded from any possible relationship with culture and cultural order.” (Cixous and Kuhn 46) Rashid Jahan’s literary career stretched in the years after Virginia Woolf had just

phase, (1920, onwards) women writers gave up protest and imitation and began writing autonomously.

published her seminal work, *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Woolf's call for the need of a space and her own money for a woman to flourish in intellectual capacities is depicted by Rashid Jahan, through her stories like, "Woh", "Mera ek Safar" (A Trip of Mine), "Chor" (Thief) and "Mard wa Aurat" where she portrays financially independent women who stand up as examples for others.

While feminism can be said to be an offshoot of Marxism as it discusses the oppression of women, Marxism discusses the oppression of the downtrodden. Rashid Jahan was a staunch Marxist and a life-long member of the Communist Party of India. As an ideology of economic equality through elimination of private property, Communism derives its beliefs from Marx who held that inequality and suffering are results of capitalism. Communism is different from socialism because though both the ideologies advocate economic equality, socialism works within the existing democratic structure of capitalist countries whereas communists believe in completely overthrowing the capitalist economic and political system through revolution. Rashid Jahan's sister, Khurshid Jahan recalls in her memoirs, that her sister began subscribing to communist ideals from a very young age. From her childhood, she had seen servants treated like family in her home, but when stepped out of Aligarh, she stood face to face with a society divided by class and caste. She felt keenly for the sufferings of the masses, oppressed by unequal systems and aligned with the Communists.

As a founding member of All India Progressive Writers' Movement of India, Rashid Jahan used her writings to speak for the poor and the oppressed. The Progressive Writers Association had established literature as a tool of social awakening, and provided a dynamic platform for discussion of diverse issues related to the nation and national culture. The Association, "created and supported a network of writers concerned with social and cultural transformation. Though the organization had links with the communist party, it tried to maintain political heterogeneity and heterogeneous membership" (Singh 454). Along with undermining stereotypes, Premchand's inaugural address at the first conference in Lucknow, in 1936, provided a new direction and definition of literature. The movement was highly influential from 1936 to 1954 and spanned several regions and languages across India. It also inspired the production of a bulk of literature that interrogated communal and national collective identities. Many of Jahan's stories feature persons from the lowest sections of society and through their experiences she tries to bring to the forefront the misery of the masses. Most writers including Premchand, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, and Ismat Chughtai acknowledged the seminal influence of *Angarey* on the Progressive

Writers Movement and Rashid Jahan was a contributor and founder member of both.

In her works, one finds a lack of form and aesthetic appeal while the focus is on presenting the abject poverty of the masses. The story “Ghareebon ka Bhagwan” (God of the destitute) is a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. It is a story where her Marxist stance is visible at its best. She highlights the class struggle in society and showcases the inhuman circumstances within which the masses are forced to live. The story deals with the trauma of widowed Durga, left with a son and three daughters to feed after her husband’s death. She works very hard and strains her eyes stitching clothes and embroidering for a living but loses her mental stability when her only hope, her son, dies. Rashid Jahan has described the abject poverty and exhaustion of a family that doesn’t have the assurance of getting one meal a day. Rashid Jahan was bold enough to comment on the hypocrisies of religious institutions revered by her community, thereby, standing for the masses and dealing with criticism to the extent that she was branded ‘Angarewali’. Many of her stories expose the “hypocrisy of religious figures” (Jalil 99). While most of her stories foreground the Muslim community, several of them like “Ghareebon ka Bhagwan” project vices prevalent in the Hindu community. Indiscriminately, Rashid Jahan puts all oppressors, whether *moulvi* or *pundit*, under the sword of her pen. This story is also a comment on the caste system which allocates the highest place to the privileged brahmins belonging to the highest *varna* who fulfill their selfish interests through the power that religion bestows in them. Jahan has highlighted the important role that they play in funeral rites. To care for a Brahmin is considered to be an act of great spiritual reward and they are fed to bless the soul of the dead. Durga invited the Brahmins for the funeral rituals of her husband, fed them and gave them the best she could, still they were not happy when they left her house. As a result, Durga always felt terrified of them. They ate more than their appetite would allow, leaving Durga worried if any food would be left for her and her children. Whenever she happened to see one, she thought that he must be going to rob someone just as they robbed her of whatever was left after her husband’s death. For Durga, brahmins are like vultures, who benefit from or scavenge dead men. Durga was aware of the high status of the Brahmins and that her religion mandated taking care of them. She believed that her hatred for them was a crime. This thought very well relates to Althusser’s theory that, “Ideology interpellates an individual as subject” (84). Althusser explains that religious institutions which are part of ideological state apparatuses condition an individual under the overarching dome of ideologies. What Durga feels is an example of ideological recognition

where she admits to herself that to hold poor opinion of Brahmins is in itself a sin. Though she has no money to get food for her and her children, she ensures she pays a ransom to the pundits to compensate for her sin of hating them. The only hope Durga has is in the form of her ten-year-old son, Indra. Here, Rashid Jahan brings in a feminist angle by highlighting gender discrimination against the girls. While Durga's sole comfort is her son, who she thinks will grow up to ease her affliction, she considers her daughters, liabilities, who will leave her house one day, when they marry.

One day, Indra returns from school, convulsing and running a high fever. Durga runs to *vaid* and even *savana* who are said to drive out the spirits but nothing improves her son's condition. The *vaid* suggests she consult a doctor but she has no money to pay his fees. When she is driven off by the merchant, the poor wife of the potter helps her by lending two rupees. Durga calls a doctor who arrives only to tell that the boy is suffering from '*gardan tod bukhaar*' or meningitis and needs to be hospitalized urgently. Rashid Jahan, herself a doctor, projects doctors as being callous. Durga loses all hope and sits down near the bed waiting for her son to die. The abject poverty left her with no option but to await the death of her only hope in life. Finally, all sounds of hiccups and groaning stopped and Durga knew her son was dead. A kind of frenzy overtook her and she ran out crying, "*Merā bachchā mar gayā!*" ("My son is dead"; Jahan, *Aurat* 99)⁴ Instead of asking about her plight, people told her that it is due to the sins of her past life that she is suffering. Durga then runs to temples and mosques to have her sins absolved. She is told at a temple that the God there is not her God because she is a beggar. In the end, when she faints after hitting her head on a bench and recovers, it is not her son's death that she is concerned about but finding her God. The doctor who is treating her tells her that the God of the poor is their hands. The story ends with the image of Durga staring at her hands. Rashid Jahan points out that in a world where people are insensitive and cold-hearted and cannot sympathize with others' sufferings, the poor persons' only hope and strength is their ability to put their hands to work and earn to provide for themselves. By referring to the hands as poor people's God, Rashid Jahan is talking about the productive forces or the labor power provided by the proletariats. The labor power is one of the elements of social formation that is ensured by the capitalists to be of their use.

Another story in which she talks about the poor is – "Punya" or "Reward" that contrasts the comfortable life of the narrator with the people he meets on his way to the railway station. The narrator, accustomed to all the comforts of his wealthy household is so startled to

⁴ All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

see the living conditions of the poor that he forgets what he was going to do. He saw a beggar lying wrapped in a blanket on the roadside near to where dogs were lying and his comfortable mattresses and blanket flashed before his eyes. He saw hundreds of women going to the temple to worship, some giving alms to beggars but making sure they don't come near them. People throw food for crows, but they don't like it when the food they throw is picked up and eaten by hungry children.

In story after story, Rashid Jahan attacks vices prevalent in society and works towards making people realize their shortcomings. In "Iftari" also, Rashid Jahan presents a bleak picture of poverty by highlighting the gap between the haves and have-nots and contrasting characters from both spheres. The story unfolds in the holy month of Ramzan, when Muslims fast. "Iftari" refers to the meal taken after breaking the fast and Rashid Jahan describes this meal as it is prepared in different households. In the first part, she presents the house of Deputy Saheb, where the servant girl-Nasiban is ill-treated by her mistress. Also, when a beggar comes asking for something to eat, he is given two days old *jalebis* although there are various delicacies prepared for the mistress' iftari. The story then goes on to talk about several other families of the city and highlighting the double-mindedness of people. Finally at the time of prayer, we see Nasima and her son Aslam looking out of their window at the same beggar. Recalling that his grandmother said that elders who do not fast, go to hell, Aslam asks his mother, "What is hell, Amma?" (Jalil 173) Nasima answers that hell is where the blind beggar is standing and where ironsmiths, dyers and weavers live in poverty. She adds "The fire of hell, my son, is the fire of hunger." (Jalil 173) She explains that often people don't get to eat any food in hell and whatever they get is insufficient and stale. One has to work tirelessly to survive. And people who live in hell have their clothes reduced to shreds. The homes of people living in hell are small and filled with insects and children living in hell don't have toys to play with. On being asked what heaven is, she says that heaven is the clean house where they live, having delicious food to eat and good clothes to wear. The child, Aslam, is presented as more sensitive than the elders of the society as he asks, "why does everyone not live in heaven?" (Jalil 174) Rashid Jahan makes a great Marxist comment when Nasima says, "Because my dear, those who live in heaven do not let others come in. They get these other people to do all their work but then they push them back into hell." (Jalil 174) As they were talking the sound of *azan* was heard and it marked the time to break the fast, the beggar on the street quickly drew the *jalebi* towards his mouth, but his hands began to tremble and the *jalebi* fell to the ground. He began searching for it with his hands but a dog comes and eats it. The tired and hopeless beggar sits on the ground crying like a baby.

While others start laughing at the spectacle, Aslam gets frightened and Nasima picks him up and tells that it will be his job to remove this hell when he grows up.

In another story “Chor” or “Thief” we see Rashid Jahan’s experience as a doctor and her communist sensibilities. The unnamed narrator could be Rashid Jahan herself for there are many parallels between her and the protagonist. In the story, we see a lady doctor sitting in her clinic reading a medical journal when a man enters with an ailing child. As it was past her time to see patients, she advises him to go elsewhere or come another day. The man was arrogant and told her to take her fees. This annoyed her, but the condition of the child who evidently had pneumonia evoked her pity and she gave him an injection and wrote a prescription. Thereafter, she recognized the man as the thief Kamman who had burgled her house two months ago. The doctor goes on to confront him about his burglary and asks him why he steals. When she informs that the policeman revealed his name to her, he began articulating abuses, “They take their cut first and foremost, then we get our share in the end. Sister, they needlessly bring us a bad name” (Jalil 178).. The story highlights corruption of the policemen, the caretakers of society; it reveals that they are hand in glove with thieves and take major shares of the booty. The policemen take their salary and for extra money, permit robberies. The doctor tried to keep him occupied by talking to him, all the while she could not decide if she should call her servant or get Kamman arrested. She asked how he began his career as a thief and he told her that just like she had teachers to teach her medicine, they also had teachers. His college was the jailhouse where he was imprisoned for six months after a fight and met his teachers there. It is also a comment on how the prisons instead of being places of redemption become places where a person is filled with greater hatred for society and takes on the career of a criminal. Instead of being beneficial for the inmates, jailhouses make them stone-hearted. While she was making up her mind to have him arrested, Kamman left. She was ridiculed by others when they learnt that she had let the thief off. At the end of the story, she wonders that nobody reports or gets people arrested for exploitation, corruption, swallowing up someone else’s land. She looked around herself and found the biggest of robbers dressed as saints living respectable lives – people who had gobbled up large tracts of lands and bribed the entire police force. Whereas Kamman was just a pawn in the whole system of corruption, people at the helm of crime were never questioned. The story offers an opinion on corruption which has infiltrated the entire society. Rashid Jahan comments on how thieves and other trouble-makers are blamed by people without a thought to the systems of corruption that sustain them.

“Insaaf” (Justice) in *Shola-e-Jawwala*, gives another stance on Rashid Jahan as a Marxist. It talks about social hierarchy which ensures that a certain class maintains hegemony over the others. In Marxism, cultural hegemony refers to the domination of society by the ruling class, which controls the “beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and mores – so that their imposed, ruling class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm; the universally valid dominant ideology.” (“Cultural Hegemony”). The story is about two boys – Ram Singh and Pritam, belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds, and portrays dialectical materialism in culture and society. Ram Singh was the son of Raja Bihari Lal’s watchman. He was a bright child and beloved of all. Raja Bihari Lal expressed that Ram Singh must come to the palace to spend time with his son, Pritam. Raja also sanctioned a rupee per month for Ram Singh’s clothes and other requirements. Ram Singh then began to live in the palace and was brought up along with Pritam. Both the boys were taught by the *pundit* but Ram Singh was brighter than Pritam. The master used to give more marks to Pritam in fear of his father. The *pundit* was afraid of losing his job if he didn’t give preferential treatment to Pritam. Rashid Jahan comments on how all people are conditioned to favor the rich, either out of fear or in order to please them so that they don’t get into war with the dominant bourgeois communities. Ram Singh felt bad but since he was just a child, he couldn’t understand that, “*log is qism ki bāteñ bhī karte haiñ kī rupye vāloñ kī haiñ me haiñ milāte haiñ, aur ghaibon ko janke taklif dete haiñ.*” (People tend to favor the rich and hurt the poor on purpose; Jahan, *Shola-e-Jawwala* 124) One day, the boys were given an arithmetic test by the master. Ram Singh knew that he had answered all questions correctly, while Pritam had answered only two out of seven questions correctly. When the *pundit* disclosed the result, Ram Singh secured seventy out of hundred and Pritam scored eighty out of hundred. Ram Singh felt hurt and upset with the *pundit*. He asked the *pundit* to give him the exam copies so that he could get them checked by the king and get *insaaf*. The little boy couldn’t understand that being born into a poor family he will not be awarded justice. He took his case to the king who was busy and told him that he would talk to the *pundit*. Raja Bihari Lal called the *pundit* and asked why he gave less marks to Ram Singh. The *pundit* told him that Ram Singh tries to equal Pritam in all things. About Ram Singh, he said,

*Tez is qadar hai kī jis chīz ko ek bār yād karle, kabhī na bhule.
Ab agar yeh ladkā padh gayā to kal ko koi barī naukrī kar lega
aur huzūr ye chaprāsī ka ladkā phir Pritam ke barābar ho jaegā.
Aur phir kise khabar hai kī ye phir ūñcha afsar bankar yahāñ*

āye, aur bhaiyya ko uske hukm ke āge sar jhukana pare. (Jahan Shola-e-Jawwala 126)

(Ram Singh is so intelligent that he memorizes anything that he had read once. If he is educated, he will get a good job someday and this peon's boy would become an equal to Pritam. And it might be possible that he becomes an officer and comes back to order Pritam and Pritam has to bow before him.)

By means of their dialogue, the story highlights how the ruling class maintains dominance by ensuring that the poor remain ignorant and uneducated. The rulers never let anyone from the base equal them, thereby assuring superiority for themselves. The king who was fond of Ram Singh and had raised him for years as his child agreed with the pundit's views and decided that Ram Singh should not be educated any further. Raja talks about how education had made poor people get out of hand. If the weaker sections of society become empowered through education and speak up for their rights, they are written off as mannerless or as exceeding their brief. The poor have no power to question the authority of the rich; they are oppressed just because they don't possess the material riches. Raja called Ram Singh's father, and told him how his son had misbehaved with the pundit and paid back their generosity with insolence by comparing himself with Pritam. Raja asked him to take his son back. Ram Singh's father went to see him and scolded him for having brought about such a loss whereas Ram Singh, who revered the Raja as his god, was left speechless at Raja's injustice. In his rage, Ram Singh says he never knew Raja too would be as unscrupulous as the pundit. But he is silenced by his father as he cannot vocalize the dishonesty of the king. The story ends with Ram Singh's father telling him, "*Hum gharib haiñ. Tumhārī unkī kyā barābarī* Jahan (*Shola-e-Jawwala* 126)?" ("We are poor. How can you compare with them?")

"Buri Sohbat" or "Bad Company", unlike others which speak mostly about the poor, talks about a communist boy, from an upper-class family. Through this story, Rashid Jahan attempts to highlight views people have about the Communist Party of India and also those of the party members. Because she joined the Communist Party as a full-time member along with her husband, and devoted all her time and money for the cause of the party, it is very like her to write a story that makes the Party's standpoint clear. The story begins with a declaration by Zakiya: "Saeed Bhai is leaving." (Jalil 190) which itself is a testimony to the lives of the communists who were always on the run, in fear of being wedged by the authorities or because they were disowned by their family members. Zakiya confronts her father, Chief Justice Sir Ataullah about whether he has thrown her brother, Saeed, out of the house again. Saeed who is

twenty-eight years old and is a member of the Communist Party is believed by his father, to be a vagabond wasting away his life in idleness. The judge Saheb remembers how after the death of his father, he gave tuitions at the age of thirteen to ease his mother's affliction and provide for his siblings. He worked hard to be what he has become and now, but his son questions him about what he had done with his life. For Saeed, his father's working hard to step out of poverty and become the Chief Justice had profited no one but him. As a Communist, Saeed's life is devoted to the cause of the downtrodden and he doesn't want to accumulate wealth and riches for himself and his family. Saeed questions his father as to how he can benefit humanity with well-settled children and what sympathy he feels for those he left behind in poverty while himself became successful. According to Saeed, all the hard work his father put in his life is a waste because it does not in any way help humanity.

Coming from a devoted Party member this story is a testimony of the members' experiences and challenges. As members of the communist party Rashid Jahan and Mahmuduzzafar's house was always a center for Party meetings and discussions. Both of them donated their earnings for the communist cause and survived on a meager allowance from the Party. About the communists, the Judge Sahib says, "...a group of convicts and bad characters who cannot bear to see anyone progress or do well! They claim they will redistribute the wealth of a handful, but have any of them ever known the hardship with which wealth is collected?" (Jalil 193)

Judge Sahib reflects on how he can get Saeed a prestigious job just as he had placed his other three boys as a Collector, a Railway Officer and in Police. But Saeed refused saying, "I want to take the whole world with me on the staircase on which you have climbed to the top." (Jalil 193) Judge Sahib ridicules the idea of everyone getting on the top. He cannot understand why his son wants to lead a life of such hardship and feels there is no point in taking up for all the world's sorrow; everyone should work for himself without bothering about others. Everyone praises and admires the Chief Justice but his son shows him the mirror telling him that he had wasted his life. For others, his life is an example of success but for his son, it is a tale of purposeless existence. For Judge Sahib, who sends thousands of people to prison and the scaffold, every year it is most disrespectful that his son has been thrown into prison once. He is so offended that he doesn't want to set eyes on him. As his other son who is a collector comes to visit him, Judge Sahib is filled with pride and simultaneously he hears the sound of the carriage which means Saeed is going away. Judge Sahib's eyes then go to the paper he has scribbled on, "That boy says my life is a waste. In fact, not just a waste, it is a zero from beginning till end." (Jalil 198) It is not clear whether Judge Sahib really

hates his son Saeed for his communist activities, or whether he considers his own life meaningless. It is more probable that Judge Sahib cannot really understand why his son, who could have lived comfortably, prefers to live like a vagabond, doing his best to help others. The other people in the story are so preoccupied with their own lives that they don't even bother about others, let alone comprehend the need to help them. Hamid attributes Saeed's views to the "bad company", of his communist friends who have filled his mind with bad ideas.

The Marxist-feminist, Rashid Jahan wrote scathingly against exploitation, the plight of sex workers, the challenges faced by the communists, arranged marriages, communal angst, women oppressing other women, and inter-caste marriages. She needs to be celebrated for many reasons – her bold attitude that acquired her many adversaries, her concern for humanity, her indefatigable capacity to work as a doctor and a communist, as a writer and her charismatic personality that won her many admirers. She fought for the upliftment of women and the downtrodden of society. Her oeuvre is seminal in foregrounding women's issues at much larger levels in Urdu literature.

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