



Women's magazines and their role in encouraging women's education and the women's movements in pre-independent India

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Abstract

Journalists and writers hold the power of the 'pen'; Newspapers and periodicals served as a vehicle for western education and modernisation as well as an agent of Indian nationalism. Colonial Indian society was superstitious by nature, and women's lives were made much more difficult by the prevalence of evil rituals and customs. Women writers and journalists have played a crucial role in reforming the age-old superstitious belief system. During the twentieth century, journals were published in India to improve Indian society. Newspapers and periodicals were produced in all vernacular languages, with articles on the value of education and the need to eliminate superstitious beliefs and behaviours from society. This paper majorly focuses on exploring the role the women's journals and magazines played in encouraging women education and the women's movement in pre-independent India.

Keywords: women, magazine, periodicals, pre-independent, India, colonial, education, reform, authors, feminism

Introduction

Journalists all around the world have successfully used the power of the pen to address local and global issues, and women journalists have not been far behind. Women writers and Journalists had a crucial role during the British Raj, which has been grossly undervalued. Colonial India witnessed a rise in the publication of journals and magazines as a part of the country's socio-religious movements. Newspapers and magazines served as a channel for both Indian nationalism and western education and modernity. Magazines were published in India during the twentieth century to change Indian society. In the nineteenth and twentieth-century India, socio-religious movements aimed to modernise Indian women. During this period, women's periodicals started being published to reform women in colonial India.

Since the 1850s, numerous Indian women have published women's periodicals, and their contributions have been outstanding. The editorials in these magazines, which came from various places, disclose numerous previously unknown historical details about the arduous path to freedom. The publishing and expansion of these women's periodicals, as well as other movements relating to the marginalised sections of society such as peasant and worker movements, lower caste movements, and anti-colonial battles, have a nearly century-long history in India. The paper majorly focuses on exploring the role the women's journals and magazines played in encouraging women education and the women's movement in pre-independent India.

The publication of women's magazines in India during the colonial period is a watershed moment in India's women's movements. Women's magazines were first published by both men and women in colonial India during the nineteenth and twentieth century as part of socio-religious reform movements. Even though these women's publications were

formerly edited by males, women soon began to edit and publish a large number of them. These women editors became the foundation for women's writing in India. These women's periodicals provided a forum for women to write and read, as well as communicate their views, sentiments, and emotions.

Research question

Were there a lot of female writers back then?
What were how those women writers expressed themselves in colonial India?
Were women writers and journalists given adequate recognition in pre-independent India? What was their role in encouraging female education and women's movement in colonial India

Objectives

The major objectives of this paper are

- to delve into the history and find out about women writers and journalists who gained recognition in colonial India
- to find out how the women's magazines exemplified the phases of colonial India and
- to examine their roles in encouraging women's education and women's movement

Review of Literature

Mytheli Sreenivas claimed that historical research of women's periodicals provided possibilities to learn more about female journalists and authors (Sreenivas Mytheli (2003), 61) ^[6]. She further states that because women publications were edited in urban regions, they did not include women from various socioeconomic strata. She concentrated on Tamil women's periodicals, arguing that the publications were edited in both Tamil and English and

reflected the desires of middle-class educated women. These publications promoted the tenets of Victorian domesticity and attempted to educate women in the ideal wifehood, but they paid little attention to the various social structures that shaped the family in society. Magazines were anti-dowry and advocated for the abolition of early marriages as well as the necessity of girls' education.

According to Sonal Shukla, social reformers and cultural revivalists state that women periodicals in the 19th century tried to educate and equip women for the tasks that were allocated to them in their scheme of things. Himani Bannerji saw women's magazines as a qualified modern communicating place. In this perspective, it is critical to consider the role of women in India's socio-reform movements, particularly concerning the production of women's periodicals (Himani, Bannerji, 1991, 55).

These female reformers saw women's issues through the eyes of women and advocated for the abolition of dowry, purdah, and child marriage systems, as well as widow remarriages. Social reformers see the value of change in achieving a modern, egalitarian society. The reformers were concerned with modernisation, but they did not accept westernisation without reservation. He claims that concern for women's socioeconomic conditions was "much less an indicator of such ideological support for liberalism" than "particular acute concerns of interpersonal adjustments inside the family." He claimed that the women's question in the socio-reform movement failed to liberalise women because women were more entangled in a web of culture, tradition, purity, motherhood, and other factors that positioned them as shapers of the Indian nation versus against foreign domination.

Sumit Sarkar in his essay "The Woman's Question in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," puts doubt on the idea that early reform efforts were primarily led by the ideological embrace of liberal or western rationalist ideas.

Women Writer's in colonial India

Kamini Roy

Born in 1868, a Bengali poet and feminist, she was India's first woman to get an honours degree in British India. She was also one of the first Indian females to attend school. Kamini Roy was born into a Bengali household of privilege. Her father was a judge as well as a writer, and she learned how to write from him. She began at the age of eight. In 1889, she released her first book of poems named *Alo O Chhaya*. *Mahasweta*, *Pundorik*, *Dwip O Dhup*, *Smritichihno*, *She Ki*, *Sukh*, *Era Jodi Jane*, and others were among some of her significant works. Roy defied societal norms to complete her education and become the first graduate Indian woman. She helped advance feminism in the Indian subcontinent and also helped women in Bengal to achieve their voting rights.

Ismat Chughtai

One of the earliest and most well-known Urdu authors. Ismat Chughtai's revolutionary writing is well-known. Her outspoken and even controversial words influenced generations of women. Ismat was the first woman to write about same-sex attraction as a feminist. Ismat, who was born in 1915, was a pioneer in her field, publishing frequently on female sexuality and other topics. Her writings inspire young authors and writers, and they look up to her. One of her best works is *Lihaaf*, which was taken to court for obscenity in 1944. In the Islamic community,

Ismat fought for women's rights. Shaikh Abdullah and his wife Waheed Jahan Begam (1886-1939) created another periodical, *Khatun*, which encouraged women's education and wrote about the necessity of girls' schools. These publications promoted women's education and stated that only educated women could be decent wives and mothers.

Hemant Kumari Devi Chaudhrani

Hemant Kumari Devi was the daughter of Navin Chandra Rai, a Brahmo Samaji, and was born in 1868. She was India's first woman journalist in Hindi and the editor of *Sugrihini*, a women's magazine published from Allahabad. In the first edition of her newspaper *Sugrahini*, the opening lines of her editorial were: "*O my dear sisters, open your doors & see who has come to visit you. This is a sister of yours called Sugrihini. She has come to you because you are oppressed and illiterate and in bondage.... Welcome her & bless her. May the mother help you and Sugrihini...*"

In the above lines, Hemant Kumari refers to women as her sisters who are oppressed illiterate and are leading a life of bondage and so the need to be rescued from that life. In a way, Hemant Kumari tries to indicate the importance and need of education among this gender to be able to live a life of dignity and freedom.

Uma Nehru

A regular contributor to Rameshwari Nehru's *Stree Darpan*, a women's monthly magazine started in 1909, in which she voiced feminist views. She was imprisoned for taking part in the Salt March and the Quit India Movement. She was twice elected to the Lok Sabha from the Uttar Pradesh town of Sitapur after independence. She served in the Rajya Sabha from 1962 until her death. Uma Nehru wrote a more radical article in which she criticized revivalists for attempting to reimpose classic heroines like Sita and Savitri on current women in society (Talwar, 1999, 227)

Women magazines exemplifying three phases of colonial India

The history of women's magazines can be divided into three phases: (1) the reformist phase in the nineteenth century, (2) the radical critical period in the first part of the twentieth century, and (3) the feminist era in the second half of the twentieth century. After Independence, when women's journals returned to domestic concerns, most journals became platforms for wide-ranging and hard-hitting criticism of Indian society, gender roles and domains of activity, and also became vehicles of politicisation.

Cultural and Ideological campaign in the 19th century

The nineteenth century saw a cultural and ideological campaign against age-old superstitions. In the religious realm, they wanted to eliminate idolatry and polytheism, as well as the priest's monopoly on religious knowledge, and to simplify religious rites. Ranade, Dayanand, Phule, and Sree Narayana Guru were all vocal opponents of the caste system.

Western-educated woman reformers and the establishment of women's groups marked the end of the nineteenth century. Swarnakumari Devi established Lady Association in 1886, Pandita Ramabai established *Sarada Sadan* in 1892, and Ramabai Ranade established *Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club* in 1902 and *Sevasadan* in 1909.

The First World War saw women's organisations and associations began to develop. From the perspective of women, this time saw the publication of women's

publications by women journalists (Talwar, 1999, 206). To give jobs and education to women, western-educated women reformers founded independent women groups around the end of the nineteenth century. Pandita Ramabai's Sarada Sadan and Ramabai Rai Ranade's Sevasadan are two notable women's groups in the Hindi areas. Balabodi was the first Hindi-language women's journal, published in 1874 by Bhartendu Harishchandra, a male reformer.

'Grihalaksmi' (Laksmi of the House) authored by Gopala Devi rehabilitating women and domesticity, while another publication titled Stree darpan (the Mirror of Women) edited by Rameswari Nehru encouraged education, political awakening, and battled gender inequality. Stree darpan published autobiographies of successful women to motivate them. Third, a publication known as Camd (Moon) promoted women's full engagement in the public realm. Women's publications played a critical role in pre-independence India's modernization process. These magazines provided a venue for women to express their opinions and fostered female education. By reporting all women's activities and institutions, these magazines underline the link between dogmas and action.

According to Orsini, the first phase of women's periodicals concentrated on the function of education in transforming women into Sugrhnis (ideal housewives). The Streedarpan, unlike Grihalaksmi, opposed role-based schooling, purdah, and fought for politicisation and women's rights. Streedarma advocated for women's suffrage and encouraged women to join the independence struggle. Camd portrays women in Indian society as active participants and empowered persons. Camd instilled in women a sense of civic and political responsibility as well as a critical mindset.

Anni Beasant edited Streedharama, a periodical, and her organisation, the Women Indian Association, encouraged women to join the national struggle. Another publication maintained by Sanatan Dharma Mahamandal, Arya Mahila, focused on the situation of women in light of Vedic knowledge. Surprisingly, these women's periodicals also carried pieces concerning women's rights in other nations. The other Hindi-language publications were Maduri and Saraswati. These publications featured articles about women's lifestyles in foreign countries.

The majority of these women's publications produced books on social issues. Streedarpan wrote several articles about men's attitudes toward their spouses and the relevance of widow remarriages. When Streedharpan was unable to recruit female teachers to teach the girls, he placed advertisements in the newspaper. Women's journals like Streedharpan, Marayada, and Saraswati published articles with images of schools to encourage women to continue their education. Maryada, a Hindi women's magazine, published articles advocating for women's suffrage and urging readers to vote for female candidates.

Women editors encouraging women's movement

The articles encouraged women to shun foreign clothing and items and join the Swadesi movement. However, the majority of women editors did not adopt western feminist ideals and chastised their contemporary female activists who did. Uma Nehru, for example, wrote an essay in Maryada Hindi Journal criticising the reimposition of the Sita Savitri ideal on contemporary women. The editor of Streedarapan, who urged contemporary women to venerate these Savitri and Sita ideals, rejected this argument. Partha Charterji

wrote on colonial India's reformers who were working on the reformation of the society and transformation of women.

Magazines disregarded the real issues and the marginalised

Women publications in India nourished this building of the "new woman." The articles in women's periodicals promoted women to become domestic wives based on Victorian ideals and morality learned through western education. Though they encouraged women to join in the free fight, they made it clear that a woman's primary responsibility is to make her husband happy. These periodicals left columns for household chores such as how to raise children and clean the house, among other things. These publications were aimed at the middle and upper-middle classes of society. They left no room for women from the 18 castes and classes on the margins. It was unconcerned about the tradition.

In 1857, Streebodh became India's first women's journal. The rise of educated middle-class men and their desire to modernise their wives prepared the path for the publishing of Streebodh, a Gujarati magazine. Fiction, biography, informative pieces, notably on science, history, geography, travelogues, poems (typically in the style of 'Garba' songs), and miscellanea were all included. This publication highlighted family moral qualities such as loyalty, cleanliness, and harmony. Streebodh did not print any articles about reform movements in the second half of the nineteenth century, hence it isn't a reform movement journal.

Women's periodicals were majorly started by the Indian middle and upper classes who were products of the western education system. The newly educated middle class discovered that illiteracy was the primary cause of women's plight in colonial India. They discovered that Indian women are superstitious and illiterate. These western-educated male reformers edited women's publications to spread the value of education in Indian society for the reformation of Indian women. During this time, most magazines focused on Victorian domesticity, teaching women that they must adjust and do everything they can to make their spouses happy.

Women editors see women as exploited and encourage them to oppose exploitation via education. They created a forum for female readers to share their experiences and have discussions on women's issues. The domestic function of women in their families was also justified in these women's journals. Both men and women edited magazines that featured articles about sewing, knitting, and poultry needlework, encouraging women to put their free time to good use. They released recopies of articles about cleanliness, child-rearing, and cooking. The majority of these publications praised nationalism and encouraged women to join the Indian independence movement.

Conclusion

Women's magazines were crucial in rewriting women's history from a female perspective. Magazines provided insight into gender relations, social structure, political and social changes, and women's diverse responses to the changing environment. Women's magazines can be thought of as a modern form of communication. Magazines and periodicals gave women a place to express themselves while also encouraging women's education. In the beginning,

women's magazines emphasised the role of education in transforming them into '*sugrihinis*' so that they may be able to do their gender assigned roles in a better way. Still, it can be seen that the publications indicated the need for women education in an underlying way. Women's journals were crucial in increasing women's awareness of nationalism and motivating them to engage in India's independence struggle. They wrote about women's political empowerment, pushing and demanding women's enfranchisement.

In the present time in India, there are many accomplished female authors. Writing has become a respectable career in India. Women are more vocal, and the desire to write books and articles on ordinary life as well as forbidden subjects in India. We value these women because they have aided us in our personal development.

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