

THE BIOGRAPHY OF ASHRAFUNNISA BEGUM

A Most Noble Life is the story of Ashrafunnisa Begum, who was born in an obscure village in Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh; taught herself to read and write in secret, against the wishes of her elders and prevailing norms; and went on to teach and inspire generations of young girls at the Victoria Girls' School — the first school for girls in Lahore.

Her unusual life was written about by Muhammadi Begum, the first woman to edit a journal in Urdu. She titled the biography *Hayat-e Ashraf*, which echoes the name of her subject and means “the noblest life”. This is the first complete English translation of *Hayat-e Ashraf* (1904).

An absorbing narrative translated and annotated by CM Naim, it offers the reader glimpses of the lives of ordinary Muslim women in the 19th century who, unknown to themselves, led extraordinary lives.



A Most Noble Life

Muhammadi Begum, translated
from the Urdu by CM Naim
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