

Literary Movements in Indo-Pak: A Study of Progressive Writers Association (1936-47)

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Abstract

The paper in hand deals with the role of played by the Progressive Writers Association in the pre-partition era of Indo-Pak Subcontinent. A breaking point came in the middle of 1930s with the appearance of the Indian Progressive Writers Association (PWA). It was mobilizing the writers of Indo-Pak Subcontinent and projecting the movement for independence by the use of pen. It was inspired by movements in Europe but was also inextricably linked to social and literary traditions that had already been developing in India. PWA was embarking on a project for cultural hegemony that was as much a literary, socio-cultural and to an extent political and political movement as well. The Association was not solely concerned with questions of literature but also with the specific role of writers who played their respective roles from the platform of Progressive Writers Association.

Keywords: Progressive Writers Association, Literary Movement, Culture, Politics, freedom

Historical Backdrop

In 1930s, Indian students studying in Europe were preparing themselves for the Indian Civil Service in order to get prestigious positions and administer the affairs of their native land. These students, studying especially at Oxford and Cambridge, had been involved in activities which focused on Indian problems. Organized in cultural societies, such as the Oxford Majlis, and the Cambridge *Majlis*, they discussed the problem of the freedom of India. These debates remained within the framework of gradual constitutional change leading to dominion status. However, during the 1920s, some of these students came under the influence of the Communist party of the Great Britain, which offered them revolutionary political alternatives, and which groomed them as communist activists to work in India. By the end of the decade, a small group of them had been gathered into a study circle based in London, which examined Indian problems from a Marxist perspective. Students such as Muhammad Din Tasir at Cambridge, Sajjad Zahir, Mahmud-uz-Zafar and Mian Iftikhar ud din at Oxford, Dr. Z.A. Ahmad, Hajra Begum, and for a short while, Dr. K.M. Ashraf in London, served their organizational apprenticeships in the *Majlis* and the recently-established London branch of the Congress (Russell, 1992).

Ralph Fox had been delegated by the Communist party along with Clemens Dutt, to conduct study circles with some of Indian students. Sajjad Zahir, Dr. Z.A. Ahmad, Mahmud-uz-Zafar, Dr. K.M. Ashraf and Hajra Begum were the significant participants in these study circles (Syed, 1988). They studied the classics of socialism together, and sought to clarify its basic principles in formal and informal discussion with Fox and other members of the Communist Party. They gathered ideas on the formation of a radical literary organization. These discussions were corroborated by British Intelligence Reports. According to the New Scotland Yard Report of 13 May 1931, “The British

Museum is becoming more and more a tacitly organized rendezvous for Indian extremists.” Similarly, another official report stated that “the Nanking Chinese Restaurant is a rendezvous for, among others, Indians of the student class” (Zaidi, 1993). In 1934, a handful of these Indians met Sajjad Zahir at his flat in London and formed a committee to organize a Progressive Writers’ Association for India. An initial draft of manifesto was prepared by Mulk Raj Anand and after necessary modifications and addition a final draft was drafted by Sajjad Zahir. Mimeographed copies of the final version were sent to India for distribution and further discussion among writers there (Ansari, 1990).

Structure of the Association

The first regular meeting of the Association was held on 24 November 1934 in the Nanking Restaurant in Denmark Street. Almost thirty-five students from London, Oxford and Cambridge participated in this historic gathering. Mulk Raj Anand was elected president. Among the founding members were Sajjad Zahir and Mohammad Din Tasir (Narang, 1991). The London Association held its meetings every fortnight. Essays, stories and poems were read, lectures were delivered. A Bengali member read a paper in English on the poetry of Qazi Nazrul-Islam, explaining its revolutionary significance. Sajjad Zahir presented his Urdu one-act play, *Bimar* (The Sick Man). The Association also published a short-lived bulletin as well (Abbasi, 1992).

On 2 January 1935, New Scotland Yard Report states that “An Indian Progressive Writers Association has recently been formed, the Secretary of which is Sen Gupta and the Committee comprised of S.S. Zahir, I.K. Yajnik and a Miss Hazra (Hajra). For the present, it is to remain purely a literary organization” (UP Gazette, 1933).

The founders of the Association were fully aware of their limitations. Sajjad Zahir, in his memoirs reflects that a few exiled Indians could do little more than draw up plans among themselves and produce an orphan-like literature under the influence of European culture. The progressive movement had to take roots in India to have any impact. The UK based members of the PWA resolved to return to the Sub-continent. They were encouraged to do so by the ideas they absorbed at the World Congress of Writers for the defence of culture, called in June 1935, at the initiative of the eminent French Writers, Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, Andre Malraux and Louis Aragon. In the audience of thousands Sajjad Zahir and Mulk Raj Anand were mere onlookers, but the Congress inspired them profoundly. They learnt important lessons and their faith in their mission further strengthened. Writers of different beliefs and persuasions had come together to defend the right of freedom of thought and opinion, in opposition to fascism and imperialism. They realized that a similar front of diverse forces could be established against British repression in India. Sajjad Zahir also observed the presence of workers in a large number. He was much impressed because capitalist society had tended to separate writers as a group from the people, encouraging former to fear and despise the latter. The gulf which separated writers from the source of life of the labouring people had resulted in the spiritual paralysis of large part of modern literature. Literature was to be revitalized by putting it in the closest possible touch with the people, and so writers had to live amongst them (Abbasi, 1992).

Manifesto of Progressive Writers Association (PWA)

The manifesto of the Progressive Writers Association, which had been sent from England, noted that radical changes were taking place in Indian society, which was bound to transform it. The

main objectives of the Association were to fight cultural reaction, and to further the cause of social regeneration and Indian freedom. It declared that:

“The new literature must deal with the basic problems of our existence today.... the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation.... The object of our association is 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 closest touch with the people and to make them the vital organ which will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future” (*The Hindustan Times*, 23 February, 1933).

In India, the first comprehensive statement of views on progressive movement was contained in an article “Adab Aur Zindagi” by Akhtar Hussain Raipuri. It was on the same lines as a draft circulated by Sajjad Zahir but according to Ali Jawad Zaidi, Raipuri was more explicit and comprehensive. It was presented as a manifesto at the Nagpur session of the Bhartiya Sahitya Preshad setting forth the aims and objects of the new Indian literature embodying the views of the London based progressives in their manifesto earlier. The two manifestos in essence affirmed that living literature should not only mirror life but also aim at changing it by showing the path of progress and by aspiring to serve humanity at large. It called for the preservation of the traditions so dear to us, simultaneously undertaking a critical re-examination of the traditions and rejecting all that is obsolete and unhealthy (Ali, 1974).

Indigenous Response to PWA

The idea to form an organization of progressive writers was no doubt conceived on an alien soil, but the process had started much earlier in the Sub-continent in the days of Ghalib and Sir Syed. It had started much earlier in the days of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai and Sachel Sarmast, Waris Shah

and Bulhe Shah, Rahman Baba and Khushhal Khan, Jam Durrak and Mast Tawaqqali and in the days of great Muslim Bengali traditions of 18th and 19th century. The Progressive Writers Movement was, therefore, not an imported commodity or an accidental phenomenon but proved to be the logical conclusion of the intellectual trends of the preceding epochs. It can rightly claim to have deep roots in the humanism of our national literatures of Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashto, Balochi, Seraiki and Gujrati languages, in the rationalism of Ghalib and Sir Syed, in the reformist zeal of the natural school. That is why, most of the senior writers like Tagore, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Maulana Niaz Fatehpuri, Majnun Gorakhpuri, Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Kazi Nazrul Islam (Bengali) Gurbakhsh Singh, Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum (Punjabi), Azat Jamaldin's Anka (Balochi) and Ghani Khan (Pashto) warmly welcomed the progressive writers' movement (Russell, 1977). It is also noteworthy that the most influential Urdu poet of the 1920s and 1930s, Iqbal and the outstanding fiction writer of the same period, Premchand, had raised their voices against imperialism and in favour of the poor and the oppressed (Premchand, 1986).

It is also worth mentioning that Tagore welcomed the PWA in the following words:

“To live in seclusion has become second nature to me, but it is a fact that the writer who holds himself aloof from society cannot get to know mankind. Remaining aloof, the writer deprives himself of the experience which comes from mingling with numbers of people. To know and understand Society, and to show the path to progress, it is essential that we keep our finger on the pulse of Society and listen to the beating of its heart. This is only possible when our sympathies are with humanity, and when we share its sorrows.... New writers must mix with men, and recognize that if they live in seclusion as I do, they will not achieve their aims. I understand now

that in living apart from Society for so long I have committed a grave mistake.... This understanding burns in any heart like a lamp, and no argument can extinguish it.” (Zaheer, 1952).

The preparations for the first conference were underway. Sajjad Zahir visited Lahore in January 1936. Mahmud-uz-Zafar and Dr. Rashid Jahan helped Zahir to forge contacts with the Punjabi writers. Faiz, a young lecturer, at MAO College Amritsar, was approached for contacts in Lahore. In a small literary meeting, Sajjad Zahir explained the manifesto and answered some objections of religio-political nature. Finally, Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum was provisionally elected as the secretary of the Lahore Branch of the PWA, which soon developed into an articulated organ of Marxian thought in literature in the Punjab and NWFP (Trotsky, 1987).

An active part in the formation of PWA was taken by the young generation of Punjabi writers, those who had grown up in the period when the Punjab and other parts of the Sub-continent were witnessing important shifts in the balance of social forces. During the First World War, large number of Punjabi Youth was recruited into the Anglo-Indian army. They were Sikhs, and Muslims, and Hindus, all fighting for alien interests mainly i.e., for the British imperialists. They returned not only enriched with life-experience, especially in the political sphere, but also with some knowledge of the revolutions in Russia, Germany, Hungary, and aware of the criminal senselessness of the wide-scale massacre initiated by the British rulers. Back in the Punjab, they became active fighters for independence. In the meantime, the young Punjabi workers were gathering strength, displaying increasing activity in the national liberation movement in which the left-wing revolutionary forces held key positions. In the period between 1919 and 1922, when the freedom movement was at its height in the Sub-Continent, Punjab stood in the vanguard of the movement. This was particularly stimulated by the savage reprisals perpetrated by the Colonialists

against the participants of a peace meeting in Amritsar on April 13, 1919, an event that roused all India to indignation (Malik, 1967).

The mood among Punjabi freedom fighters was growing increasingly radical during the 1920s, and in the 1929-1933, when the national-liberation movement was soaring high. It was leavened with socialist ideas that were penetrating in whole of the Sub-continent, and frustrated by the achievements of socialist construction in the Soviet Land. The effect of all this was particularly notable among a group of young Punjabi writers. The movement launched by the PWA was strongly welcomed by them. Lahore became the centre from which the movement of progressive writers spread across the country.

The First Conference of PWA in India

The first Conference of PWA was held in Lucknow in April 1936, under the presidentship of Premchand. Hasrat Mohani was also present in the conference. Premchand delivered a highly evocative presidential address:

“I am not advocating the vague egocentric view of ‘art for art’s sake’ but desire to emphasize the qualities of a good creative writer, if he (the writer) found his fellow beings around him being stifled and shackled by social customs and traditions, he should feel perturbed over their plight and should endeavor to liberate them from thralldom and poverty.... His artistic excellence would be determined by the truth and sincerity with which he responds to the pains and agony of his age” (Premchand, 1986).

Premchand was more explicit about the traditional concept of beauty and exhorted writers to discover beauty in the struggle for the common man for his livelihood.

“Beauty did not lay in the painted faces, lips, cheeks and eyes of women laden in perfumes. It was their fault if they did not discern any beauty in a woman who sweats in the fields.... Behind her withered lips and scorched cheeks lie the beauty of selflessness, devotion and hardship.....” (Premchand, 1986).

Hasrat Mohani, was more forthright in the denunciation of exploitation and urged the progressive writers’ movement to stand by the struggle for national liberation and to oppose the imperialist powers and the tyrannical capitalists. They should defend all the workers, peasants and poor humanity. Mere progressivism was not enough, he wanted literature to reflect socialism, and communism as well. In his opinion, Islam and Communism were not mutually exclusive. Impelled by the democratic urge of Islam, Muslims should oppose tyranny, and endeavor to set up communistic system in the world (Hussain, 1989).

During the Conference, Ahmad Ali read a paper on literary criticism in which he maintained that Iqbal and Tagore, were reactionaries. On the last day, the conference was also attended by Jai Prakash Narain, Yusuf Mehr Ali, Indo Lal Yajnik, Kamla Devi and Mian Iftikharuddin (Kaviraj, 1995). The manifesto approved at the Lucknow Conference laid down two major objectives: to free Indo-Pak (Sub-Continent) from British rule, and to bring literature into the closest touch with life. The Constitution was also approved at the Conference, and was adopted with minor changes at the second All-India Conference at Calcutta in December 1938 (Coppola, 1975). Syed Sajjad Zahir and his friends were gratified that the Conference was successful, their goals defined and a prototype devised for the establishment of a network of progressive Association in the country (Russell, 1992).

The immediate reaction to the Lucknow Conference was not very favorable in certain quarters. The daily 'Statesman' of influential spokesman of British interests in India took exception to the PWA on political grounds. It charged the PWA with inciting the people against the Government, creating hatred between various classes and preaching violence and bloodshed. The paper suggested that the PWA was a result of the conspiracy hatched in London and in fact the Communist International was at its back (Syed, 1988). A warning regarding PWA was immediately issued from the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, to all local governments:

"I am desired to address you in connection with an organization known as the progressive writers' Association known as the progressive writers' association. This association held its first conference at Lucknow simultaneously with the annual session of the Indian National Congress in April, 1936. Since then, S.S. Zahir and other members of the Executive Committee have been active in forming local branches of the Association and such branches are known to exist in Aligarh, Allahabad, Andhra, Calcutta, Delhi, Gujrat, Hyderabad (Deccan), Poona and the Punjab. This Association owes its origin to an Association of the same name formed in London about a year ago. The London Association is closely connected with and to a great extent controlled by the British Section of the International Union of Revolutionary writers. The Association is, however a typical example of the methods, now being pursued by Communists in all countries in accordance with the current policy of the Communist International. This method is for a few convinced and trained communists to establish contacts with all sorts of organizations and societies having interest in intellectuals, cultural and social subjects with the object of spreading communistic ideas and gaining converts. Its development should be watched with some suspicion and that it should be approached with caution by individuals who do not wish to be involved in

extremist left wing politics. Suitable opportunities may be taken to convey, preferably in conversation, friendly warnings about this association to journalists, educationists and others who might be attracted by its ostensible programme.” (UP Gazette, 1933).

Widening the Circle of PWA

The years between 1936-39 were full of promise as “new ideas and revolutionary movements” appeared on the Indian horizon (Zaidi, 1993). The All-India Conferences of the PWA discussed literary problems, laid down practical tasks for its members and decided the broad political and social alignments of the association in the light of the national and international situation. The first conference, for instance, discussed issues such as the nature and purpose of literature, intellectuals and cultural reaction, and the problems of Hindustan (Ansari, 1990). At the second conference, it was decided to disseminate the ideas of the progressive movement. The resolutions passed at the four All-India Conferences-Lucknow (1936), Calcutta (1938), Delhi (1942) and Bombay (1943), revealed the political colour of the organization: the construction of a new social order based on equality, freedom and peace was proclaimed; the anti-cultural forces of Fascism and militarism were condemned; British proscription of radical literature and its suppression of the press and other civil liberties in India were protested against; British imperialism was blamed for ‘the exploitation of India’, the deliberate neglect and suppression of its cultural growth, ‘the illiteracy of the vast number of people, the decay of arts and the comparative backwardness of Indian literature; solidarity was proclaimed with the forces fighting reaction Fascism and Imperialism in Germany Spain, and China; writers were urged to ‘help the forces of International peace’ by entering into working alliances with other progressive forces (Narang, 1991). Local PWA units probably did the most productive work of the Association. It was at these meetings that problems of literary

criticism, of the need of progressive writers to participate in the freedom movement, of attitude towards literary heritage, and of the value of propaganda and aesthetics in Art were discussed exhaustively (Abbasi, 1992).

Akhtar Hussain Raipuri suggested that the members of the Association must spend some time with the peasants or workers, so, that they come into direct contact with the people. Not all the progressive writers agreed entirely with these views. Faiz argued that since in India the majority of the workers were illiterate, they were hardly in a position to write about their own problems. Under these circumstances, only the prosperous, who were also educated, could dare to expose the fundamental injustices of society.... Faiz rejected the obsession of progressive writers with workers and peasants, and asserted that it would be worthwhile in itself if they could only communicate their message to the middle classes for at least these classes could think about the issues and understand their importance. The debate continued right up to partition and generated considerable heat inside the organization. The more dogmatic group, spearheaded by Ali Sardar Jafri, continue to argue for a close physical and intellectual proximity between the writers and the masses, while the rival group, in the initial stages led by Ahmad Ali and later by Faiz, Akhtar Ansari and Sajjad Zahir, opposed it (Ali, 1974). The PWA, however, laid greatest stress on making the widest and deepest possible connections with the people. For instance, the close relations, which the PWA attempted to establish with peasant organizations, were best illustrated by the decision of the Punjab PWA to organise its annual conference in April 1937, to coincide with the annual festival of Baisakh, organised by the Punjab Kisan Committee. In terms of peasant participation, Sajjad Zahir considered the conference a great success. Similar efforts were made to organize activities which would appeal to the urban working poor (Russell, 1977).

From Imperialist War to the People's War

It is commonly said that during the initial phase of World War II, Nazi Germany and Soviet Union were allied and cooperated in the dismemberment of Poland. The PWA now changed its strategy and, the erstwhile Fascist powers were lauded as allies of the Soviet Union and Britain singled out as enemy of freedom and democracy. But when Germany attacked the Soviet Russia in 1941, the same British imperialist was hailed as an ally of the forces of progress and humanity symbolized by the Soviet Union. The Government of India and the PWA made strange bed-fellows. It is stressed that without any qualms of conscience, the PWA switched over its loyalties and took a leading part in manning the propaganda machine of Government of India. Obviously, PWAs political and intellectual orientation was conditioned by the demands of its loyalty to the Soviet Union. PWA's political somersaults compromised its literary credibility and gave a convenient handle to the freedom fighters both Muslims and Hindus to expose the double standards of the Communist Camp-followers of the Soviet Union. Thus, it is concluded, PWA's high flaunting claims come to dust (Zaheer, 1952).

This is not the whole truth. No doubt, until the outbreak of the Second World War, the PWA pursued vigorous anti-fascist policies based on Socialist arguments which identified Fascism as an extreme and more brutal form of imperialist capitalism. It is also true that the anti-British policies of the PWA were consistent with their anti-fascism abroad. In their view, there was no difference between Fascism and British imperialism. Under these circumstances, it was not easy for members of the PWA to justify the Non-Aggression Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939. By a twist of logic, they perceived it as a purely tactical move, design to protect the Soviet Union from being consumed by the imminent war, the major responsibility for which lay

at the fact of the allies and their struggle for world domination (Trotsky, 1987). These were the days, when the Government of India was not prepared to tolerate Indian opposition to its war effort. Soon after the outbreak of war, the Government severely attacked the PWA. Many of the Association's members were arrested.

Government attacks set off disputes within the organization itself. Among some of the members felt that the PWA was a literary organization and its sole task was the creation of literature. Thus, there would be no harm if under the existing circumstances the PWA remained aloof from politics. The Delhi branch of PWA favoured this view, and to prove the 'literary' and 'non-political' nature of the Association. Shahid Ahmad Dehlvi, the secretary of the branch, invited the inspector of the secret police to attend the branch's functions and meetings, and to judge for himself its purely literary nature and intent. This decision, which had been taken without the consent of the membership, created immediate turmoil in the branch. Dehlvi resigned and the branch faded away (Malik, 1967). This period was known as 'the Imperialist phase' to socialists in PWA. When, on 22 June, 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, this caused great confusion among them. The question was: Should PWA continue with its popular front policy of Cooperation with the Congress against British imperialism, or was it necessary now that the Soviet Union had joined the War on the side of the allies to support the Allied war effort in the hope that the defeat of fascism would change the balance of international power and so help India to achieve freedom (Hussain, 1989). In July 1941, progressive writers who were members of the Communist party of India, held fast to, and supported the united anti-imperialist front (Premchand, 1986). Two months after the German invasion, the Communist party of India continued to call it an 'Imperialist' War with which Indian should have no part. The matter was debated for several months. The majority of the Communist, who were in detention thought that it had become their moral and political duty

to proletarian solidarity to support the Allied War effort now that the Soviet Union had come under attack (Kaviraj, 1995).

On contrary, the members, who were not in detention, were reluctant to make a clean break with the nationalists, particularly, since the Congress also welcomed Anglo-Soviet cooperation against Hitler. By December 1941, supporters of the people's war, encouraged by the Communist Party of Great Britain won the debate. With the threat of Communist disruption to the war effort removed, the British Government gradually released leading communists including leading members of the PWA, and secretly negotiated with them about how the communists could help in the war. Agreement was reached, and the Communist party of India was declared legal on 24 July, 1942 (Coppola, 1975). The final break between Communist party members and the Congress came when its communist members voted against 'Quit India' resolution in August 1942. The PWA vehemently criticized the Congress leadership for having committed national suicide. They also praised the Muslim League for having boycotted 'the Quit India' campaign (The Hindustan Times, 23 February, 1933).

There was a lot of Controversy within the PWA. In December 1942, Saghir Nizami and Josh Malihabadi, in a statement condemned both British Imperialism and Japanese Fascism. Israrul Haq Majaz in May 1943, took upon extreme position in this respect and called on the people of India to participate in the war of independence, meaning the second world war. Faiz and other Muslim progressives joined the Indian army. As Faiz mentioned, when "Russia joined the Allies.... the imperialists decided to recruit the youth with progressive and left-wing ideas. Before me, Majid Malik had joined the Army. He phoned me and said, Faiz, come into the Army, you are needed. I went immediately. "In the army, Faiz provided valuable suggestions for propaganda to motivate

the troops to fight, not as a mark of loyalty to the British but as a patriotic duty to the homeland (Syed, 1988).

There were further divisions in the ranks and file of the PWA. Sajjad Zahir and Dr. K.M. Ashraf supported the war while non-communist progressive writers disagreed with this tactic. Ali Jawad Zaidi and some others expressed their opposition to unconditional support for the Allies. Akhtar Hussain Raipuri could not reconcile himself to the British war effort, and resigned his job at All-India Radio as soon as the 'Quit India' movement began (Zaidi, 1993). It is interesting to note that a draft, attacking both British imperialists and fascist as culprits, which was prepared by Khawaja Ahmad Abbas, had been approved at the fourth conference of PWA, held at Bombay in 1943. The pro-war members of PWA had, by now, been thoroughly discredited and were stigmatized in Congress leaflets as hirelings of the British rulers.

The Parallel Journey of *Halqa-i-Arbab-i-Zauq*

The *Halqa-i-Arbab-i-Zauq* (Circle of Men of Good Taste), founded in September 1939, was organized as a parallel movement. The tone of this somewhat pretentious title captures very well the lofty disdain that they generally felt for their numerous contemporaries who had not been blessed with good taste. Their quarrel with the progressives stemmed from their view that art and propaganda were mutually exclusive, and that art must be for art's sake alone. (It must be said that some of the men of taste made the opposite mistake and assumed that anything that was presented as a poem and was clearly not propaganda must therefore be art) (Ansari, 1990).

Many objections were raised against PWA by a section of writers on the ground that:

- Forming an association of writers amounts to their regimentation, thus encroaching upon their freedom and forcing them to write to order;
- Writers should not commit themselves to any particular thought system nor should they get involved with the social, political, economic or moral issues agitating the society;
- Writers should be accountable only to their own selves and express only their inner thoughts and feelings;
- Masses are just a rabble, therefore, not worth consideration. Only the elite creates culture, art and literature (Narang, 1991).

Some of the writers holding these views, formed *Halqa*, with main object to counteract the PWA influence and keep young writers occupied with new experiments in form only. The new movement coincided with the First World War. On 29 April 1939, Sayyid Naseer Ahmad Jamee, Sher Mohammad Akhtar and some of their friends got together and set up *Bazm-i-Dastan Goyan* (the Society of Story Tellers). The meetings were held in rotation in the houses of its members who served tea to the participants. Since the *Bazm* enlarged its areas of interest from short story to literature, accordingly its name was changed to *Halqa-i-Arbab-i-Zauq* in September 1939 (Abbasi, 1992). The aims and objects of the *Halqa*, were set forth in a succinct five points statement. They wanted to:

- i. Promote and propagate Urdu;
- ii. To provide encouragement and entertainment for young writers;
- iii. To protect the rights of Urdu Writers;

- iv. To foster sincerity and spontaneity in literary criticism; and
- v. To rectify the prevalent unsound condition of Urdu literature and journalism (UP Gazette, 1933).

Unlike PWA, the *Halqa* had no pretensions of launching mass contact movement, or engineering a revolutionary class struggle. Since the *Halqa* had no mass appeal, its literary activities were confined to a small, elitist, rather an exclusive literary group. Only writers and poets of merit or promise, as Yunus Javed claims, were admitted to its membership. The *Halqa* maintained a rigorous discipline and took care to enroll only suitable writers as members. The applications for membership were closely scrutinized and only those who in their opinion, possessed literary merit and showed interest in *Halqa* were accepted (Ali, 1974). It is interesting to note that the leaders of *Halqa*, with their tone of regimentation, kept pending and rejected several applications of writers like Zia Jullundhry, Mubarak Ahmad and Hafiz Ludhianvi. The *Halqa* held their meetings regularly on every Saturday evening. In 1944, the YMCA Hall Lahore was fixed as the venue of *Halqa* meetings. Recital of poems and reading and short stories was followed by criticism, often rambling, sometimes pungent and scolding relieved by streaks of perceptive remarks or humorous sidehights (Russell, 1977).

Halqa, referred to by some as Modernists or Experimentalists, had built up a following and had in its fold poets like Miraji, Noon Meem Rashid, Dr. Taseer, Yusuf Zafar, Qayyum Nazar etc. (Zaheer, 1952). Rise of the *Halqa* was spectacular but the gains of this trend are more on the technical and formal side. It revived free and blank verses which were first tried around 1910 by the Dilgudaz School of Sharar (Lucknow). To compensate for its innovations, it often sought to vary the erotic theme to accommodate the sensuous and the outspoken sex, perversion or

ambiguity. In the writings of some, the faint ripples of political or social ideas can also be heard but it is introduced usually to provide escape through criticism. Unlike the English models, the new verse libre in Urdu was 'predominantly metrical' and to that extent did not do much offence to the traditional poetic aesthetics. From Tassadduq Hussain Khalid to Miraji onwards, it appears to be an extension of the immediate past. Despite the slender link of the experiment with the past, the popular reaction to it has been extremely halting. By stages, the opposition to the new wave softened and its youthful votaries were 'forgiven' for the innovation which they dared in their search for new modes of expression. There were, however, many unkind insinuations at the temperament behind the expression (Trotsky, 1987). Although the *Halqa* has not produced writers and poets of great stature, it has rendered valuable services in its own right. Miraji, Nazar and Yusuf Zafar were the best product of the *Halqa*. Under their influence, it developed into an effective cultural and literary forum.

Anwar Sadeed places Miraji as the true ideologue of the *Halqa*, who occupied the same position in the *Halqa* as Sajjad Zahir and Faiz did in the PWA. During 1940-47 the *Halqa* emerged, as Anwar Sadeed maintains, as a first-rate literary body. As a result of Miraji's involvement, the *Halqa* advanced on the road towards literary progress and innovation. The *Halqa* also reacted against the purposive stance of the PWA and brought about variety in the midst of monotonous uniformity. Gradually, the *Halqa* was transformed, concludes Anwar Sadeed, into a movement that was determined to alter the existing situation and to highlight the inner beauty of art' (Malik, 1967).

The *Halqa* and PWA, both the organizations provoked many important debates on important subjects. The progressives, however, had a well-knit ring of critics, who were unsparing, in their

criticism of the reactionaries, escapists or master craftsmen of technique, who failed to reflect the inner struggles which should inspire the verse of the day. Whatever way we try to look at the picture, the literary scene, though rather hazy and crowded, was being progressively dominated by the progressives (Hussain, 1989).

Conclusion

To sum up, the activities of the Progressive Writers Association reached to its peak and it took the turn as an active literary movement in the subcontinent. Prominent writers and intellectual like Allama Iqbal, Maulana Hasrat Mohani and Munshi Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand continued to give central importance to the theme of imperialism as a big menace for the agrarian human society of Indo-Pak especially. Syed Sajjad Zaheer and his peers were trained by the literary grace of the same creative intellectuals and became involved in study circles of the Association. Sajjad Zaheer was one of the writers and poets who founded the association in London at the beginning of the third decade of the 20th century. Along with this, Dr. Muhammad Din Taseer and Professor Ahmed Ali were also active participants in the debates and deliberation of this literary movement. Indeed, no movement emerges suddenly, but social, cultural and economic conditions intervene in its emergence. The effort of the Association gradually became a global move with many philosophical underpinnings. It left long-lasting impact on the socio-cultural environment, literature and literary development of Indo-Pak.

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