

Chandervati

Qudratullah Shahab

Translated by Yasmeen Razi Zaidi¹

Qudratullah Shahab was a civil servant during the British Raj. After the partition of India, he served as the chief of staff of three heads of state of Pakistan. He also served as the ambassador of Pakistan to the Netherlands and as information secretary and education secretary of Pakistan. He authored many short stories and, in his later years, he opened up about his spiritual journey. "Chandervati," which was included in his memoirs, recounts his coming of age during the thirties, at a time when interreligious marriages were taboo. The author expresses his deep connection to a Brahmin girl named Chandervati. Despite their love for one other, they understood their societal and religious divide. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2023 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

Although I had been a stellar student at Prince of Wales College in Jammu Kashmir, when I joined Government College, Lahore, I did not excel in any way. I lacked both style and snobbery; and I did not even speak English with an Anglo-Indian accent. Unlike other non-native English speakers, we Indians try our best to imitate an English accent, surely a legacy of colonialism. To hide my inferiority complex and avoid ridicule, I plunged into my reading, burying myself in a veritable cocoon. And that is when I met Chandervati.

She studied at Lady Mckilligan College and lived in an ashram on Mohinie Road. We met at the Punjab Public Library, competing to borrow the same book. After a brief argument, the librarian decided to let me borrow the book for one week. As I signed my name on the register,

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