

A powerhouse of kindness



Bilquis Edhi, a commendable and praiseworthy name in the social and humanitarian circuit, dedicated her life to serving humanity. She passed away at the age of 74. Nothing short of a national loss. However, she continues to live on in the hearts of thousands of children and women for whom Bilquis was the last and only hope for survival.

Bilquis Edhi was born on August 14, 1947 in Karachi. She joined the training centre at Edhi Foundation when she was in the 8th grade. She married Abdul Sattar Edhi in April 1966. An eminent force serving the most underprivileged sections of Pakistani society, especially women and children, the couple began as a team doing charitable work that touched lives for more than 60 years. They worked together to run an extensive Edhi Foundation which her husband Abdul Sattar Edhi had set up independently in the beginning with meagre resources. Steadily, the Edhis emerged as a

power couple and their network continued to expand through vast private donations. This impressive social enterprise became Pakistan's major relief organisation with a world-wide charity empire comprising a network of nursing homes, maternity clinics, orphanages, medical centres, ambulances, graveyards, adoption services for abandoned children, family planning centres, kitchens, all free of charge, and international offices in the United States, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Canada, Australia, Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Japan.

Numerous children have been left in cribs outside Edhi centres that Bilquis had set up across Pakistan, commonly known as the jhoola project. She is known to have watched over abandoned bodies of children born out of wedlock retrieving them from trash bins, the roadside, and from any place they would find them. She is also remembered for her major contribution in the

India-Pakistan 1965 war, where she saw many brutally mutilated bodies that she had to wash for burial. She worked relentlessly alongside her employees and volunteers to wash these bodies.

A benevolent soul, Bilquis always shone with kindness, empathy and compassion – quiet yet relentless, humble yet magnanimous, loving yet stringent, an unbelievably caring woman. Her jhoola project saved countless babies from infanticide. Most of these babies left in the cradle at the doorstep have been girls. Edhi foundation also took up older children to adoptive families in Pakistan, helping couples who couldn't have children. Bilquis Edhi exemplified unconditional love, care and empathy, earning her the title Mother of Orphans, although this did not come easily. The work incurred backlash from religious conservatives who accused them of being infidels and condemned them for “sheltering illegitimate children”. They were robbed of the valuables that they had collected through private donations, dedicated to serving their cause. Bilquis and Abdul Sattar Edhi remained steadfast. The charity has managed to save more than 42,000 children from infanticide.

Bilquis had also wholeheartedly cared for a deaf and mute Hindu girl, Geeta, who was found by the Pakistan Rangers stranded at Samjhota Express, at the Lahore railway station. Bilquis Edhi first named her Fatima as there was no way to identify her. Later, Bilquis found out that she belonged to the Hindu community when Geeta repeatedly put her hands together for greetings and touched their feet, a common practice in India while meeting the elders. The Edhis then ensured that the girl remained associated to her religion, celebrating Holi and Diwali festivals and buying new clothes and bangles for the occasions. After 13 years, in 2015, they were finally able to unite her



with her family in India. Many of these children raised at Edhi centres or adopted by families from there, have been successful in their lives as engineers, doctors and scholars, settled in the US, England and Ireland. The Edhis also set up schools for those who could not be adopted. Bilquis undertook the responsibility of marrying off the girls, after careful scrutiny of the proposals by assessing whether or not the prospective candidate had a stable job, a secure home and was not abusing drugs or substances.

Bilquis frequently travelled to oversee the Edhi Homes across Pakistan to observe any shortcomings and recommended improvements. She was very stringent in following the criteria to approve or reject couples seeking to adopt a child. All couples were personally interviewed by her.

Bilquis and Abdul Sattar Edhi's children – Faisal, Kubra, Zeenat and Almas – have taken upon themselves to carry the legacy forward. Her name will forever be etched

in everyone's hearts. With her husband, she received the 1986 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service, the prestigious Hilal-i-Imtiaz for her persevering selfless work. She is also the recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize and the esteemed Mother Teresa Memorial Award for Social Justice. She was named the Person of the Decade in 2021 for being the most impactful person along with the likes of Professor Yanghee Lee and Stephen Soldz. Various politicians, philanthropists and celebrities including Sarim Burney, Arif Alvi, Shahbaz Sharif, Narendra Modi, Hadiqa Kiani, Imran Khan, Shahid Afridi, Babar Azam, Zeba Bakhtiar and Aijaz Aslam condoled her demise. In Pakistan, where basic necessities are barely accessible, where state-run organisations are disturbingly ill-equipped to deal with social issues, the Edhis set up a welfare system reminding us time and again that nothing is more powerful in this world than kindness.

Remembering Iqbal

All the leading vocalists of Pakistan have sung Iqbal. The first vocalists to capitalise on his poetry and name were the qawwals

Though there is no end to paying lip service to Iqbal it appears that the fervour is subsiding at least at the state level if the cancellation of the public holiday is any indication to go by. Initially, his death anniversary was celebrated by a public holiday on April 21 but then was replaced by the birth anniversary in November as the researchers discovered in due course that that is his actual date of birth but now it is a working day like any other – as if the best tribute to him is following in the footsteps of the father of the nation with the adage: work, work and more work.

All the leading vocalists of Pakistan have sung Iqbal. Iqbal himself was very interested in music and sought sitar-learning classes in the early part of his life. He could also sing and was very close to the musicians of Lahore who helped him build his vocal capacity to recite his poetry. He was hugely popular because of his tarannum and was requested to do it again and again in mushairas. It was indeed sad that in his twilight years, he suffered from a throat ailment that affected his voice and it was painful as eyewitnesses recalled him declining the request to recite quoting his throat condition. Even if he tried, he failed to bring in the intensity and the full-throatedness of his earlier years.

Iqbal's poetry was a break-away from tradition. In the musical rendition, the effort to let the lyrics determine the form, has petered out. It is rendered mostly in conventional forms like the ghazal, qawwali, geet, naat, hamd, manqabat and recently the rock and pop genres. His Saray Jahan Say Acha Hindustaan Hamara became hugely popular and was sung across the length and breadth of an undivided colonial India. In Pakistan, this composition is hardly sung. In fact, this poem is hardly even mentioned though it was one of his most famous poems in his life time. It is not difficult to understand that it is for the purposes of political correctness that it has been placed on the back burner.

The first vocalists to capitalise on Iqbal's poetry and name were the qawwals. It was also considered safe and sanitised by the Radio authorities, the main platform for the promotion of music in the first three decades of an independent Pakistan.

Mubarak Ali and Fateh Ali made Shikwa and Jawab-i-Shikwa composed in darbari as one of the standard numbers in their repertoire. His Saray Jahan Say Acha Hindustaan Hamara became so popular that even when the decision was taken for the national anthem of an independent India it was up there and given a serious thought along with Bande Mataram till the dice of the final choice was cast in favour of Jana Gana Mana by Rabindronath Tagore.

According to Ravi Shankar, the lyrics were recomposed by him in the mid-1940s. He found the existing composition to be long and drawn

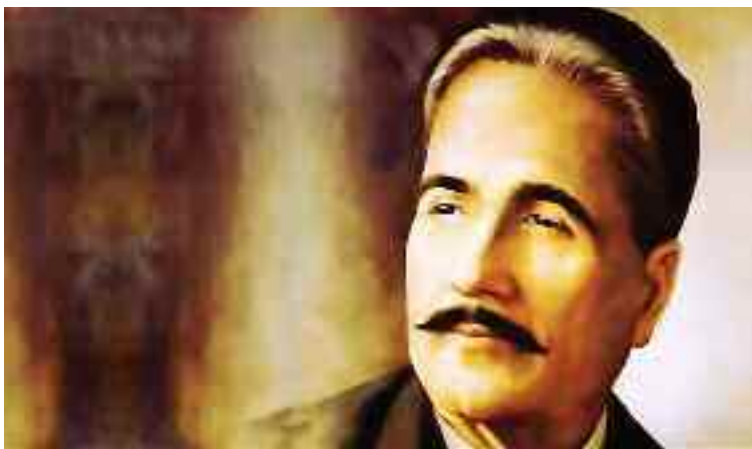
out. It was sung like a dirge and did not have the strength so he composed it in a catchy tune and gave it a brighter look. It was picked up by the All India Radio and became hugely popular after the independence. It still features in local gatherings and Beating of the Retreat Parade in Delhi every year on Republic Day. It is so venerated across the country that Lata Mangeshkar was made to sing it on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of independence in the Indian parliament.

Ravi Shankar was peeved that he was not always given the credit for composing it. Different composers had been given credit for it and he was shocked and saddened to learn on the flap of the cassette brought out by the HMV featuring nationalistic songs by Lata Mangeshkar, instead of the composition being credited to him it was mentioned that it was a traditional composition. He lamented that there was no effective system pertaining to copyright/intellectual copyright in India.

In Pakistan, Noor Jehan, Medhi Hasan, Fareeda Khanum, Ghulam Ali, Malika Pukhraj, Pervez Mehdi, Naheed Akhter, Asif Javed, Nayyara Noor, Suraiya Khanum, Gul Baghar Bano, A Nayyar, Shabnam Majeed and Rahat Fateh Ali have all attempted valiantly. Contemporary vocalists and groups like Abrar ul Haq, Junaid Jamsheed, Hadiqa Kiyani, Jawwad Ahmed, Ali Azmat and Shahzad Roy too has rendered him. Without assigning a value judgment one can say that the compositions and the intonation are a sign of the changing trends in music in our part of the world.

In '80s, Mahjabeen Qizilbash and Mohammad Ali Shekhi sang Nawa-i-Waqt from Payam-i-Mashriq. Asif Javed vocalised Akal Go Aastan Say from Baal-i-Jibreel, a part of Masjid-i-Qurtaba was sung by Akhlaq Ahmed, Ghulam Ali, Mehnaz, Naem Tahir and Iqbal Bano. Jawad Ahmed sang Tu Abhi Rehguzar from Baal-i-Jibreel and Naheed Akhtar Nagma-i-Sarban along with Ghulam Abbas from Payam-i-Mashriq. Then there are some more numbers: A Nayyar's Tuloo-i-Islam, one of the last poems in Baang-i-Dara, Ghulam Abbas's Tu Aye Aseer-i-Makan, Haqqeqat mein Rooh-i-Abad, and Aye Pak Watan. Tu Aye Aseer-i-Makan by Tarannum Naz, Nigah-i-Faqr by Shaukat Ali, Ya Rab Dil, Zamanay kay Andaz by Junoon, Ya Rab by Shehzad Roy and Maqam Paida Kar by various artistes including Abrar, Humera, Ali Raza, Fariha Pervez and Masooma Anwar.

The late Asad Amanat Ali sang Hai Soaz. Akhlaq Ahmed sang Wohi Meri Kamnaseebi with very supple and measured vocals, Shahida Parveen also sang Kalam-i-Iqbal on PTV. Aasman by Hadiqa Kiyani comprises a beautiful Persian Poem Aye Chashm-i-Saqi. Sitaron Say Aagay by Parvez Mehdi had a pro-classical touch to it whereas the one by Sajjad Ali had a pop style. Junaid Jamsheed gave it a Nasheed touch with a cappella.



Nauman Ijaz: Foot in mouth



Ayesha Omar, actor, host, and occasional singer has worked hard to be in the position she currently enjoys in the entertainment industry. In 2020, Ayesha Omar went public with her own story of being sexually abused “for years”. Prior to going public, on a breezy, sunny afternoon, Ayesha had told me - off record - that she, too, had gone through a #MeToo experience.

It was a truth that took off in the United States as #MeToo (meaning you had gone through a sexual assault, misconduct, abuse and harassment). Harvey Weinstein, an iconic producer, fell from grace with multiple cases against him eventually landing in jail. It was followed by another major case against American financier Jeffrey Edward Epstein. But other stories on a second rung began trickling through. It led to the creation of #TimesUp – claiming sexual misconduct against vulnerable people will no longer be tolerated.

The goal of #MeToo at its heart was about showing just how high the number of this trauma was in various societies, countries, and the lives of others and how often they occurred. But look up the issue and you realize not everyone went to court. Because it wasn't about defamation lawsuits and prosecution so much as it was about – first and foremost – creating awareness and a community that could heal by going public, lifting an inner, hurting weight by sharing it with others. While #MeToo spread like wildfire, it moved from celebrities to ordinary individuals who had gone through such an ordeal around the world.

In Pakistan, it did lead to people sharing their stories on social media. But when it came to public figures like Meesha Shafi, naming the accuser didn't mean justice in entirety but defamation suits. In fact, those who threw their weight and stories behind her also landed in legal waters.

In such a situation, Ayesha Omar not naming the person who abused her makes sense. However, what didn't make sense at all was when Omar went on Nauman Ijaz's talk show (G Sarkar with Nauman Ijaz) where she spoke about the abuse and received insensitive criticism from one of the industry's biggest names in acting.

During the interview, Nauman Ijaz told her how things in the past should not be revealed just because someone else has done so before and it can damage image. Ayesha partially agreed with what Ijaz said about damaging image. However, she went on to explain what she felt was right and how some truths must be brought to light. In

a country like Pakistan, these taboo topics need to be discussed openly and when public figures speak, more people pay attention. Of course, this was lost on Nauman Ijaz who stated during one point in the show: “Kabhi apki bold shoots aa jati hain, kuch aap statements aise de deti hain”, essentially shaming Omar for her choices.

At another point, he said, she was doing it because someone else did it and she clarified she did it for herself, first and foremost, and those who follow her as an influential person.

A composed Ayesha took his words in stride before stating, “But I need to follow my truth.”

What followed was a preaching of a strange sort and an attack on Ayesha Omar about how making such statements was about publicity perhaps and why did she choose to speak now, several years after the fact. Ayesha is popular enough and when people choose to speak is ultimately about when they're ready. It's not as binary as Nauman Ijaz thinks. A restrained Ayesha explained how she didn't speak for 15 years but when influential figures speak about their ordeals, fans/followers don't feel alone. While Ayesha eloquently explained her reasons for admitting that she, too, had been abused within the industry, Nauman Ijaz spent quite a bit of time as a non-neutral host who kept pushing all the wrong buttons.

The clincher: He is featuring in a non-cliched ZEE5 series, Mrs. & Mr. Shameem going for what is the most unconventional role for him, aka non-alpha male. The need to keep pushing Ayesha about how there was no need for her to speak on the matter a decade later was fairly despicable as it went on for quite a few minutes. And coming from an industry giant makes the argument inexplicable and naive. The world we lived in two decades ago has changed and speaking on such traumatic matters is never easy but it is opening up. Kudos to Ayesha Omar for eloquently standing up to a judgmental interview, and sticking to her truth.

Meesha Shafi opened the Pandora's box and others followed suit but this attitude of finding dignity in hushing up such ordeals is why society has become much more myopic and divisive. Perhaps the one small silver lining is how netizens have reacted to this interview and for once, they're on Ayesha Omar's side and calling out Nauman Ijaz for his offensive, insensitive, impolite exchange of words. At this rate, even those within the industry will think three times before using their influence to tell their personal stories that can help fans in finding their truths and strength.

Kiara Advani praises ‘Kabir Singh’ co-star Shahid Kapoor for ‘Jersey’

NEW DELHI: There's rarely a chance when fans do not encounter a fun banter between Kiara Advani and Shahid Kapoor whenever the ‘Kabir Singh’ actors write anything about each other on their social media space, and the same happened recently after Kiara praised the latter for his performance in ‘Jersey’.

After much delay, Shahid Kapoor's much-anticipated sports drama ‘Jersey’ has been finally released today.

The makers of the movie organized a star-studded screening, which was attended by some of the leading actors including Kiara Advani, who shares a great friendship bond with Shahid after starring together in their super hit film ‘Kabir Singh’.

After attending the screening of ‘Jersey’, Kiara took to her Instagram handle to hail Shahid for this performance as Arjun in the

film. “My dearest SK, you are just toooooo special ya, watching you as Arjun has been nothing short of magic, you hit it out of the park and how, as Jersey releases tomorrow my best wishes to the entire team, @amanthegill, the loveliest @mrunalthakur, the finest of them all, @official-pankajkapur sir and the captain of their ship @Govtammaidu for this beautiful film,” Kiara wrote.

Replying to Kiara for her kind words, Shahid re-shared her post on his Instagram handle and wrote, “My dearest Preeti your words will always stay in Kabirs heart Tu meri bandi hai,” adding a pink heart emoticon. ‘Jersey’, a Bollywood remake of the National Award-winning Telugu film of the same name, featuring Nani, will see Shahid play the role of Arjun, a failed cricketer who decides to fulfil his dream of representing Team India for his

