

Halide Edib – Outside and Inside India

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Introduction:

The Turkish woman novelist, soldier and political activist Halide Edibⁱ is well known to many readers in South Asia primarily because of her books related to India but also due to her highly successful visit to India in the 1930s. She and her husband stayed many weeks and travelled all over India, from Peshawar to the Deccan, and from Lahore to Calcutta, giving lectures and meeting Indian intellectuals and politicians.

Her first “Indian” book, titled *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*ⁱⁱ is a survey of Turkish history and culture, discussing the impact of the West. The book comprises lectures given at the Jamia Millia in Delhi during her stay in India. The book is highly readable and touches on socio-cultural problems that are still being faced in the Middle East and South Asia. There is also a whole chapter on Turkish women which begins as follows: “In Turkey we have a saying – women are all one nation.”

*Inside India*ⁱⁱⁱ is the name of the second book written by Halide Edib, after her departure from India. This book chronicles her experiences in India and is dedicated to the memory of Dr Mukhtar Ansari, who died before the book was published and who was a personal friend of Halide Edib and Adnan Adivar. He had the invitation issued to Halide Edib for her lectures at the Jamia Millia. The book has chapters on Ansari and his family, Mahatma Gandhi and Choudhry Rahmat Ali. This book was translated into Urdu as early as 1939.^{iv}

During her tour of India, Halide Edib received an ovation when she spoke at the Aligarh Muslim University. The poet Asrarul Haq

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Majaz wrote a long [and now famous] poem welcoming Halide Edib to Aligarh. Gandhi was present at one of her lectures and praised her spirit of tolerance. Allama Iqbal presided over another of her lectures. Halide Edib saw the Hindu-Muslim problem at first hand, and the book is also valuable for her political insight. Discussing the Hindu caste system, Halide Edib writes:

With regard to the clash between the Hindu and Muslim systems...while the Islamic system gave latitude for social evolution, Hinduism gave latitude to the mind only and insisted on a fixed social pattern.

Later she was also to write: ^v

Pakistan has another cultural and historical background, and they had to be liberated from Hindu dominance in industry and commerce. Besides, the social structure of this country is based on the principles of Islam, that means social equality, which is far away from the caste system.

The impression left behind by Halide Edib in India was powerful, and many Muslim girls in India born after her visit were given the name of “Khalida Adeeb”, which is the Urdu version of her name. One intention of this article is also to present some aspects of Halide Edib’s life outside her connections with India and thereby offer a short but rounded picture of her life, works and personality. Halide Edib has also written extensively about her own life and experiences^{xi} both in English and Turkish and those who wish to study her in detail will find plenty of material in print.

Early Life:

Halide Edib was born in 1884 in Istanbul into a modern well-to-do family. Her father, Mehmet Edib, was one of the treasurers of the Sultan Abdül Hamid II (who reigned between 1876 and 1909). Halide Edib’s mother was Fatma Hanim who, however, died of tuberculosis when Halide was still young. In consequence, Halide was brought up by her grandmother.

Halide Edib was educated privately at home for the first few years. Unlike most Turkish girls of the period, she was later sent to study at the American Girls College in Uskudar on the Asian side of

Istanbul. Although her ancestors included Jewish people who had converted to Islam, she studied Arabic and the Quran. Her religious upbringing was that of a typical urban Muslim family. In the cosmopolitan Istanbul of the time, she was taught English, French and Arabic in addition to Turkish. She went to a neighbouring school where she also picked up some Greek. However, most of her writings are in Turkish and English in which she was fully proficient. In fact, at school she received a special prize from the Sultan for book translation.

Married Life:

Halide Edib was 17 when she graduated from college. She married her Mathematics tutor Salih Zeki, by whom she had two boys called Ayetullah and Hikmetullah. She helped her husband in translating books and also continued writing articles and reviews in well-known newspapers such as *Tanin* and in other journals. Salih Zeki was an old-fashioned traditional Ottoman gentleman. He had the wealth and resources, and wanted to take a second wife. Halide Edib, now Halide Salih, refused to accept the situation. In her own opinion she represented the young, independent career woman. She had already written articles on the role of the modern Turkish woman as a full partner to her husband.

In Halide Edib's mind, there was only one way out. She was too independent to accept a second wife. She obtained a legal divorce from Salih Zeki in 1910. Halide Edib's teaching, writing and social work kept her busy after her divorce. Her first novel (which is based on her experiences of a broken marriage) was published in 1912. When the First World War began in 1914, she became Inspector of girls' schools in Damascus and Beirut.

The four years of war finally came to an end. In 1918, when Turkey had been pushed back on all fronts, Halide Edib found comfort in her marriage to Dr Adnan Adivar, a medical man and a professor. Adnan Adivar was also the author of several books. This marriage gave her companionship, stability and common goals.

Post 1918:

After the War ended, Halide Edib, like many Turks, was initially impressed by Woodrow Wilson's 14 Principles, which included self-determination and freedom for all nations. The Ottoman Empire had

collapsed, and she hoped that, unlike Europe, America would help a defeated Turkey. It was to prove to be a forlorn hope.

Far away from the beleaguered capital of Istanbul, where the last Sultan Vahideddin was a prisoner in his own palace, the Ottoman general Mustafa Kemal [later known as Kemal Ataturk] had left for the interior of the country in May 1919 to begin organizing the armed Turkish resistance to reverse Turkey's defeat and to fight to the death to free Turkey again.

Halide Edib saw that freedom was never to be given, but only to be won by blood and sweat. She knew that Mustafa Kemal and his men had the right response. The foreigners who had sent victorious armies to Turkey had to be thrown out by force. She and her husband therefore looked for an opportunity to join the freedom fighters assembled in Ankara in the heart of the country.

Meeting in Sultanahmet Square:

The Allied Forces had given the green light to the Greeks to invade the Turkish homeland. At the start of the Turkish armed resistance, there was a famous mass meeting in the square of Sultanahmet in Istanbul on 6 June 1919. The major speech there was given by Halide Edib. It was then quite unprecedented for an Ottoman woman to address more than 200,000 people.

Halide Edib gave an unprepared speech to the large crowd which contained thousands of young men who would soon leave to defend their homeland. It was a speech that was to make her famous for the rest of her life. Here is a translation of her address to the citizens of Istanbul.^{vii}

Brothers and sisters, citizens,

The honour of seven hundred years watches over this new catastrophe of Ottoman history from the top of these sky-reaching minarets and calls out to the spirits of our great ancestors, who so often marched through these great spaces in victorious formations. I raise my head to these unseen and invincible spirits and I tell them:

I am an unfortunate daughter of Islam, and today I am also the mother of a sad but heroic chapter of our history. I bow to the spirits of our ancestors and I address them in the name of the new Turkey thus: Though this nation has no weapons today, its heart is as unconquerable as yours was. We have faith in Allah and our rights.

*Brothers and sisters, my children,
Listen to the judgement the world has passed on you. The aggressive policies of the Allied Powers have been turned against Turkey sometimes treacherously but always unjustly. If they were told that Turks and Muslims are to be found on the moon and stars they would send their armies of occupation there as well. They have now found an opportunity to break the crescent into pieces. No western power will support us against these decisions. Those who have not acceded to this inhuman decision are equally if not more responsible in this matter. They have created tribunals supporting human rights and national rights but have trampled on those of the losers. Those who call the Turks sinners are such great sinners themselves that the waters of the oceans will not make them clean. A day will come when a greater tribunal will convict those who have deprived nations of their natural rights. That court will comprise individuals of those very states who are against us today. In the individual lies an eternal feeling for justice, and nations are, after all, made up of individuals.*

*Brothers and sisters, my children,
Listen to me. You have but two friends – the Muslims, and those individuals who will raise voices for your rights every day. The Muslims are together with you today. The second group will comprise those who sooner or later understand the justice of our unflinching resolve. Governments may be our enemies, but nations may be our friends. Our strength is the power of just rebellion. The day is not far off when all nations will gain their rights. On that day, take your flags and remember your brothers who gave their lives for this noble cause. Now take an oath and repeat with me: the sacred emotions in our heart will not flag and will remain until the rights of nations have been achieved.*

Escape to join Mustafa Kemal:

After the huge national reaction to this speech, Halide Edib and Adnan Adivar had to flee to Ankara as the British forces in Istanbul wished to arrest them. During the Turkish War of Independence between 1919 and 1922, Halide served as a corporal on several fronts wearing the regular army uniform. She demonstrated that women could fight side by side with men in a national effort.

Halide Edib (and her husband) were present at most of the battles fought between 1920 and 1922 till the Greeks were finally

driven out of Western Turkey. In his book *Grey Wolf*, the British Intelligence agent Harold Armstrong^{viii} mentions that Mustafa Kemal considered the presence of Corporal Halide to be a “good luck” charm for the Turkish troops. Halide Edib had earlier experience of being a nurse in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913.

Establishment of the Republic:

The attainment of Turkish independence set into train many events at great speed. The republic was proclaimed in 1923, and the Caliphate abolished in 1924. Other reforms followed and, in this process, along with others, Halide Edib and her husband Adnan were side-tracked. Thus, from 1926 onwards, as Mustafa Kemal consolidated his power, Halide Edib and Adnan Adivar lived outside Turkey for over 12 years.

Halide Edib and Adnan Adivar spent these years teaching in the United States, England, France and several other places where they both worked as professors and researchers. She also renewed her contacts with Indian Muslims. During the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, she had been helping in Istanbul to coordinate the work of the Indian Red Crescent Mission which went to Turkey and ran field hospitals for several months.

The Medical Mission had been proposed in 1912 by Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulana Mohamed Ali Jauhar. The mission was headed by Dr Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari and had many members who became well-known later, such as Choudhary Khaliqzaman, Shoaib Qureshi and others. They were well received in Turkey, and Halide Edib often invited the members to her Istanbul mansion.^{ix}

Later Career:

Halide Edib and her husband returned to Turkey in 1939. She was now a famous Turkish novelist and feminist as well as a political leader. She was appointed Professor of English Literature at the university of Istanbul. In 1950 she was also elected to the Turkish parliament. Adnan Adivar, who also served in parliament, died in 1955. After a fruitful and eventful life, Halide Edib died in Istanbul in 1964. In her obituary in the London *Times*, which calls her a “Turkish Writer and Woman of Action”, the following *inter alia* is stated:

“...some of her finest work was in her memoirs of the war of independence, written in English, such as *Turkey Faces West* and *The Turkish Ordeal*, which are valuable not only for historical data, but for her descriptions of such men as Kemal Ataturk, whom she presents in a light which is a good deal more interesting, and probably more realistic, than the hero worshipping conformism of the present day...

Besides being a strong, original writer and a personality of the first magnitude, Halide Edib was a brilliant speaker and her rousing addresses in Istanbul and Izmir at the beginning of the war of independence whipped large crowds to action. She was a woman in whom passion and intellect were remarkably blended... In her younger days she was a keen horsewoman, a fine shot and was always very active...”

Other Works of Halide Edib in English:

Atesten Gomlek (1922; translated into English as *The Daughter of Smyrna* or *The Shirt of Flame*).

The Memoirs of Halide Edib (1926).

The Turkish Ordeal (1928), memoir.

Turkey Faces West: A Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin (1930),

The Clown and His Daughter (first published in English in 1935 and in Turkish in 1936).

Turkun Atesle Imtihani, a memoir, published in 1962; translated into English as *House with Wisteria*.

Halide Edib’s “Feminism”:

For a discussion on Halide Edib's ideas on the status of Turkish women, reference may be made to an article by Emel Dogramaci.^x For a broader outlook see the article by Füsün Altıok Akatli.^{xi}

It has been observed that – like Halide Edib herself – the heroines in her novels are strong, independent women who use their will power to reach their goals in spite of huge obstacles. Halide Edib’s “feminism” should not be confused with the aggressive feminism of today. Her goal was obtain a partnership for women with men in the work and social spheres. Her novels also treat problems of arranged marriage, easy divorce (for men) and honour killings. However their

popularity, nearly 90 years after they were written, stem from the elegance of their Turkish style and their overall interest.

Works about Halide Edib:

There is a novel^{xii} (2001) is a story about Halide Edib's early years and youth. In most Turkish films dealing with the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Halide Edib appears as a prominent character. A few of Halide Edib's novels have also been adapted for film and television.

Professor Inci Enginun, one of Turkey's foremost living authorities on Turkish Literature, has authored a book in Turkish in 2008 which is a critical study of Halide Edib's works and gives a list of all her novels, speeches, poems, stories, plays and journalistic articles.^{xiii} There is also a very recently published study of Halide Edib's relationship with India.^{xiv}

Much research on Halide Edib, her writings and her contributions is being conducted within Turkey. However, more work needs to be done on her stay in India and its effects on the Indian intellectuals of the time. Moulvi Abdul Haq has an interesting essay on Halide Edib.^{xv} in which he describes her visit to Hyderabad [Deccan] where she was the guest of Sir Akbar and Lady Hydari. Abdul Haq escorted her to one of the orphanages outside the city and here Halide Edib was surprised to observe that there were two separate kitchens, one for the Hindu orphans and the other for Muslim orphans. She thought that as the menus were similar, it would be more economical to have one kitchen producing all the food. Abdul Haq had some difficulty in explaining to her that the Hindus did not eat food cooked by Muslims.

Halide Edib is also the subject of an essay by Rais Ahmad Jafri.^{xvi} which is sub-titled "you are the honour of the Muslim nation". He writes that he was a guest at a tea party given in Bombay by Syed Abdullah Brelvi, Editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, in honour of Halide Edib during her stay in India in the mid-thirties. Jafri mentions that the name Halide Edib had been known to him for a long time; she was the lion-hearted woman who stood by Mustafa Kemal and performed feats on the battlefield as well as in public life of which most men would be proud. Although the doors of the country that she had helped to free were apparently closed for her, she did not say one word against

Mustafa Kemal and, whenever the name of her country was mentioned, her face lit up and shone. Of medium height and fair complexion, with large eyes , with lines on her face that did not diminish the beauty that hung on from the past, she had a delicate and melodious voice, but a soldier's bearing that contained decisiveness... Jafri continues as follows:

Much propaganda had been conducted in the past about the Turks having become irreligious and Westernized, but the Turkish woman who sat before us, though she was not veiled or covered in accordance with Indian tradition, made clear with her words that she was proud of her religion, that she had studied other religions and considered Islam superior to them, that Islam was her choice not just because she was born into it but because it was her belief that this was the religion for her.

Such essays provide a beginning, but steps need to be taken by other scholars to collect and publish all relevant material in Urdu and other regional languages on Halide Edib.

NOTES

¹ Halide Edib is the modern Turkish version of her name. In English, she generally chose to write Halidé Edib or Halide Edib. Later in life, Halide Edib also used the surname of her second husband, Dr Adnan Adivar, and she is therefore often styled Halide Edib Adivar.

² Halide Edib, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*, (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1935), 223 pp. The full text of this book is available on the Internet.

³ Halide Edib, *Inside India*, (London: G.A. & Unwin, 1937), 378 pp.

⁴ Maulvi Syyed Hashimi [Faridabadi], *Andrun-e-Hind* [Translation of *Inside India* by Halide Edib], (New Delhi: Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu), 1939.

⁵ Halide Edib, "Hindistan'ın İcindeki Kavga" [The Conflict within India], articles in the Turkish newspaper *Aksam*, Istanbul [20 November 1947 and 27 November 1947].

⁶ Halide Edib, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib*, (London: John Murray, 1926), 472 pp.

⁷ The translation from the Turkish has been done for this article by the author.

⁸ Harold C. Armstrong, *Grey Wolf*, (London: Arthur Barker, 1932) 352 pp. On page 195, we have:

He must have with him, as his mascot, Halideh Edib; she had meant success before... When she arrived at headquarters he felt sure of success.

⁹ S. Tanvir Wasti, "The Indian Red Crescent Mission to the Balkan Wars", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No.3, (May 2009), pp. 393 – 406.

¹⁰ Emel Dogramaci, "The Novelist Halide Edib Adivar and Turkish Feminism" in *The World of Islam*, Vol. 14 ([Leiden](#), 1971).

¹¹ Fusun Altioklar Akatli, "The Image of Woman in Turkish Literature" in Nermin Abadan-Unat, editor, *Women in Turkish Society* (Leiden, 1981).

¹ Frances Kazan, *Halide's Gift*, (New York: Random House, 2002), 376 pp.

¹² Inci Enginun, *Halide Edib Adivar'in Eserlerinde Dogu ve Bati Meselesi* [The Question of East and West in Halide Edib's Works], (Istanbul: Dergah Yayinlari), 520 pp.

¹³ Mushirul Hasan, *Between Modernity and Nationalism: Halide Edib's Encounter with Gandhi's India*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 280 pp.

¹⁴ Moulvi Abdul Haq, "Khalida Adeeab Khanum" in *Chund Humsafar*, (Karachi: Urdu Academy Sind, 1970) pp. 447 – 461.

¹⁵ Rais Ahmad Jafri, *Deed o Shuneed* [Seen and Heard], (Karachi: Rais Ahmad Jafri Academy, 1987), pp. 43 – 45.

Abstract

Halida Edib, a well known Turkish woman writer and scholar visited India in 1930s with her husband and travelled all over India, lecturing and meeting Indian intellectuals and politicians. This article discusses the significance and impact of her visit on the socio-cultural environment of South Asia. It also introduces her works in general and her feminist approach in specific. The works about Khalida Edib have also been discussed and evaluated in this article.



Based on her experiences, Halid Edib documents significant contemporary events which shaped the history of India at the time, including the Hindu-Muslim separatism and the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Her work is by far the most eloquent account of Indian society and politics in the 1930s. First published in 1937, this book presents the author's personal account of India. The author, a Turkish writer and novelist, visited the region in 1935 and gained insights into the history and sociology of the country. Based on her experiences, Halid Edib documents significant contemporary events which shaped the history of India at the time, including the Hindu-Muslim separatism and the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. by Halid Edib (Author), Mushirul Hasan (Editor). See all formats and editions Hide other formats and editions. Price. New from. \$438 in Indian Literary Criticism. Start reading Inside India (Oxford India Collection) on your Kindle in under a minute. Don't have a Kindle? Get your Kindle here, or download a FREE Kindle Reading App. Inside India book. Read 4 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. First published in 1937, this is a book about India as seen through the... It makes a conscious attempt to document significant contemporary events that were shaping the history of India at the time, such as the Gandhian movement and the Hindu-Muslim separatism." Get A Copy. Amazon.