

The Glory Days of the Progressive Writers' Movement, Bombay Circa 1940s

Rakhshanda Jalil

*Hum akele hi chale thhe jaanib-e-manzil magar
Log saath aate gaye aur karvaan banta gaya*

—Majrooh Sultanpuri

The year was 1944. A large number of progressive writers had begun to flock to Bombay. Josh Malihabadi, Akhtarul Iman, Krishan Chandar and Saghar Nizami were in Poona, but the lure of the silver screen drew them to the city that was home to the biggest film industry in Asia. By the time the Second World War ended, some of the most dynamic writers of the age had flocked to Bombay from different parts of undivided India: among the Urdu writers there were Rajinder Singh Bedi, Sahir Ludhianvi, Hameed Akhtar, Sardar Jafri, Kaifi Azmi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Rifat Sarosh, Niyaz Haider, Hajra and Khadija Masroor, Saadat Hasan Manto, Miraji, Vishwamitra Adil, Ismat Chughtai and her husband Shahid Latif to name a few; Hindi writers Upendranath Askh, Nemichandra Jain, Amritlal Nagar, Balraj Sahni, Prem Dhawan; Marathi writers Mama Warerkar and Anna Bhau Sathe; and Gujarati writers Bakulesh Swapnath and Bhogilal Gandhi. They were all members of the Bombay branch of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) which was then the most active in the country.

But how did Bombay emerge as the beating heart of the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM) and how did the 1940s come to embody the 'high noon' of the PWM? Thereby hangs a tale, but to reach the Glory Days of the 1940s, we must start at the very beginning, namely the First War of Independence in 1857 which released a burst of political energy and irrevocably changed the way of seeing the world. There were other milestones too in the journey leading up to high noon, some of which are briefly outlined below without elaboration:

- *The October Revolution of 1917* • *A flourishing Translator's Bureau in Tashkent soon after which began to flood Asia with socialist literature in a gamut of languages: Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Bangla, Telugu, etc.* • *Formation*

of Communist Party on 26th December 1925 • The publication of Angarey, a collection of nine stories and a play in December 1932 and its subsequent banning in March 1933 • The drafting of the Manifesto of the still-to-be-launched PWA in Nanking Restaurant, London on 24 November 1934 • The publication of a long essay, Adab aur Zindagi ('Literature and Life') by Akhtar Husain Raipuri in Maulvi Abdul Haq's journal Urdu, in July 1935, spelling out the place of realism in life, and by extension, art • The publication of the Hindi version of the Manifesto by Premchand in his journal Hans, in October 1935 • 1935, Sajjad Zaheer's return to India in November 1935 and his strenuous efforts in gathering together a group of like-minded writers and thinkers • A conference of Urdu-Hindi writers in Allahabad organised by the educationist, Dr Tara Chand in December 1935 which paves the way for the progressives to meet on a common platform, • 1936, Sajjad Zaheer travels to Amritsar, meets Faiz in the house of Mahmuduzzafar and Dr Rashid Jahan, sets up the Lahore branch of the PWA in January 1936 thus adding to the growing number of active PWA hubs in Lucknow, Aligarh, Hyderabad and Patna • The first meeting of the All India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA) where Premchand delivers his seminal inaugural address entitled Sahiyya ka Uddeshya ('The Aim of Literature'), on 9 April 1936 in Lucknow, outlining the aims and objectives of a literary grouping of progressive writers and urging fellow writers to change the 'standards' of beauty • A most unusual gathering of established poets and peasant poets and singers organised by an activist-poet, Muttalibi Faridabadi, in his haveli in Faridabad in May 1938, which provides the template for later progressive meetings with peasants and industrial workers where the distinction between 'high' and 'low'/folk literature is blurred • Gandhi launches his Quit India Movement in August 1942 • Tenure of P. C. Joshi as General Secretary of CPI from 1939-1948 and its implications for culture, literature and the performing arts • Second World War, from 1939-1945, when the progressives join the war effort which is billed a 'people's war' • Ban is lifted from the CPI, from 1942-1946, and it becomes the 'third largest political party' in India • Gandhi launches his Quit India Movement in August 1942.

Returning to Bombay, 1943 proves to be a crucial year. The First All India Congress of the CPI takes place in Bombay in May 1943. An equally important event occurs on its sidelines. The Fourth AIPWA meets in the Marwari Vidyalyaya and the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) is born. Also, the central office of the PWA moves from Lucknow to Bombay and the course and content of the movement increasingly begins to come from a group known as the Bombay progressives. Also, Sajjad Zaheer, who had been in prison till 1942, moves to Bombay where he takes charge of

the PWA along with Sardar Jafri, Sibte Hasan, Kaifi Azmi and others. A host of Urdu journals, as well as the People's Publishing House soon put Bombay on the literary map.

It is to this Bombay that Kaifi Azmi, a full-time Party member, brings his Hyderabad bride, Shaukat Azmi, to live in the commune in Andheri. Shaukat notes her first impressions thus:

Katthal, banana and mango trees stood with giant banyans. A swing was hanging from one of the trees and the air was filled with the scent of *mogra* and *juhi*. A few years earlier, this idyllic setting had been the home of the Cultural Squad, a wing of the Communist Party. Many artists and dancers had lived here...In 1943, during the Bengal Famine, artists from the Communist Party of India had toured the length and breadth of the country and collected two lakh rupees for relief work. Their theme song, *Bhuka hai Bengal* ('Bengal is hungry'), written by Wamiq Jaunpuri, became very well known throughout India.

We went to Kaifi's tiny room in which there was a loosely strung jute *charpai* with a *dhurrie*, a mattress, a sheet and a pillow. In one corner there was a chair and a small table on which there were some books, piles of newspapers, a mug and a glass. The simplicity of this room touched my heart...

Lunch in the commune was unlike anything I had seen. Everyone had an aluminum plate, two bowls, and two low wooden *chaukis* (one for sitting and one to use as an improvised table). The cook served the food which was a *daal*, a vegetable, four *chapattis* with *ghee*, some rice, salt, onions, a slice of lemon, and I think, some pickle on the side. Everyone washed their own utensils and put them away.¹

Shaukat provides a luminous account of her new life in the company of gregarious comrades: Zaheer and his wife Razia and their two daughters, the affable duo of Muneesh and Mehdi², Jafri and his wife Sultana who took Shaukat under her wing and taught her the ways of coping in a commune, the parsimonious Party Treasurer Comrade Ghate (who nevertheless grudgingly parted with Rs 100 to the newly-weds), and P. C. Joshi who comes across in her narrative as a benevolent despot. Shaukat's *nikah* with Kaifi was witnessed by nearly all the progressive writers from Bombay; it was followed, naturally enough, by a *mushaira* with Majaz reciting *Aaj ki Raat* ('Tonight') and the bride being presented a copy of the groom's first collection of poetry, *Aakhr-e-Shab* ('The End of the Night'), dedicated to her. Shaukat describes Kaifi and his friends, who would become her fellow-travelers, thus:

They were enlightened and humane individuals who were struggling to create a new world for the poor, the destitute and the hungry. Although they were from different parts of India, these people were like one family where everyone was addressed as ‘Comrade’, which at the time meant an evolved human being.³

Kaifi earned Rs 40 as monthly salary from the Party; from this he had to give Rs 30 towards his wife’s boarding expense. To earn some extra money, he wrote a column for the Urdu daily, *Jamhuriat*.⁴ Partly to lighten the burden on Kaifi and partly in response to P. C. Joshi’s command that ‘the wife of a Communist should never sit idle’ Shaukat got drawn into the IPTA⁵. Her first role was in Ismat Chughtai’s *Dhani Bankein* (Green Bangles), a play on the Hindu-Muslim riots that were tearing the fabric of a newly-independent India. Here, Shaukat got drawn into the country’s most vigorous cultural movement that had the likes of Zohra Segal, Uzra Butt, Bhishm Sahni, Prithviraj Kapoor, among its stalwarts.

The IPTA, PWA and Bombay film industry were like three inter-linked circles, with overlapping memberships and a host of common concerns. Foremost among these concerns was a socially transformative agenda which would fulfill the needs of a fledgling nation. For this they sought inspiration not only from Marxist tomes and ideologues but also from Nehruvian socialism that hailed schools, colleges, dams and factories as the ‘temples of modern India’. Members of IPTA and PWA – some of whom worked in the film industry as actors, directors, scriptwriters, lyricists, technicians, etc. – worked in tandem to produce a radically new set of images, metaphors, vocabulary, even aesthetics that influenced several generations of film-goers. Their most visible and immediate effect was the introduction of a non-sectarian ethos, one that rose above the narrow confines of caste, creed and religion and worked as balm on a national psyche that had been traumatised by the communal outrages before, after and during the partition.

Apart from Shaukat Azmi’s account, we find several other memoirs that talk of this important period. There is Akhtarul Iman’s *Iss Aabad Kharabe Mein*, Rafat Sarosh’s memoir, Ibrahim Jalees’s *Bambai*, as well as essays by Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto. While Manto is acerbic about the progressives given his love-hate relationship with most of his fellow-writers⁶, Ismat describes the Bombay progressives as a group of ‘undisciplined revolutionaries – careful, happy-go-lucky and very interesting people. I remember spending very exciting moments in the company of these outspoken, candid, crazy but intelligent people.’ Typically her interest in them was on grounds of compatibility and camaraderie rather

than Party affiliations, even less so on any real understanding of the CPI's policies let alone how and to what extent they had begun to influence the working of the Bombay group:

I have never seriously taken it to be my mission to reform society and eliminate the problems of humanity; but I was greatly influenced by the slogans of the Communist Party as they matched my own independent, unbridled, and revolutionary style of thinking...What wonderful get-togethers, arguments and scuffle of words we had!⁷

Ismat goes on to address the difference between her writing and what she calls the 'rigid policies of the progressives':

If my writings have not measured up to the set standards of the progressives, I have not panicked. I shunned dogmatism, the very idea of getting tied to codes and norms is hateful to me...What is and what is not progressivism has been discussed so much that the very topic somewhat perturbs me. I despise the four walls and I am also irritated with the idea of a stamp or a label. The pens should be free. That is the reason why I am not one with the critics – whether they are progressive or modern. They remind me of surgeons whose only interest is dissection.⁸

While Ismat brought alive the cloistered lives of *shareef biwis* from the *qasbahs* and *dehats* of Uttar Pradesh in the most immaculate *begumati zubaan*, she also wrote about the dark underbelly of Bombay to reveal a world hitherto unknown and unvisited by Urdu readers. And not just Ismat, Bombay began to feature in a host of new Urdu writings, both prose and poetry. People from different parts of the country converged here: Manto from Amritsar, K A Abbas from Panipat, Kaifi from Azamgarh, Jafri from Sultanpur, Ismat from UP, Sibte Hasan from Hyderabad, Bedi and Krishan Chndar from Punjab and so on. And so while they brought bits and pieces of their cultures, they were quick to take note of the city they now called home. In the process, they devised a new literary vocabulary and startlingly new set of images. For instances, Manto's *Nangi Awaazein* ('Naked Voices') about a group of poor daily workers and their sleeping arrangements in a *chawl* could only have been written in Bombay and not his native Amritsar, nor could Majaz have crafted his long poem *Awara* had he not roamed the glittering streets of this big, beautiful and bewildering city.

Bombay became a melting pot where writers were writing rousing poetry asking the people of Asia and Africa to arise, to fight a common enemy. There was something in the very air of Bombay that was redolent with the need for change and progress. There was no dearth of writers who

were perfectly amenable to the idea of harnessing literature to social change. Regardless of their sympathy for Communism per se, there was no shortage of writers who saw the merit of purposive literature and were prepared to find common cause with the progressives despite their reservations about organised Communism.

Charles Dickens wrote in *A Tale of Two Cities*: 'It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.' So too the Glory Days of the progressives in Bombay, for the high noon hid a dark shadow and the end lay coiled somewhere in the beginning. We have a portent of the rigidity that would mar the early heady days and the gradual sully of dreams in several autobiographical accounts and interviews. With time – and with the increased militancy on the part of an ideologically-driven core group within the Bombay progressives – tension between the literary tradition (of which the progressive poets were acutely aware since every single one of them had their roots in the soil of the classical tradition and almost all had a good grasp over Persian and Arabic⁹) and the demands of social realism. How much of this tension arose from the Party's diktat and how much from the progressives' own rather stringent observation of western experiments in aesthetics and people's poetry (especially in the Soviet countries) is hard to tell. While there are references to Party member-poets like Kaifi and Jafri producing poetry that is clearly in the nature of 'command performances', the extent of the pressure on other progressives is not certain. It may well be that some progressives felt the need to be more loyal than the king simply in order to remain in the inner circle, or as in the case of Makhdoom or Faiz, out of genuine conviction of the Party's stand on national and international events. We can see propaganda replace poetry – in direct proportion – whenever there is the slightest dilution of the poets' belief in certain stated positions. Wherever the poets speak with conviction, their words have the ring of honesty; they might lack in craft, but not in clarity.

Among the Bombay progressives, the one person who gained the most name and fame not to mention top billing and a fortune was Sahir Ludhianvi. His lyrics in simple but chaste Hindustani, touched a chord with millions of Indians in films like *Pyasa* (1957). Here we shall concentrate on his career till 1955 where his reputation rested largely on his progressive poetry for the *mushaira* circuit and his first collection entitled *Talkhiyan* (Bitterness, 1943) which earned him instant recognition as the voice of a generation. In later years, he came to be regarded as a lyricist¹⁰ rather than poet and, like most progressives, learnt to make compromises by giving in to the demands of film-makers – a practice Kaifi once compared with digging a grave and then looking for a corpse to fit in!

In the case of Sahir in particular, and the other progressive lyricists in general, it would be useful to make a distinction between their film and non-film poetry; the former was more need-based, more tailored to the exigencies of the trade rather than the times and the latter was, as Raza Mir puts it, more 'programmatically and manifesto-driven.'¹¹ And. It was this latter kind of poetry that allowed poets like Sahir to ask more acerbic, more trenchant questions as in '26 January':

Aao ke aaj ghaur kareii iss sawal par
Dekhe thhe humne jo vo haseen khwaab kya huwe
(Come, and let us ponder over this question
What happened to those beautiful dreams we had dreamt)

To return briefly, to the high noon of the Bombay days, every Sunday, the progressives would meet at Zaheer's house on 7 Sikri Bhawan at Wal-keshwar Road, not far from the Hanging Gardens. The Bombay branch of the PWA was not only the most active but, given its location, boasted a cross-section of great writers from Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and English. They would meet jointly where the barrier of language would be overcome with working translations in English or Hindustani as well as in separate language groups such as Gujarati, Marathi or Urdu. The Bombay PWA also organised day-long celebrations devoted to pan-Indian icons such as Premchand, Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Iqbal and Shibli as well as Gorki Day, Russian Revolution Day and Romain Rolland Day.¹² Reminiscent of the Oxford Majlis days, Zaheer also invited an array of visitors including E. M. Forster, the English novelist and Ould Herman, Secretary of the International PEN. Members of the Bombay PWA also formed the Cultural Workers' Committee for fighting Famine and volunteered to work during communal riots. One of the most diligent members, Hamid Akhtar, began the practice of taking notes at the weekly meetings and publishing them in the *Nizam*.¹³ In the regular meetings, the writers would read from their works, which would then be discussed freely and frankly by all present, with Zaheer playing the dual role of umpire and attendance taker.

Stern and benevolent by turns, Zaheer had no patience with those who came infrequently or showed deviations from a laid-down Party line. While ostensibly these meetings were in the nature of 'open house', they gradually became tools of marginalisation. While Zaheer's *Roshnai* depicted this as a Bloomsbury-in-Bombay sort of group, we get a sharply conflicting version from Akhtarul Iman¹⁴, another young progressive who began to feel left out largely due to a small core group who demanded strict adherence to laid-down policies that brooked neither debate nor dissent. Here, it must also be said that

by the late-1940s the Urdu canon had been commandeered by the progressives and it was they who henceforth decided what comprised the canon and what was beyond the pale. For instance, at the Hyderabad Conference in 1945, a move was made (primarily by Abdul Aleem) to pass a resolution to condemn the writings of Ismat, Manto and the poet Miraji on grounds of obscenity and pre-occupation with sexual matters which was thought to contravene the aims of the PWA. Fortunately, Hasrat Mohani and Qazi Abdul Ghaffar disagreed vigorously and the resolution could not be passed.¹⁵

Miraji, who was present in Hyderabad, tasted at first hand the public ostracisation from a 'community of writers to which he thought he belonged'; he was subsequently kept away from the meetings of the progressives in Bombay who had declared an 'all-out war'.¹⁶ And while Miraji's was the most extreme form of ostracisation (especially since he was emotionally and financially the weakest and most vulnerable), others too were marginalised, mocked or blanked out in different ways or different degrees. Ismat, Manto, Bedi, Akhtarul Iman, to name a few, all suffered in different ways and different degrees.

Increasing Politicisation

The increasing militancy and politicisation of the PWA can be traced to the Fourth All-India Conference held from 22-25 May 1943 in Bombay, where a revised version of the *Manifesto* was adopted. Held in the Marwari Vidyayalaya Hall, this was a grand affair attended by a virtual who's who of the Urdu literary world: Zaheer was there with his wife Razia (an increasingly prolific writer and active member of the Lucknow PWA), Abdul Aleem, K. A. Abbas, Sardar Jafri, Saghar Nizami, Krishan Chandar, Sibte Hasan. The highpoint of this conference was the adoption of another modified *Manifesto* which proclaimed: 'In this hour of grave peril, it is the supreme task of Indian progressive writers to spiritually sustain the nation.'¹⁷ Urging the writers to come out of their ivory tower and take full social responsibility, it went on to declare: 'Soviet example tells us how revolution gives men the chance of bringing dignity and civilisation into the common possession.'

This version of the *Manifesto* was markedly different from the London, Lucknow and Calcutta ones in its sharply political tone, specific references to food shortages and biting critique of imperialist policies; in short, it sounded more as a wake-up call from a political economist rather than a manifesto of a literary association. Speaking at the resolution to pass this *Manifesto*, K. A. Abbas and Zaheer were at pains to stress that the new *Manifesto* did not 'restrict but widen the scope and appeal of our literary activities'. Emphasising that the document would 'serve as a basis for the

united front of all Indian writers who claim to be patriotic' they invited writers of 'all shades and schools, humanists, romanticists, Marxists and even religious writers' into the PWA. The inherent duality of their statement does not seem to have struck them though the invitation to S. A. Dange to deliver the inaugural address seemed to many a clear give-away of the political underpinnings of what Zaheer was still at pains to call a 'cultural movement'. Comrade Dange used the PWA's platform to defend the CPI's 'people's war' stand thus:

Can we remain neutral and not be against fascism and belie our whole past, our greatest of poets, our whole national and patriotic leadership? We cannot. We stand against fascism and its complete destruction in this war. We choose to side against fascism and for the liberation of all nations and peoples of the world.¹⁸

Declarations of friendship with Soviet Union and China were made and writers such as Pearl S. Buck, Lin Yu Tang and Upton Sinclair were hailed as role models. By calling upon 'all genuine and honest intellectuals to unite' and by constant references to patriotism, the speakers were flinging a gauntlet in the face of the Indian intelligentsia — those not with us are against us and, by extension, against reactionary right-wing forces. Zaheer was again elected General Secretary, Bishnu Dey and K. A. Abbas became joint secretaries, Mama Warerkar took over as treasurer, and the central office of the PWA moved from Lucknow to Bombay. The IPTA held its foundation conference on the same occasion.

As the movement grew, and the IPTA spawned a host of cultural squads, PWA functions became lively, energetic occasions with songs and dances interspersed with academic discussion and poetry readings. The progressives wrote plays and songs which were shown to peasant and working-class as well as middle-class audiences in different parts of the country. Despite the early heady success, the perception that the progressives were against tradition grew and this, many felt, was like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. In an editorial penned for the inaugural issue of *Naya Adab* ('New Literature'), its three young editors, Sibte Hasan, Majaz and Jafri, tried to defend the change:

It is wrong to say that the term progressive literature denotes protest and hatred of all old things. Progressive literature sees all things in their proper perspective and historical background; this very fact is the touchstone of literary achievement. Progressive literature does not break off relations with old literature; it embodies the best traditions of the old and constructs new edifices on the foundations of these traditions. In fact, progressive literature is the most trustworthy guardian and heir of ancient literature... In our view,

progressive literature is that which keeps in view the realities of life; it should be a reflection of these realities; it should investigate them and should be the guide to a new and better world.¹⁹

To conclude, it must also be noted that the glory days of the PWM in Bombay also coincided with the most tumultuous period of modern Indian history – Gandhi’s call to *satyagraha*, India’s response to the rise of fascism, Nehru’s Muslim Mass Contact Programme, the Second World War and its impact on India, the Bengal Famine, Independence, Partition and the Communal disturbances that scarred the nation. The Bombay progressives faithfully reflected each of these momentous events that shaped the nation’s destiny; at the same time, they drew the nation’s attention to events outside the country such as the Rosenberg Trial, the decolonisation of Africa and the emergence of a new world order in which India must take its rightful place.

The hegemonic ideological force of the PWA in Bombay did not dissipate overnight. The coming of Independence saw the departure of many writers to Pakistan, especially Zaheer who was sent by the CPI to set up the Communist Party in Pakistan. The declaration of Independence as false freedom by the CPI, the increasing ideological commitment demanded by Jafri alienated many. The flock dwindled, many of the progressive journals closed down, Urdu itself shrunk in importance as a lingua franca. Those who remained within the progressives’ fold increasingly found no reason *not* to respond to Nehru’s call and join the nation building project. Then, in purely literary terms, there was the rise of another literary movement – the modernist movement – that spoke of the inner life, the life of the mind. The PWA, as it had existed in all its glory and might all through the 1940s, became a shadow of its former self. Having said that, while the Bombay progressives may have weakened as literary grouping, their influence continued to be felt for a very long time in the work of the film lyricists. For instance, the IPTA poet Prem Dhawan wrote:

Chhorho kal ki baatein, Kal ki baat puranii
Naye daur mein likhenge hum milkar nayi kahani,
Hum Hindustani, Hum Hindustani...

In B. R Chopra’s *Naya Daur*, we see Sahir exhorting his fellow countrymen and women — almost in Soviet style — to join hands, put their shoulder to the wheel and build a new and prosperous India:

Saathi haath badhana saathi re
Ek akela thak jayega, milkar bojh uthana...

And in *Dhool ke Phool*, there is Sahir again exhorting them to put communal ill will aside and, in true Nehruvian style, become a liberal humanist:

*Tu Hindu banega na Musalman banega
Insaan kii aulad hai insaan banega*

Notes

- 1 *Kaifi & I: A Memoir*, Translated from the Urdu by Nasreen Rahman, New Delhi: Zubaan, 2010, p. 43-44
- 2 In a lengthy interview with S. M. Mehdi, who had retired to live in Aligarh till he passed away in 2015, I was able to get corroboration of Shaukat's account. Like Shaukat he blamed B. T. Ranadive, who took over from Joshi in 1947, for the infighting and bitterness that marred the post-1947 years. Mehdi also told me how he, Muneesh and Kaifi formed a trio in the commune. In the course of a rambling chat, he described the Party leadership as being puritan, bent upon keeping the Party away from *badnami* (getting a bad name). He also described how bohemianism was not tolerated by the Party, nor were 'deviations' such as homosexuality. One of Mehdi's designated tasks was to distribute the Urdu weekly *Naya Zamana* in the Muslim areas of Mohammed Ali Road and Bhindi Bazar. Bitterly critical of Ranadive, he claimed, the sectarianism fostered by him eventually led to the split in the Party. In contrast, he praised Joshi for his inclusive policies. He described Joshi as critical of the national leadership but not anti-nationalistic, the way Mehdi perceived Ranadive's policies to be. Joshi, he believed, did not want to cut off the Communist movement from the nationalist movement and kept his links open with Gandhi and Nehru. Ranadive, on the other hand, was vehemently opposed to this deeming the independence that was finally achieved, a 'false freedom'.
- 3 *Kaifi & I*, op cit, p. 49
- 4 From 1956 onwards, Kaifi had a fairly successful stint as a film lyricist with films like *Yahudi ki Beti*, *Kaaghaz ke Phool*, *Haqeeqat*, *Pakeezah*, *Heer Ranjha*, *Hanste Zakhm*, *Garam Hawa*, *Razia Sultan*, etc. Several Urdu writers came to Bombay all through the 1940s to find work in the film industry — as script writers, lyricists, film journalists — and met with varying degrees of success.
- 5 IPTA was launched on May 1943 in Bombay with Joshi as President and Anil de Silva as General Secretary with the aim of using the stage and other traditional arts to portray the problems facing the country. Joshi had earlier begun the practice of gathering the country's prominent writers, journalists, artists, economists, historians, film and stage actors to rally around the party organ, *National Front*, and later *People's War* and *People's Age*. He commissioned Sunil Janah to take photographs of the Bengal Famine and document people's movements in different parts of the country, such as in Telangana. Joshi understood, and capitalised on, the need to use culture as a living tool. While the catalyst for IPTA was the Bengal Famine, it continued to be active long after the PWA declined.
- 6 For details, see Rakhshanda Jalil, 'Loving Progress, Liking Change, Hating Manto', *Social Scientist*, Nov-Dec. 2012, Vol. 40 (11&12).
- 7 Sukrita Paul Kumar & Sadique, *Ismat Chughtai: Her Life, Her Times*, New Delhi:

- Katha, 2002, p. 127.
- 8 *ibid.*, p.133-134.
- 9 This tension was largely missing in the prose writers. Manto, Ismat, Bedi, Krishan Chandar and Rashid Jahan crafted a new lexicon with the blithe confidence that the Urdu short story was like putty in their hands. The absence of an evolved literary canon for the Urdu short story empowered them instead of intimidating or curbing their natural instincts for a new kind of self-expression.
- 10 A collection of his film lyrics, *Gaata Jaye Banjara* ('And the Gypsy Sings On') continues to be popular even today. For a nuanced understanding of the distinction between lyrics, especially film lyrics and conventional poetry, see Nasreen Munni Kabir's *Talking Songs*, a long interview with Javed Akhtar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005)
- 11 'The Poetry of No', *Outlook*, 29 July 2004.
- 12 Culled from a report on the Bombay PWA in Sudhi Pradhan (ed.), *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-47)*, pp317-321.
- 13 Hameed Akhtar subsequently collected and published his reports as *Roodad-e-Anjuman, 1946-47* (Lahore: Bright Books, 2000). A xerox of this book was given to me by Akhtar's comrade from the Bombay days, Mehndi when I went to interview him in Aligarh. The book deserves a serious study for it holds a mirror to the concerns, tensions, groupings and politics of the Bombay group.
- 14 Iman worked as a scriptwriter for Shalimar Pictures in Poona. He moved to Bombay shortly before the partition and started, with Miraji, a literary journal called *Khayal*. Zoe Ansari, on the journal's board of supervisors, condemned Miraji's publications and insisted that *Khayal* stop publishing his work.
- 15 See Khalilur Rahman Azmi, *Urdu Mein Tarraqi Pasand Adabi Tehrik*, Aligarh: Educational Publishing House, (reprint), 2002, p. 96 for details. Also Ralph Russell, 'Leadership in the Progressive Writers' Movement 1935-47' in *How Not to Write the History of Urdu Literature and Other Essays*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.69-93. It has been noted by both that the same group that defended *Angarey* on grounds of social realism now wished to target Ismat, Manto and Miraji for their so-called obsession with 'deviance'.
- 16 Geeta Patel, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism and Desire in Miraji's Urdu Poetry*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2005, p. 70-73.
- 17 For full version of this Manifesto see Sudhi Pradhan, *op.cit.*, pp. 348-350.
- 18 Sudhi Pradhan, *op cit.*, pp118-119.
- 19 Quoted by Ali Husain Mir and Raza Mir in *Anthems of Resistance* (New Delhi: Roli, 2006) p. 35-36. Translated from the Urdu by the authors.