



### Urdu Studies

An international, peer-reviewed, bilingual research journal

ISSN: 2583-8784 (Online)

Vol. 5 | Issue 1 | Year 2025

Pages: 203-215

## *Angarey* and ‘The Purpose of Literature’: Setting the Stage for Progressive Writing

### Tabinda Sadiq

**Abstract.** With its publication in December 1932, *Angarey* rose like a beacon of progressive thought on the Indian literary stage. In reply to all the furore that followed, Mahmuduzafar published an article on 5 April 1933, “In Defence of *Angarey*”, which tried to justify their efforts and also called for formation of “League of Progressive Authors” across India. Meanwhile, Sajjad Zaheer established Progressive Writers Association along with Mulk Raj Anand and the organization met for the first time on 24 November 1934 in London. Sajjad Zaheer came in close contact with Premchand who published the manifesto in his Hindi Journal *Hans* in October 1935. With positive responses from writers all over India, Zaheer decided to hold the first All India Progressive Writers Association meeting on 9-10 April 1936 in Lucknow. Premchand delivered the first address titled, “The Purpose of Literature”. According to him, literature can no longer be limited to individualism or egotism but needs to focus on psychological and social issues.

In this paper, I intend to analyze Premchand’s address at the first meeting of the AIPWA and the manifesto that Sajjad Zaheer formulated in London to bring out how *Angarey* exemplified the kind of literature that these documents called for later. Premchand said that “progress” meant a situation that showed us our degradation and that we must strive to remove it. Likewise, the stories in *Angarey* shocked readers out of their complacencies and made them uncomfortable. This paper tries to establish how *Angarey* was not only a cornerstone of Progressive Movement but also a fine example of what a Progressive writing should be.

**Keywords.** *Angarey*; Premchand’s presidential address; PWA Manifesto; “The Purpose of Literature”.

### Introduction

*Angarey* (Live Coals) is a slim volume comprising nine short stories and a play, out of which five stories were by Sajjad Zaheer, two by Ahmed Ali,

Included in UGC-CARE List since October 2021

Published on August 15, 2025

<http://www.urdustudies.in>

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/?ref=chooser-v1>

a story and a play by Rashid Jahan and one story by Mahmuduzzafar. It was published by Nizami Press in Lucknow. In *Liking Progress, Loving Change* Rakshanda Jalil points out that “*Angarey* was possibly the first anthology of short stories published in Urdu, a collection, that is, of short stories by different authors included within one cover” (Jalil 109). With its publication in December 1932, *Angarey* took the Urdu literary world by storm. The book set the stage “for the development of an organization that was to be the mouthpiece for the progressive development in all Indian languages” (Poulos 113). The four writers who contributed to this collection were well aware that they were courting possible sanctions from both the religious and the civic order. While they expected their book to create a stir, they clearly had underestimated the severity and extent of hostility it would generate. As Ahmed Ali notes, “We knew the book would create a stir, but never dreamt it would bring the house down” (Coppola 61). *Angarey* generated public anger verging on mass hysteria. The stories were condemned for ridiculing the Prophet, religious beliefs, rituals, and practices. The writers were blamed for having attacked the tenets of Islam and were threatened with dire consequences, including death. All the public anger culminated in the British Government of the United Provinces banning the book on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1933 under section 295A of the Indian Penal Code. All extant copies were ordered burnt.

In the words of Carlo Coppola, the significance of *Angarey* is not contingent upon its being a good piece of literature nor because of the uproar it caused, but in the fact that it “brought together and solidified a group of individuals” who would later lay the foundation of the *Anjuman Tarraqi-pasand Mussannifeen-e Hind* or the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association (AIPWA), which would change the course of Indian literature for decades to come. While the publication of *Angarey* can be considered as the first step towards setting the stage for Progressive Writer’s Association, the reaction from the writers on banning the book was the second. On 5 April 1933, Mahmuduzzafar, one of the contributors to the collection, published an article in *The Leader* titled – “In Defence of *Angarey* – Shall we submit to gagging?” The article lashed out against curbing free speech and was neither apologetic in tone nor fearful. It read: “The authors of this book do not wish to make any apology for it. They leave it to float or sink of itself” (Mahmud 451). Explaining why they chose a Muslim setting for most of the stories in *Angarey*, he wrote: “They have chosen the particular field of Islam, not because they bear it any ‘special’ malice, but because, being born into that particular society, they felt themselves better qualified to speak for that alone” (Mahmud 451). This particular article also gave a call for the formation of a league of writers on an all-India basis. It said:

Our practical proposal is the formation immediately of a league of progressive authors, which should bring forth similar collections from time to time, both in English and the various vernaculars of our country. We appeal to all those who are interested in this idea to get in touch with us (Mahmud 451).

The need for such an association became expedient after the upheaval caused by *Angarey*, best remembered as the cornerstone of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). In this paper, I analyse how *Angarey* is not only a cornerstone of the PWA but is also, on account of some of the stories, stands out as a fine example of progressive literature. In order to understand the nature of progressive literature, I have analysed the manifesto of the PWA and Premchand's inaugural address titled, "The Purpose of Literature" delivered at the inaugural conference of Progressive Writers' Association on April, 1936, at the Rifah-e Aam Club, in Wazir Ganj in Lucknow.

At the time of protests and threats that followed the book's publication, Sajjad Zaheer had begun his law studies in London and there he came in contact with number of writers like Ralph Fox, Mulk Raj Anand, Marxist thinker Rajani Palme Dutt and other members of the Communist party of Great Britain and was deeply influenced by them. Coppola writes, "Sajjad Zaheer, together with Mulk Raj Anand established an organization in London called the Progressive Writers' Association" (Coppola 22). It included a group of students from London, Oxford and Cambridge and some expatriates who were living there. This group had its first meeting in the Nanking Restaurant on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1934.

In *Roshnai*, a memoir of the early days of Progressive movement, Zaheer writes about drafting a manifesto along with Jyoti Ghosh, Mulk Raj Anand, Promode Sengupta and M.D. Taseer. It was later called the London Manifesto. He sent copies of this manifesto to his *Angarey* co-writers and Indian intellectuals including Premchand. This document stated the aims and objectives of the association they wanted to set up in India. The manifesto was received positively by a number of writers, and even gained the support of Premchand who published the Manifesto's Hindi translation in his journal *Hans* in October 1935. The English version of this manifesto was published in London's *Left Review* in February 1936.

The manifesto stated that "radical changes" are taking place in Indian society. Long held beliefs, social and political ideologies are challenged and due to all this, a new society is coming forward. It is the duty of the writers in India to write about changes taking place in the society so as to "assist in the spirit of progress in the country" ("Manifesto"). It further said that since the classical period, Indian literature has shown a tendency to escape from *Angarey* and 'The Purpose of Literature'...

the realities of life and a bend towards “spiritualism and idealism” (“Manifesto”), which has resulted in a kind of unrealistic ideology. When the country was going through acute misery and degradation, literature produced showed mystical devotion, lack of rationality and a furtive attitude towards sex. Stating the objective of the association it states that, “it is the object to rescue literature and other arts from the priestly, academic and decadent classes in whose hands they have degenerated so long; to bring the arts into the closet touch with the people; and to make them the vital organs which will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future” (“Manifesto”). It is clear from the manifesto that the purpose of the Progressive Writers’ Association was to bring arts towards realistic depiction of the society. The literature, according to it, must deal with existential problems that we face like poverty, hunger, political subjugation, social backwardness, so that we can understand these problems and then act on them. These were the themes that *Angarey* stories had taken up to shake the society from the complacent attitude it had.

Along with detailing the aims of the movement, the manifesto also stated that several resolutions would be adopted. The first resolution was to establish organizations of writers corresponding to “various linguistic zones of India and to coordinate these organizations by organizing conferences, publishing pamphlets, magazines, etc.” (“Manifesto”). The purpose was to bring together the different linguistic zones of India and writers writing in regional languages towards the cause of association. It also wanted to cooperate with other literary organisations whose aims were similar to this association in order to collaborate. The main resolution was “to produce and translate literature of a progressive nature and of a high technical standard, to fight cultural reaction, and in this way, to further the cause of Indian freedom and social regeneration” (“Manifesto of the PWA”). This resolution corresponded to *Angarey* as a perfect example, since the book talked about such topics that were never before touched upon and the writers had to fight back extreme hatred and objection from the society for writing it.

Another resolution was, “to fight for the right of free expression of thought and opinion” (“Manifesto”). The freedom of expression was in question after the ban on *Angarey*, so the progressives realized that the road ahead will not be easy and they will have to fight for their right to free speech. There were some other resolutions like helping writers in publication of their works and striving for a common language – (Hindustani) and common script (Indo-Roman) to be used in India. This resolution was later dropped off, keeping in mind the multilingual culture of India.

Coming back to India, with a desire to establish an All-India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA), Zaheer met with various writers to gain their support and got favourable responses. *Hindustāni Sabhā*, an organization that sought to popularize *Hindustāni* language met in Allahabad in December 1935 and it was on this occasion that Sajjad Zaheer met Premchand, Josh Malihabadi and Maulana Abdul Haq and convinced them to sign the manifesto.

Gaining the support of Premchand, who was by that time a well-established writer, gave credibility to this association. Considering Premchand's positive disposition towards the organization, Zaheer invited him to give the presidential address at the first meeting of All India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA) that was organized in Lucknow on 9-10 April 1936. Premchand not only gave his whole-hearted support to the young writers, but his "presidential address would in later years become a manifesto of sorts for a literary movement unlike any other in the history of this country" (Jalil). His speech titled, "Sahitya ka Uddesha" or The Aim or Purpose of Literature was one of his finest non-fiction write-ups. As Rakshanda Jalil writes, "In simple but powerful words, the greatest storyteller of his time told his audience how good literature can only be founded on truth, beauty, freedom and humanity, and that his definition of literature was simply "a criticism of life."

Premchand begins his speech by calling the first meeting of All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) a "memorable occasion in the history of Indian literature" (Coppola 25). He states that as portrayed by their works, writers in the past had a very narrow view of the world. This narrowness was both in terms of style and content. As writers depended on patrons, their writings reflected the likes of those for whom their works were written. Moreover, these writers were interested in imaginative creativity rather than exhibiting concern of understanding the world around them. Their chief purpose in writing was to entertain and as their works had no connection with the realities of life, it often seemed to be escapist. Poets too, were concerned with tales of love and imagination which were contradictory to practical life.

He then goes on to give his definition of literature which is very different from the view of writers in the past:

Only that creation will be called literature which describes some truth in a mature, refined and graceful language, and which has the quality of affecting the head and the heart. And this quality is acquired by literature only when the truths and experiences of life are expressed in it (Coppola 25).

In this purview, we see *Angarey*, not only affecting the mind and the sensibilities, but creating an incendiary effect that shook society out of its conservatism. *Angarey* laid bare the reality of a society and its prevalent hypocrisies by unveiling all that went on behind the closed doors or all that was conveniently brushed under the carpet or earlier, went noticed.

According to Premchand's definition, literature is best defined as the criticism of life, "It doesn't matter in which form it is, the chief function is to present an honest and critical view of life" (Coppola 25). Literature which does not produce in us a resolution and determination to act and overcome difficulties is useless in the present times and it does not even deserve to be called literature. It is the duty of a writer to support and plead for the "oppressed, suffering, and destitute, whether an individual or a group" (Coppola 26). Society becomes a court for the writer where he submits his plea and his efforts are deemed successful if it arouses a sense of the aesthetic and a sense of justice.

This "sense of the aesthetic" and "sense of justice" that is inspired by literature signifies progress and improvement of the human condition. Premchand then goes on to voice his belief of progress. He says:

By 'progress' we mean that situation which generates (in us) the firmness and capacity to perform duty, which shows us our degradation, which shows us that, due to various internal and external causes, we have reached this condition of death and decline and must strive to remove them (Coppola 26).

According to Premchand, an artist is, by nature, progressive; he feels dissatisfied with the actual condition of the society around him and imagines a world where there is happiness and freedom. For the progressives, to change is to progress. Premchand then states the most famous phrase of his speech: "We will have to change our standards of beauty" (Coppola 27). By this, he meant that writers should stop portraying the rich and the privileged and turn their attention instead, towards the common man as the subject of their writings. The standards of beauty, in the past, were based on wealth and luxury and the artist's job was to describe the rich and their hopes, disappointments, conflicts, aspirations in their work. Even when they mentioned a poor villager, it was only to ridicule him or laugh at him. Artists could not see that the greatest beauty lies in the struggle of life. Premchand asserts that for an artist, beauty is a beautiful woman and not a poor woman in rags. He does not believe that one can find beauty in starvation and nakedness and so there is this need to change the standards of beauty. If this definition of beauty changes and widens, society will progress. And the role of writer is "not to entertain the audience but to become a standard-bearer who shows the path" (Coppola 28).

While guiding the writers at the conference on how to change their standards of beauty and advising about their role in society, Premchand also warns them that their role of being the standard-bearer is a “thankless undertaking.” As Premchand was aware of his lack of financial success as a writer, he alerts the younger writers that, “the temple of literature has no place for those who worship glamour and riches” (Coppola 28). The interest of society is to be placed over individual gain and if they serve society with sincerity, prestige and fame would follow ultimately.

Talking specifically about the Progressive writers Association, Premchand mentions that they have come to this field of duty with certain specific principles. The very first principle he mentions is that there must be literature in which content is more important than form. This principle is very much visible in the stories of *Angarey* where the focus is to present a vivid picture of the decadence prevalent in the society. These stories lack formalistic elements, and not much importance is given to language and structure. Premchand asserts that the writer who writes for the common people, should write in the common language of the people. And their purpose is to create an environment in the country where unsophisticated literature can be created and developed.

The second resolution was to “establish literary centers throughout the country, in all the various vernacular languages, in which there would be extensive give-and-take between and among members” (Coppola 28). Premchand ends his speech with a statement about this new kind of literature that the Progressive Writers’ Association is encouraging: “this new literature should not put us to sleep, for further slumber will mean death” (Coppola 28).

Owing to its content, Premchand’s speech is considered one of the major documents in the history of progressive movement. Though it comes rather late in Premchand’s literary career, it not only discusses critical problems which are debated throughout the history of the progressive movement but it also sums up his literary aesthetics.

When we look at *Angarey*, against the London Manifesto and Premchand’s speech, we realize that the stories exemplified the kind of literature these documents called for several years later. All of the four writers belonged to the upper middle class Urdu speaking families, but they were concerned with “the social and economic disparities that cleft the Indian society into unequal halves” (Jalil 40). Not only social and economic justice, *Angarey* dealt with the subject of sexuality as well as discussion of issues that were always a ‘taboo’ in society. As a result, the book was labelled as obscene and blasphemous. The furore that followed its publication drew the attention away from its true purpose, that was, as Premchand stated in *Angarey* and ‘The Purpose of Literature’...

his address, to introduce a new kind of writing. *Angarey* talked about common people and their struggles in a common language. Unlike other progressive works published later, *Angarey* does not provide solutions, it just lays bare the workings of society.

The first story in the collection, “*Neend Nahin Āti*” (“Sleep Does Not Come”) by Sajjad Zaheer, was written in the stream of consciousness mode popularized in the west at that time by writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. According to Rakshanda Jalil, Zaheer also acknowledged the influence of Dadaism on his *Angarey* stories. The story is written in the form of “interior monologues of a young impoverished poet, Akbar, belonging to the lower-middle-class who drifts between sleep and sleeplessness at night.” He is unable to sleep due to hunger-pangs and is having a series of unrelated thoughts. His thoughts wander to Gandhiji’s public speech at Amin-ud Daula Park, where people wait to listen to him despite heavy rain; about his dirt-stained clothes and poverty; his childhood when his mother took care of him; about the time he sat near his ailing mother watching her die; he thinks of his mother’s dying wish of getting him married and about his wife and child who now live with relatives. He thinks of his wife’s complaints of ill-treatment by these relatives, his mother’s death due to lack of funds for her treatment and about his own condemnation to hell. One prominent figure that comes up in Akbar’s imagination is Munni Jan, a courtesan, who is assigned to hell just like him. When he enquires about the snakes around her neck, she tells him how she was punished with five scorpions but she pleaded for another punishment to Satan, called ‘Sarkar’ in the story. Munni Jan then fades away and Akbar is awakened by his hunger. Towards the end of the story, Akbar is questioned about freedom to which he replies that he wants neither freedom nor death, he only wants food with which he can fill his stomach. Zaheer, in this story, made his protagonist “comment on a wide variety of social customs and mores, especially the Islamic religion, in a particularly denigrating and heavy-handed manner” (Coppola 58).

Zaheer’s second story, “*Jannat kī Bashārat*” (“Vision of Heaven”) is sexually explicit while elucidating the futility of ritualistic religion. This story garnered more public reaction than any other story in the collection. A religious man, Maulvi Muhammad Dawood who teaches in a madrasa and is famous for his wisdom, spends his nights in prayers. When he falls asleep the next day during his classes, his students think he is in a trance and leave the classroom. The story then goes on to talk about the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during hot days of summer. Maulvi Dawood spends Shab-e Qadr, night the most blessed night in the month of Ramzan, offering his prayers masjid. He returns home having his pre-dawn meal with

the intent of spending the rest of the night reciting the Quran. As he wakes up his young wife asking for a matchbox, she tries to seduce him. Recollecting Eve's transgression, Maulvi extricates himself from her embrace and returns to his prayers. During his prostration, "he falls asleep over the Koran and has a vision of heaven in which he sees himself about to engage sexually with a *hur*" (Coppola 59). His wife's laughter wakes him up from his dream and he finds himself on his prayer mat. In this story, Zaheer brings out Islamic notion of heaven as he has portrayed hell in the previous story. He is mocking the idea of being rewarded with beautiful women on the basis of religiosity, and to an extent religion itself.

Zaheer's third story, "Garmiyon kī ek Rāt" ("A Summer's Night") is again about middle and lower strata of society and their struggles. The story portrays the huge gap between the rich and the poor by presenting characters from different strata of the society. The protagonist, Mushi Barkat Ali, goes for a walk after dinner where he meets Jumman, the peon at his office. Jumman narrates his tale of poverty and exploitation at the hands of the manager. Munshi Barkat Ali feels uneasy listening to Jumman's plight and engages him in religious talk so that he doesn't request a loan. As Jumman keeps following him, Barkat Ali gets desperate to get rid of him. Munshi then happens to meet an old friend who belongs to the aristocrats. He asks Munshi to accompany him to watch a dance performance of the famous courtesan Noorjahan. On his assertion, Munshi gets into his car and drives away, leaving Jumman in a state of shock and despair. This story is a critique on socio-economic differences between bourgeoisie and proletariat of the society.

The fourth story by Sajjad Zaheer, "Dulāri", is about a slave girl, who unlike a maid-servant, is not paid for her work but is fed and clothed in return for her services. Dulāri has been raised since her childhood in the house of Sheikh Nazim Ali Khan, and was a companion of the younger daughter of the house, Hasina Begum. As they grew up, Dulāri got engaged in household chores while Hasina Begum spent her time stitching, sewing, reading and writing. And thus, they grew apart. Usually, her clothes are dirty but she wears her special clothes on festivals and while going out with the ladies of the family. On Shab-e-Barat, an Islamic festival, she dressed up like a doll and was watching fireworks when Begum Sahiba ordered her to bring *sharbat* for Qasim, the *bare sahabzāde* of the house, who was about to finish college. Though he criticized old customs and traditions, he did nothing to change them except for voicing his disagreement.

As she goes to prepare *sharbat*, Qasim follows her to the store and engages with her sexually. A year passed when Qasim's marriage got fixed and Dulāri's hopes were shattered and she ran away from the house, only Angarey and 'The Purpose of Literature'...

to be found in the street of prostitutes after a few months. It is a comment on how exploited and helpless women turn into prostitution for survival. On her return, she is ridiculed and chastised for her actions by Begum Sahiba. Qasim comes to the scene with his bride asking his mother to forgive Dulari. Dulari is unable to bear facing Qasim and runs away again, never to return. Zaheer, using such themes of domestic servitude and exploitation, is trying to bring a social reform.

The last story by Zaheer titled, “Phir Yeh Hungāma” is a stream of consciousness narrative which weaves together random images and several short episodes. Story begins by making a satiristic comment on the religion that it is based on faith and fear, and anything related to intellect and logic is devilish. One major incident discussed in the story is the death of the sweeper’s son. Kallu worked as a sweeper for a family in exchange of 15 rupees a month and a room for his family to live. For Kallu, his master was no less than God. One day his son was bitten by a snake in his sleep and within a few hours, he lay withering in pain. Kallu’s master’s son was kind-hearted and helped the poor. He came to Kallu’s room and gave medicine to his son with his own hands. It is ironic that he couldn’t stand the smell in their store and took a bath immediately after coming back from meeting him. There are several other images like that of poor pregnant women lying on a broken bed, which presents a very bleak picture of the downtrodden of the society.

Ahmad Ali contributed two stories in the collection. The first story titled, “Bādal Nahin Äte” (“Clouds Do Not Come”) is quite similar to Zaheer’s “Neend Nahin Äti” in terms of its use of stream of consciousness technique. The story begins with a description of Indian summer and compares it with hell where the protagonist is unable to find any peace. In the words of Rakshanda Jalil, “one story emerges out of the belly of another. Coiled within one idea is another, seemingly unrelated one, and together they paint the image of a languid, lackadaisical society” (Jalil 129). The words and expressions point out that the narration takes up a woman’s voice and so it is probably one of the first stories written by a man in the voice of a woman in Urdu literature. There is a comment on *maulvis* who are said to be devoid of any intellect as they keep reading and rocking all the while crouched over the Holy Book, a picture of ignorance prevalent in the society as people are shown to believe in talismans and offerings, an image of oppression of women living behind purdah and sexual abuse of married women to an extent that she claims, “All we can do is to rot behind the veil” (*Angarey*).

Ahmad Ali’s second story, “Mahāwaton ki ek Rāt” (“A Night of Winter Rain”) presents a completely contrasting scenario from the former one.

Instead of a hellish summer, it shows a cold winter night of rain. The story is an interior monologue by a woman named Maryam, who was once well-off but is now reduced to poverty. She is living in a small room with a sagging roof along with her three children and bemoans her poverty. Worried for her children who are huddled up in a soaking blanket under a roof that seems to fall anytime, she thinks about her past comforts. The story presents a picture of inequality, injustice, suffering and helplessness of the poor resulting in an existential crisis in the narrator who seems to believe that only death can give her comfort now.

Mahmuduzzafar contributed only one story to the collection titled, “*Jawanmardi*” (“Masculinity”). The story was written in English by Mahmuduzzafar and was then translated to Urdu by Sajjad Zaheer. The story presents a portrait of loveless marriage between two people who are poles apart, and tells “a tale of man’s pride, vanity, and willfulness” (Jalil 134). The man is educated in the West and is living abroad while his wife has led a sheltered life back in India and is now bed-ridden. Her illness is not specified. One day, as the man receives her letter, he is filled with emotions and decides to return home. But back in India, he feels stifled by his surroundings, a world of ignorance. When people begin to question his masculinity, he, “in a fit of depression, hopes to prove his manliness by impregnating his wife” (Coppola 60), who is not strong enough to bear pregnancy. As her pregnancy proceeds, she gets quieter, but the man is delighted as he says, “my state was like a gardener’s who is delighted to see the buds burst into blooms on the trees he has planted. With every passing day, with every minute, my success became more apparent” (Jalil 136). His wife dies in childbirth and the man tries to find relief in the sympathies of relatives who told him that she had a smile on her face when she died. The man, “perhaps, have been a better specimen of manhood had society not exerted its corrupting influence on him” (Jalil 136). The story paints a picture of society that is as sick and ailing as the man’s wife.

Rashid Jahan, the only women writer in the *Angarey* quartet contributed a story, “*Dilli ki Sair*” and a play, “*Parde ke Peechhe*”. “*Dilli kī Sair*” is a brief account of a trip to Delhi given by a woman, Malka Begum, to the women in her neighbourhood in Faridabad. It is a brief and compact story which tells a tale of male callousness and leaves a lot of things unsaid for readers to ponder over. Malika’s husband offered her a trip to Delhi which she accepted readily. On reaching Delhi by train, her husband left her at the station with the luggage and himself went off with an old friend. Sitting on her luggage clad in a burqa, she waited for her husband to return, all the while enduring stares and insults from men asking her to show her face. She also describes Delhi platform, the commotion of trains coming and

going, coolies and porters, *mems* and *sahibs* talking in their ‘*git-pit*’ language. The women listening to her flashback are awe-struck by the description as being confined to *zānānās*, they can only imagine about the outside world. Her husband returns hours later asking if she would like to eat something. Malka Begum, already frustrated, asked him to take her back to which he readily agreed without giving any explanation for his carelessness. The story highlights the inconsiderate attitude of the husband towards his wife, who instead of feeling guilty, blames his wife for the termination of the tour.

The only play in the collection, “Parde Ke Peechhe” by Rashid Jahan, as its name suggests, tries to unravel and bring into light the life behind the veils. Rashid Jahan sort of lifts the curtain to show the domestic atmosphere of the women’s quarters, and to expose the sickness and injustice in society. Using conversation style and colloquial speech, the play presents an upper middle-class woman, Mohammadi Begum, seemingly a fulfilled person with a house full of servants and a family with a rich husband and children, but the play progresses unveiling her dissatisfaction with life. The husband’s sexual demands, his carefree attitude towards his wife’s health and infidelity is chillingly voiced by Rashid Jahan. Play also captures an intense moment of sharing between two women. The *zenana* also became the free space in which women could articulate the inarticulate and admit the inadmissible.

All the stories in *Angarey*, “rip apart the innards of a sick society, they offer neither balm nor cure” (Jalil 142) *Angarey* completely changed the ‘standards of beauty by taking up poverty, sexuality, masculinity, religion, illiteracy, etc. as its themes. The collection did its work of bringing a change by ridiculing and protesting against the social injustice, ignorance and tyranny of the empowered class. *Angarey* aptly fits into the new kind of literature that Premchand called for in his inaugural address and it became an existing example for all the progressive writings to come.

#### Works Cited:

Chauhan, Vibha Singh, and Khalid Alvi. *Angarey: 9 Stories and a Play*. Rupa Publications India, 2014

Coppola, Carlo. “The Angarey Group: The Enfant Terribles of Urdu Literature.” *Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol.1, 1981, pp.57.

---. “Premchand’s Address to the First Meeting of the All-India Progressive Writers Association: Some Speculations” [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/kafan/taraqqi\\_1936\\_speech/coppola\\_jsal\\_1986.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/kafan/taraqqi_1936_speech/coppola_jsal_1986.pdf).

Jalil, Rakshanda. *A Rebel and Her Cause: The Life and work of Rashid Jahan*. Women Unlimited, 2014.

---. *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of Progressive Writers’ Angarey and ‘The Purpose of Literature’...*

*Movement in Urdu*. Oxford, 2014.

---. 'For Premchand, Good Literature was About Truth and Humanity" <https://thewire.in/books/premchand-hindi-literature>.

Mahmud, Shabana. "Angare and the Founding of the Progressive Writers' Association." *Modern Asian Studies*, 30, 2, 1996, pp.447-467.

"Manifesto of the PWA." *Red Diary*.<https://reddiarypk.wordpress.com/2007/08/22/manifesto-of-the-pwa/>

"Manifesto of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association, London." *Left Review*, February, 1936. <chromeextension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://archiveseducate.wordpress.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/02/manifesto-of-the-indian-progressive-writers-association.pdf>

Poulos, Steven M. "Rashid Jahan of 'Angare': Her Life and Work." *Indian Literature*, vol. 30, no.4(120) (July-August,1987), pp.108-118.