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Press Release

JMI hosts exhibition of photographs by Mrs. Vyarawalla, India's First Woman Press Photographer

An exhibition of photographs by India's first woman Press Photographer, Mrs. Homai Vyarawalla, was inaugurated on April 8, 2025 by Prof. Mazhar Asif, Vice Chancellor Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) at the university's Jamia's Premchand Archives & Literary Centre (JPALC). Mrs. Vyarawalla worked as a professional photographer from the 1930s to 1970. The exhibition puts on display some of her most iconic photographs from the four decades of her active career.

Inaugurating the exhibition which was attended by students and teachers of various Departments and Centres of the university, Prof. Asif said that there much to learn from the life of Mrs. Vyarawalla and encouraged scholars from all disciplines to come and experience the work of the legendary press photographer.

Homai Vyarawalla was born in 1913 to a Parsi family in Navsari, Gujarat. She was 13 when she met Manekshaw, her future husband and closest companion who introduced her to photography. At the time, the idea of a woman professional photographer was not easily accepted so her early work appeared under Maneckshaw's name in magazines like *Jaam e Jamshed*, *Bombay Chronicle* and the *Illustrated Weekly of India*. In 1942, the couple moved to Delhi to work for the British Information Services that would later become the British High Commission. Homai Vyarawalla is exceptional not only because she was the only woman in a male dominated profession but because her photography had a distinctive style. Her career made such an impact that when Home Minister, Sardar Patel advertised for photographers to join the newly created Press Information Bureau, he added two words: "Women Eligible."

During her three decades of work in Delhi she recorded with her camera the last days of the British Empire, the important moments in the life of the new Republic and the everyday lives of people. The exhibition opens with three famous photographs of Delhi which includes an aerial view of the second Republic Day Parade taken by Vyarawalla from the top of India Gate. The largest wall in the exhibition is devoted to Mahatma Gandhi's funeral processions. The photographs show Gandhi walking to a historic meeting with Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan while another shows India's former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri walking to the Parliament with Dr. Zakir Husain.

After her voluntary retirement from photography, Vyarawala had faded from public memory. In the mid-1990s, Sabeena Gadihoke, documentary filmmaker and teacher at the AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, while researching the history of women photographers, tracked Vyarawalla down through a lead provided by another photographer. Prof Gadihoke's work on Mrs. Vyarawalla over 15 years, which includes an illustrated biography, gave visibility to Mrs Vyarawalla's extraordinary archive of photographs. The exhibition has been curated from Prof. Gadihoke's personal collection of photographs and memorabilia.

The exhibition will be on display till April 30, 2025 and will include guided tours for students and illustrated lectures about the archival value of Mrs Vyarawalla's work.

Public Relations Office
Jamia Millia Islamia





