

*Begum Shaista Ikramullah:  
A Woman Who Dared  
(1915-2000)*

**Farah Gul Baqai\***

In early forties of twentieth century, Muslim women of Delhi remembered a young girl in her twenties, well educated and talented, explaining to them about "All India Muslim League" — its motives and why it had become necessary for Indian Muslims to join it to achieve an independent Muslim State. She spoke so fluently and with such confidence and logic that flock after flock of young and old women joined Muslim League because of her oratory. It was mainly for her oratory that she became a frequent speaker in all the meetings arranged by the League in *mohallahs* and lanes of Delhi where majority of Muslim resided.

Shaista Ikramullah belonged to a family who claimed to be the descendants of Shaykh Shahab al-din Suharawardy, and well known for its significant contribution to the field of education. She was born in July 1915 in Calcutta. Her father, Hasan Suharawardy, was a brilliant surgeon. Khujista Akhtar Bano, the eldest sister of her father, is a prominent name among the pioneers of woman education. In order to translate her movement into reality she founded two girls' schools and wrote several books on women related issues.

Shaista received her early education in the traditional environment of her home where after completing the reading of the Qur'an, she was taught Persian, 'Arabic and Urdu. At the age of

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