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Sahitya Akademi



India International Centre

**invite you to**

**meet the author**

Qurratulain Hyder





Qurratulain Hyder, affectionately known as 'Annie' to her constellation of friends, was born in Aligarh in the late 1920s. It was a time of incipient social and political metamorphosis and it would seem that she absorbed in some miraculous way the enormous varieties and colours that co-existed in India during that period. Her reading drew from all quarters—from the resident sitar teacher who read romances in old Urdu, to the female cousins who read Jane Austen and Charles Dickens and the male cousins who quoted Karl Marx. As she says, she lived in a 'half-way house' of Western and Indian culture.

Her first book *Sitaron se Aage* (Beyond the Stars) was published when she was barely out of her teens, and was completing her M.A. in English Literature at the University of Lucknow. Her very first story published in a literary magazine had caught the imagination of the reading public. After the book

**T**he image of a railway platform at midnight, where coolies ran about with lanterns, was what emerged from the first two complete sentences which Qurratulain Hyder put together when she was just six. Recalling her childhood, she says, "If both your parents and one great-aunt are eminent writers of their time, you grow up in an interesting kind of household. If you also have a near photographic memory, and almost total recall and a lot of imagination, you can't help but write and go on writing for the rest of your life."



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1967 from Dr. Zakir Hussain

appeared there was no looking back. It was followed by a novel *Mere bhi Sanamkhane* (My Temples Too) which created a stir because it was a marked departure from other Urdu writing: while it displayed the compassion which moved the Progressive Writers, it steered clear of their sometimes inflexible stand. In these two works, she wrote naturally in a form not unlike the 'Stream of Consciousness' technique made popular by the Bloomsbury Group, though she had not, at the stage, any acquaintance with their writing. Her magnum opus, *Aag ka Darya* (The River of Fire) came out in 1959. Spanning 25 centuries, this novel begins in the third century B.C., but its sweep transcends all barriers of time. The recreation of the different periods of India's past is so authentic that it appears not only credible but also contemporary. The style is impressionistic as scenes piled upon scenes create a brilliantly vivid collage of reality. The Urdu scholar Mohammad Sadiq has referred to this as an "eyewitness account" of history. The overall impression is of grandeur, change and unity.

Her biographical novel, *Kar-ijehan Daraz Hai*, is a depiction of her family history over the last 1000 years. It begins in eighth century Damascus and comes down to the present. It is written in four successive styles: that of a medieval story-teller (*dastan go*), retold by a *malfoozat* (hagiography) compiler, a nineteenth century Urdu novelist, and finally by a modern, westernized Urdu writer. Her other major works include *Patjhar ki Awaz* (The Sound of Falling Leaves) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award



for 1967, and *Aakhiri-Shab ke Humsafar* (Travellers at the End of Night) set against the backdrop of the underground revolutionary movement of Bengal of the 1930's. The story extends to the creation of Bangladesh. Her two most recent novels are *Gardishi-Rang Chamant* (Changing Hues of the Garden) and *Chandni Begum*. She has, besides, written a large number of short stories in Urdu and English, and undertaken numerous translations, including the verse of Ghalib. She has also published articles in most of the leading newspapers and magazines of India.

A rich variety of experience marks Qurratulain Hyder's life as an artist and writer: she has studied Hindustani music in India and art in London; edited *Imprint* magazine, and worked with *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in Bombay; broadcast for the BBC; reported for the *Daily Telegraph*; written scripts for documentary and feature films; taught in universities and travelled to almost every part of the globe. Free of the harnesses of ideology, She

is sustained by a profound compassion for human kind caught in the throes of destinies which they have neither created nor can control. However, where such suffering emanates from human injustice, she is unsparing in her expose. Her wit and humour possess a refreshingly modern quality that adds another dimension to the larger themes of exploitation and suffering which she writes about.

Qurratulain Hyder's contribution to Urdu fiction is significant in many ways—for its substance, its innovations, its fine alloys. As a trend setter, she has exercised a profound influence on the art of novel writing in Urdu.



In Tashkent, 1969

## A Select Bibliography

### NOVELS

MERE BHI SANAMKHANE (MY Temples Too), 1949  
SAFINA-I-GHAMI-DIL (The Barge of Sorrows), 1952

AAG KA DARYA (The River of Fire), 1959 (also abridged and published in 14 Indian languages by National Book Trust, New Delhi)



Receiving the Soviet Land Nehru Award for best translation from Smt. Indira Gandhi, 1969



With Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sultana Jafri and Sardar Jafri, Bombay, 1968

AAKHIRI SHAB KE HUMSAFAR (Travelers at the End of Night), 1979  
Hindi Edition: (*Nishant-ke-Sehyatri*, Bhartiya Jnanpith, New Delhi, 1982) Russian Edition: translated by Alexei Suhochev & Ludmila Vasileva (Moscow, 1983)

FOUR NOVELETTES, 1982  
GARDISH-I-RANG-I-CHAMAN (Changing Hues of the Garden), 1987  
CHANDNI BEGUM, 1990

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

KAARI JEHAN DARAZ HAI (The Task of the World is Unending) (Vol: I & II) 1978-79

#### SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

SITARON SE AAGE (Beyond the Stars), 1947

SHEESHE KE GHAR (Houses of Glass), 1952

PATJHAR KI AWAZ (The Sound of Falling Leaves), 1967

ROSHNI KI RAFTAAAR (The Speed of Light), 1982

#### TRANSLATIONS DONE BY THE AUTHOR

Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady*, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and a large number of Russian novels and children's books (translated from English)

#### MISCELLANY

##### ENGLISH

GHALIB'S PROSE AND POETRY by Sardar Jafri and Qurratulain Hyder, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1968

AWOMAN'S LIFE (Novelette) Chetna, Delhi, 1979

##### ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

"Doesn't that Lady Look Like Bette Davis?" "I, Tiresias"; "Memories of an Indian Childhood"; "Dervish"; "A Candle for St. Judge"; "Honour";

"Fireflies in the Mist"; "Can We Get There by Candlelight?"; "My Aunt Gracie"; "Photographer"; "The Story of Caterine Bolton"; "Confessions of St. Flora of Georgia", etc. (all published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and other magazines).

Also a large number of articles, book and film reviews in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Imprint*, *The Times of India*, *Sunday*, *Mid-Day* (Bombay), *Sunday* (Calcutta), *The Statesman*, (Calcutta), *Indian Express*, etc.

Written scripts and commentaries in English for Films Division, Bombay

Broadcasts: BBC, London; Radio Hongkong, Tehran TV; All India Radio, various radio stations in USSR & USA.

Producer Emeritus, All India Radio, 1988-90

## A Chronology

- 1928 : Born in Aligarh
- 1947 : M.A. in English Literature, University of Lucknow :  
*Sitaron se Aage*, first collection of short stories
- 1949 : *Mere bhi Sanamkhane*, first novel
- 1953 : Reporter, *Daily Telegraph*, London
- 1959 : *Aag ka Darya*
- 1963 : President's Silver Medal for documentary film *Malwa*
- 1964-68 : Managing Editor, *Imprint*
- 1967 : Sahitya Akademi Award for *Patihar Ki Awaz*
- 1968-75 : Member, Editorial Staff, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*
- 1968-77 : Member, General Council, Sahitya Akademi
- 1969 : Soviet Land Nehru Award (for translation)
- 1979 : Visiting Professor, (Urdu) Jamia Millia Islamia
- 1979 : Member of International Writing Programme, University of Iowa, U.S.A. ; Invited as guest lecturer by the Universities of California (Berkeley), Chicago, Wisconsin, Arizona (Tucson) and Texas (Austin)
- 1981-87 : Ghalib-Modi Award; Parvez Shahidi Award, West Bengal Urdu Akademi; Andhra Pradesh Urdu Akademi Award; Iqbal Samman, M.P. Government
- 1982 : Visiting Professor (Urdu) Aligarh Muslim University
- 1984 : Padmashri
- 1989 : Bharatiya Jnanpith Award for her contribution to Indian literature from 1969-83
- 1990 : *Chandni Begum*, her recent novel



With relatives and friends in Oslo, Norway, 1986