

ABU MOHAMMED AND KANEZ FATIMA TRUST

Most people consider their mother to be an inspiration but for Mumtaz Haider, Member Trustee of the Abu Mohammed and Kanez Fatima Charitable Trust it was her mother in law, the late Kanez Fatima who was the inspiration. Kanez Fatima had spent most of her life assisting poor Muslim girls, trying to make them financially self reliant.

I met Mumtaz Haider, slim, middle aged, smartly clad in salwar suit near the Moghal Masjid in Bhendi Bazaar where she holds free coaching classes in English for girls from Urdu medium schools. When I visited the class at about 3 pm, it was heartening to see 25 *burqa* clad girls keen to master the language which is considered a gateway to worldly success.

“How long do they take to master the language?” I asked.

“It depends. All of them can read and write as English is compulsory in all Urdu medium schools, but since they converse in their mother tongue; their spoken English is weak. Normally it takes two years to make them proficient.”

Mumtaz is a graduate from Lucknow with a teachers training degree from Allahbad and UK where she taught for a number of years.

“We were in London for nearly 12 years. My husband was in the business of exporting and supplying fresh vegetables to Indian shops. But when my father in law expired in 1977, he came back to look after the family business and be with his mother.

Mumtaz’s father in-law was an eminent person, known for his social and philanthropic activities. He had started his career in the BMC but soon left to become a road building contractor and did such an excellent job that he soon became an A grade contractor and the family became well to do and brought a mansion near the BIT blocks opposite the Bohri Mohalla which is now known as the Trust building. The road opposite to the house is named after her father in law Syed Abu Mohammed.

“My mother in law died a few years ago she was also from Lucknow and had been educated at home. She was pious and wore *hijab*. She was very concerned about the betterment and dignity of Muslim girls. She did a lot of charity works - providing financial assistance to poor Muslim girls for their marriage or education. She also started free Sewing classes in a hall on the second floor of Imamy Masjid located at Mirza Ali Street. Besides she also had *Qirat* (Quran recitation) classes every Friday.

Then twice a year competitions were held for sewing and *Qirat* and prizes were distributed. Now we no longer have sewing classes; there are a number of such classes being run in the Mohallas of Mohammed Ali Road – one of them Khair e Ummat Trust is right opposite the Imambara school. And for teaching Urdu and Arabic many classes have sprouted in the past few years. However we still continue the free clinic and health and wellness lecture and workshops

every Thursday at Zainabia Hussein Masjid. There we have free health checkups, lectures on Hygiene, prevention of diseases, workshops to teach the basics of first aid and emergency care and we also distribute free medicine. For tuberculosis and serious diseases we send them to BMC hospital with which we have good liaison.”

“As a teacher and educationist, do you think Madrasa education and Urdu medium instruction is sufficient for Muslims to be economically successful?”

“Madrasa or religious education is necessary but so is ‘general /secular ‘education. In England Muslim children go to ‘general’ schools but have to compulsorily attend Islamic classes during the week end .We can perhaps consider following the same system in India. Of course for specializing in Islamic theology we can continue with some select Madrasas”

As far as the education of Muslim girls was concerned Mumtaz seemed despondent by the lack of enthusiasm in most families since many of them were against higher education as it is difficult to find bridegrooms for them .Moreover equipping a girl with a degree or skill was not considered necessary as they would not be allowed to do jobs .

“It is really unfortunate specially when according to **Hadees** acquiring knowledge is compulsory for both men and women .And many times it is necessary: supposing the girl becomes a widow or her husband is disabled ?Is it not necessary for her to have some skill or degree to support her family with dignity?”

“Yes. It is true.” I was aware of the plight of many Muslim girls in Muslim areas of Hyderabad. “Perhaps our religious leaders can be persuaded to guide Muslims.”

“It is for the men to do. After all as father’s and brothers they know how vulnerable a girl is in society if she is not qualified or able to fend for herself if God forbid some misfortune befalls the family .We do our bit to persuade the families not to withdraw the girls till they complete 12th standard .”

“Besides passing 12th they should do some Diploma in teaching or nursing .They can attend to women patients.” I suggested.

“But most of the Muslim families consider nursing as unclean since one has to handle *najasat* {impurities). We do try to explain that they do not have to handle anything directly. But it has not had much impact”

“I hope you are able to inspire more people to help in your work.”She smiled hopefully as I took her leave.