SECTION SIXTEEN

FEMINISM, NEW SCHOLARSHIP AND NEW TOOLS FOR DEVELOPMENT

A. Early Voices of Feminism

2559. ANON. “Hurriyat-i niswaḥ” [Women’s Emancipation]. Makhzan 18, no. 6, March (1910) 6–10. [U], MHL.
In this work an unknown woman writer addresses men and draws their attention to the low status of women who are treated as sub-humans. The author states that women sacrifice everything for happy married lives and it is the duty of men to look after their needs; women, she states, must be freed.

2560. DOBSON, A. MARY R. ‘Mrs. Ali Akbar’s Speech at the Stree Bodhi Jubilee, Bombay, 1908,’ in her National Young Women’s Christian Association of India, Burmah and Ceylon, Bombay, 1910, 35p. MSS. EUR.F.186/324 (ii) OIOC.
This book carries an excerpt from the public speech of Mrs. Ali Akbar in which she said, ‘Let it be understood that we can no longer afford to keep our womenfolk in the background; they must be made to take part in all things natural to their instincts, and above all, they must be prepared to stand on an equal intellectual footing with their European sisters.’

The front page of the file bearing the inscription, ‘To Lady Tusker in appreciation of her work,’ contains a few pages about women’s work in Hyderabad. Princess Durru Shahwar writes, ‘it has always been my earnest prayer, that no woman should bend her head for the sake of a little support for herself and her children, and that she should be able to maintain the pride and dignity of her womanhood.’

2562. SHARIFAH HAMID ALI, BEGUM. ‘Presidential Address to the Annual Session of the All India Women’s Conference, Allahabad, January 1940,’ in the Bulletin of Indian Women’s Movement, No. 23, March, 1940, 1–V11, MSS EUR F.165/172, OIOC.
The Bulletin published the Presidential Address of Begum Hamid Ali at an annual session of the All India Women’s Conference, held at Allahabad in January 1940. She said, ‘we must strengthen the feeling of friendship and the bonds of sympathy which know no boundaries of countries or continents but are based simply on humanity, with all the people of the world…. We must cement our bonds of womanhood and sisterhood so that women of all countries work together for a common aim.’ She noted that the advent of women to Parliament had a quickening influence, and the women’s point of view was not as completely ignored as it used to be. However, in spite of these efforts, she felt that ‘the rights of womanhood were still a minus quantity. The status of woman can be considered adequate only when she is looked upon as a free and equal partner.’ Addressing the men of India who have ‘closed their eyes to all the wrongs women suffer,’ she warned them, ‘I would remind our brothers that they cannot and will not gain swaraj [self rule] until they have set their house in order and given over half of the population its due share of rights and privileges.’

B. Feminism in the 20th Century


This is a translation of the poems of seven Urdu women poets. In her introduction, the editor, who is also the translator, observes that the poets she has selected represent the strength of feminist thinking and conviction. Paying a huge tribute to women poets from Pakistan, Ahmad observes, ‘I believe that the most innovative, the most radical and the most interesting poetry of our times is being produced by women and not by male poets.’ The author decided to translate these poets because she ‘wanted to chart and project the role of these poets in the women’s movement that was gathering momentum in the country, so as to dispel the assumptions that women in the developing world are passive, voiceless and hopelessly conformist.’


This paper looks at structural and cultural features of Indian societal transformation with reference to the status of Muslim women during