

TAYYABA HUSSAIN: A REMARKABLE HOME MAKER AND SOCIAL WORKER

In today's world of nuclear families and broken homes where children abandon parents in their old age it is indeed heartening when one comes across a family of nearly eight siblings (five sons and three daughters), their 25 offspring and eighteen grandchildren (till date) bonding together though they live in different continents. And the **Pivot** around whom the whole family revolves is their mother Tayyaba Hussein who lives in a modest house in a by lane of an area called Gun foundry just a furlong away from Lepakshi Emporium a, kilometer from Abids , Hyderabad's posh commercial street Tayyaba Hussein is 86 year old : she is fair and comely with snow white hair .When I met her last month she was wearing a spotless fine white silk sari and a long sleeved – up to the wrist - blouse .A golden chain adorned her neck and finely crafted gold bangles proclaim , her well to do status . Her material well being is due to the remittances she receives from her three sons residing in USA and Canada.

“Life has indeed changed for me. Life had not always been comfortable and we had to struggle a lot to make two ends meet. I had to bring up and educate my eight children within the salary of my husband, who was a school teacher.”

“How did you manage to do so? “ I ask quite puzzled , for I have always seen Tayyaba Begum ,calm , contented and well dressed and had attended the fine wedding ceremonies of some of the children .

In response she shows me a box full of diaries : “ I maintained a very strict budget .Every pie spent is noted in these diaries And I purchased this 250 sq yards of land and build this house by selling my jewelry (250grams of gold and seven grams of silver) .The one storied house named Nausheen Manzil was built in 1962 with five rooms and the small enclosed courtyard was built in 1972 .The land which had cost Rs 8000 then, is worth crores now . Nausheen Manzil a with its modest exterior and green gate covered with a bower of flowery creepers has been witness to the struggles, sorrows and successes of the Hussein family. It has been a welcoming home not only to Tayyaba Begum s immediate family but also to the extended family : her own relatives, her in laws and their families and the relatives of her children's and grandchildren's in laws and all their friends and well wishers .And despite the modest income they always shared their simple meal with friends and relatives who visited them.

“This is the *tehzeeb* which has been inculcated in us since childhood. It was so in my father's house and I hope that my children will continue the tradition, after me.”

I am curious to learn about her early life. “That was so long ago.” She smiles wryly.

Born in 1928 Tayyaba was the eldest of seven children: three girls and four boys .Their father was a Superintendent of Police and a man with liberal views who wanted to provide modern education to his daughters. She was admitted to Mehboob Alia, the Girls High School where most of the girls from the aristocracy studied .But she could not complete her Senior Cambridge as with the freedom struggle and Partition there were agitations' riots and deteriorating law and order . Hence she was married off in 1947 to a school teacher, Mr. Shaukat Hussein who taught at the Madrassa -e -Alia a renowned boys schools. Her two sisters were however lucky to study further :her sister Tahera became a doctor and is

now in Canada , and her other sister Saleha did her Doctorate in Microbiology and became the Principal of a schools .Her brothers too did well but now only two are surviving and are abroad .

Though her marriage took place during such turbulent period of history, it was not a small affair as most of her husband's family had taken refuge in Hyderabad. She remembers that nearly fifty family members lived in a huge bungalow which had been taken on rent by her brother in -law who was a resident of Yeotmal. They were rich people belonging to Jagirdari family of Achalpur in Maharashtra but her husband was a self made man. He had lost his mother when he was four and his father who remarried also passed away when he was only seventeen and he was unable to get any financial support from his stepmother and therefore had to give tuitions to pay for his education and boarding at the City college . His honesty and gentle demeanor however impressed the principal of the College who hired him as a warden when he was only eighteen .He therefore got free lodging and was able to pursue his studies .After graduation he got a scholarship to Madras –now Chennai- where he got a Diploma in Allied Art and therefore was able to teach the students Art and Craft together with Science and Mathematics .

I was aware that Mr. Shaukat Hussein was a very dedicated teacher and many of his students had great respect for him and called on him years after his retirement. Though he could not afford to continue her education he, allowed her freedom to read books and newspapers –which she still does till date .she can intelligently converse on any current topic. She had also on her own tried to educate herself by actively participating in women's literacy and educational programmers.

I found it quite amazing that with such a large family she could find time for social work

“Well, my children learnt to fend for themselves early and the older children looked after the younger ones. The boys and girls were brought up to share responsibility .We did not give the boys any preference but inculcated in them the duty to look after their sisters and respect women. I also had some domestic help .Moreover my husband was supportive in this aspect .He considered helping those less unfortunate than us to be a moral duty.”

She therefore joined the Red Cross and used to visit the hospitals to check on the treatment of patients. .She also worked with the NGO Bazm-e Khawateen which runs schools in slum areas and also imparts religious education to girls from poor Muslim families .Now her eldest daughter whose children have all settled down is continuing her work at the Bazm .

I was curious to know if she had worn the burqa in her youth as Mr. Hussein was so religious.

“No, he never insisted on my wearing a burqa or observing Purdah. I used to move freely.”

Actually I had heard from my aunts that Tayyaba Hussein was a well known personality in the social circles of Hyderabad and had been instrumental in getting good matches for many girls . Some of the girls were related to me .It was her contacts with the well to do families of Hyderabad and her genial and hospitable nature which enabled her to get her children well settled .Her brothers and sister who also did well in life helped : it was her brother who was instrumental in getting her eldest son settled

in Canada .After migrating to Canada , the boy did so well that he was able to finance his younger brothers' education and the marriage of his three younger sisters .

“Otherwise what could be achieved in the salary of a teacher?” she asks. “But of course we had a lot of goodwill from people; it was his honesty and devotion which earned people’s goodwill and was rewarded by Allah. “

In 1982 they were able to go to Canada to visit their son who by then had become a Canadian Citizen. After a year’s residency they too got Canadian Citizenship. After that they had had been travelling across continents: visiting the children in the States and in Canada and relatives in London and Europe.

Tayyaba Begum had been overjoyed to see Greece: “It is the place from which Unani medicine emanated.” She remembers many of the herbal medicines which were prepared by her husband’s family in Achalpur.”I wish I had documented those recipes”she sighs as she shows me the photographs of the ruins of the Haveli and the marvelous mosque belonging to her husband’s family.”It was built by Shahjahan and given to my husband’s ancestor who was appointed as the Khatib;” her voice is filled with pride.

After her husband’s death she has continued to visit her sons abroad accompanied by her daughter Shakira who now looks after her .Shakira is another remarkable women .Separated from her husband when her three children were toddlers she has managed to bring them up with some financial help from her brothers but mainly through her income from running a crèche on the first floor of Nausheen Manzil. Now though Shakira’s children are all settled , her daughters have got married and her son and his wife stay with them , she continued for some time with the crèche on the request from working mother’s.

“It is a facility which helps in making women financially independent and provide for their children, hence we continued it.”

But the place is quite forlorn in the absence of Tayyaba and Shakira .I had visited it some days back when they both were in America.

“How was your trip?”I asked

“Well. Quite good .It is strenuous at this age but then there were family commitments .I had to be there for my grandson’s wedding. I returned just a few days back for another grandson’s wedding in Hyderabad Now 10 of my 27 grandchildren are married and I have now 18 great grandchildren I am really blessed. ”

“I hope you live to see your other grandchildren get married.”I remark. She smiles as her four year great grandson saunters in, followed by his younger sister. I get up to wish her good bye .I do not know when I will see her again , but watching her calm and contented face , I know that it is a life fully lived in the service of the family and community .

As I shut the green gate of Nausheen Manzil , which has seen a family move from a hand to mouth existence to one of prosperity , from traditionalism to modernity , progressing and spanning continents but keeping intact the old family values and sense of togetherness mainly due to the values inculcated in them by Tayabba Hussein and her husband , I wish and hope that their future generations will continue to keep the family traditions alive .Tayabba Hussein's efforts in keeping such a large clan together is truly inspirational in today's world of self centered nuclear families .