Social Awakening on the Rights of Muslim Women in Early Twentieth Century with Special Reference to Women’s Urdu journals of North India

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Abstract

In the last decade of the nineteenth century the deplorable and oppressive condition of women in general and Muslim women in particular was an issue of concern among the social reformers of the time. Various social evils and practices such as polygamy, sati, child-marriage, purdah etc prevailed among women. Thus, some ashrāf families (noble families) in North India came forward to take up the cause of these challenging issues which were the main obstacles in the progress of women segments of society. This article seeks to examine the reformist writings with reference to women’s Urdu journals of North India which persuaded the necessity to make women aware about their social rights and the Muslim social reformers gave their opinions in the light of Islamic perspective.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century the deplorable and oppressive condition of women, which was due to their narrow mindedness and conservatism of Indian women in general and Muslim in particular was an issue of concern among the social reformers of the time. Various social evils and practices such as Polygamy, Sati, Child-marriage, Purdah etc were prevailed among women. Thus, some ashrāf families (noble families) in North India came forward to take up the cause of these challenging issues which were the main obstacles in the progress of women segments in society. This article seeks to examine the reformist writings with reference to women’s Urdu journals of North India which persuaded the necessity to aware women about their social rights and the Muslim social reformers gave their opinions in the light of Islamic perspectives.

During the period under review, an early advocate of women’s rights was Syed Mumtaz Ali who personally concerned for the status of women. From his childhood he had to observe many women in his own family who led their lives miserably and faced social discriminations. Although he was a well-educated Muslim but married to an uneducated woman whom he taught the primary level of education. However, she died by leaving two children.

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Thus, his personal loss and observations turned his attention to do something for women and finally he succeeded in it by publishing the journal *Tahzib-un-Niswan* with the help of his second wife Muhammadi Begum who was an educated lady. Abu Athar Hafiz Jalandhar, one of the contributors of *Tahzib-un-Niswan* wrote an article on *Maulvi Mumtaz Ali* which originally published in *Makhzan* in 1927 and later on reprinted in *Tahzib-un-Niswan*. He asserted that Mumtaz Ali also wrote *Huquq-un-Niswan* (Rights of women) which was unique in the sense as it gave the references of *Quran* (Holy book of Muslim) and *Hadith* (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad) commentary with his logical arguments. It highlighted Mumtaz Ali’s approach towards women’s rights and his involvement in religious debate early in his life. This pioneer work discussed various reasons about the superiority of men over women and the logical views of Mumtaz Ali. It also stated the equality of men and women on most of legal matters according to which the daughters were given the rights of inheritance and *mehr*, the question of polygamy was rejected unless the wife permit it, widows were allowed to remarry and child marriage was considered as illegal but only allowed in certain circumstances mentioned in *Quran*. In short, this work describes the rights of women and their role in Muslim family life.

At that time, Rashidul Khairi, editor of *‘Ismat* said about the miserable condition of women through his novels such as *Hayat-i-Saleha* (Saleha’s life), *Subh-i-Zindagi* (Morning of life), *Sham-i-Zindagi* (Evening of life) and *Shab-i-Zindagi* (Night time of life) and also gave his statements on polygamy, rights of inheritance, divorce and *Khulà*. He depicted the pathetic story of a married women in article *Aisi Biyahi se Kunwari Bhalí* (Better unmarried woman to have bad marriage) which showed that how an inappropriate marriages ended the lives of women. The misery of a married life was also shown from a poem in his journal which stated the complaint of a married girl who oppressed by her in-laws. He also cited an addition *Tamaddun* (civilization) for men in *‘Ismat* whose chief purpose was to bring changes in men’s behavior towards women. Rashidul Khairi in an article *Sharia ka

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2. Urdu journal published from Lahore in 1901 by Hafiz Jalandhari.
5. *‘Ismat*, vol 24, no 1, (July, 1908), p-43.
8. *Tamaddun* was a journal of Rashidul Khairi published in 1911.
Khoon (Murder of Islamic Law) included a letter of cruel husband who after hearing the birth of daughter wrote to his wife that the news of girl’s birth was worse than hundred punishments. Thus, his writings persuaded the necessity to aware women about their social rights.

Another social activist Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also articulated his ideas on women’s rights. Being a legal practitioner himself, he greatly emphasised all the legal rights of Muslim women which granted in Islamic law and Hadith. However, the women were unaware due to the lack of their Islamic knowledge. Thus, he stated the need of women’s responsiveness toward their rights. He highlighted all the world religions and asserted that Islam is unique in the sense to acquire knowledge and Masawat (egalitarian approach) in the matter of women’s rights. He stressed the fact that Islam is the first among all religions which treated woman as a legal personality by granting her rights of inheritance and property. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah informed that women did not have any significant role in ancient Rome, Egypt, Iran and in Hinduism they were deprived of their rights as it evident from Manusmriti (Hindu Law book). He also informed about the culturally advanced Europe and America where women enjoyed no legal rights. Lateron laws were passed there in favour of women and the British Parliament passed the Married Women’s Property Act in 1882. Consequently, women occupied a respectable position in west under the influence of Islamic Shari’at Laws. Thus, all these instances showed the impact of Islam on various rights of women.

We find that most of the Urdu journals of women in early twentieth century discussed the matter of women’s rights and duties to aware them as the women were socially exploited due to lack of knowledge of their legal rights. The magazine Tahzib-un-Niswan included a debate Aurat Ghulam Nahi (woman not a slave) which asserted the fact that women should know about their rights on which many prominent personalities like Khawar Durrani, Riffat Husain, Salima Begum, Jamila Begum and Sultana Kazia gave their statements. Thus, it provided a platform through which the women became able to understand their rights. Sultana Kazia wrote about ignorance of women in article Zehniyyat (Mentality) which stated

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13 Feminist writer from Calcutta.
the inferior position of Indian Muslim women as compared to the ladies of other Muslim countries because they did not know the social rights which given to them in Islam. Thus, the foremost duty of women was to know their legal rights.

All the Urdu journals provide us detailed information about women segment of society particularly Muslim middle class in early twentieth century and it also reflected the gradual changes in their social status and privileged position in society during the first half of twentieth century.

About the various women’s rights in Islam like *Khiyar* (Mutual agreements in Muslim marriage), *Nikah* (marriage), polygamy, *Wirâ’sat* (inheritance), child-marriage, *Talaq* (divorce), *Khulà* (separation from women’s side), *Mehr* (dower money given to the bride), *Purdah*, household duties, the journals gave examples of women in early days of Islam and their social status. The magazine *Anis-i-Niswan* said about the rights of women with reference of Quranic interpretations. It gives extensive information about the condition of women before coming of Islam and how their position has changed after the reveal of the *Surah Al-Nisa* (related to women) under the title of *Surah Al-Nisa Ke Mutabiq*.

In order to understand the status of women, first it is necessary to know about the condition of women in pre-Islamic period (age of *Jahiliyah*) where the women were regarded as a piece of property and treated as chattels. They enjoyed no rights and their social status was low. The man could marry as many wives as he liked and could divorce according to his wishes. It showed that the practices of polygamy and polyandry were prevalent in Arab. The women were also deprived from the right of inheritance. When a man died his elder son or other relatives had the right to possess his widow and married her if they pleased, without setting a dowry on them or marrying them to others or prohibiting them from marriage. Not only this, the women also lost their lives. When a father was informed about the birth of a daughter, he buried her alive. Thus, the mother tried to escape from this painful destiny dig hole herself to throw the girl or to strangle the daughter after their birth.

Maulana Abdus Salam Nadvi in his article *Huquq-un-Niswan aur Islam* (Women’s rights and Islam) says,

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16 Edited by Shaikh Muhammad Ikram and his wife Mrs. Ikram.

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To Quote:

19 This un-Islamic and illegal practice to bury the girls or to kill them is quoted also by Maulana Shibli Nomani in an article *Aurat aur Islam* (Women and Islam) in the journal *Purdah-Nashin* in the following words:

20 One of the contributors in *Anis-i-Niswan* gives knowledgeable information about the status of women before the rise of Islam. He traced the position of women from Roman civilization where the women also completely depended on men. Thus, the position of women was raised with respect and dignity after the coming of Islam21.

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The journal *Anis-i-Niswan* made aware the women about their social rights of marriage laws\(^22\) (verse 4, ayat 3:22:24), relation between husband and wife\(^23\), how to deal with children and orphans (verse 4, ayat 6:11:12), legal practices of inheritance\(^24\) (verse 4, ayat 11:12:176) and divorce\(^25\) (verse 4, ayat 20:35) with especial references of *Surah Al-Nisa* and *Al-Baqara*.

The magazine *Noor Jahan* cited an important tract entitled *Islam main Aurat ki Haisiyat* (position of women in Islam) by Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum of Bhopal. She informed that women were given more rights in Islam than any other religion. She stated that Islam treated the women with kindness and banned the abuses such as polygamy, female infanticide which prevalent in pre-Islamic period. Thus, she emphasised the honourable position of women in Islam. Her vision for women’s right and duties was also shown from her work *Muslim Home-A Guide to Muslim Married Couple*\(^26\).

As a matter of fact, the Urdu journals widely discussed the problems of marriage, inheritance and divorce of Muslim community to spread social awareness among women. On the problems of marriage the editor Mumtaz Ali said about the peculiar experience of men and women in Muslim society where the men got the opportunity to receive western education and the women were deprived of it. Mumtaz Ali argued that though the Muslim girls were illiterate but it did not mean that marriage with the European ladies were a right decision. Actually, this marriage was against social norms which troubled the family set up as they were unable to adjust with their Indian in-laws. As a result of this, the couples become separated in extended family\(^27\). It is mentioned that in society the only criteria to select the boys was his education, employment and no one cared for other qualities, while for girls her beauty and complexion was given more consideration. Though, the other qualities of girls such as their manner, attitudes and duties towards their in-laws were also need special attention. Thus, the ideal Islamic path should be followed in which the mutual agreement of

\(^{23}\) Also cited, Ibid, vol-1, no-10, (October,1939),pp-2-5.
\(^{25}\) *Anis-i-Niswan*, vol-3, no-7,(July,1940),pp-2-5.
\(^{27}\) *Anis-i-Niswan*, vol-1, no-3(March,1939),pp-3-5.


boys and girls were obligatory for their marriage. In this matter, the journal *Khātoon* also advised the parents to take the consent of their daughters about their marriage as the unsuitable marriages would destroy the lives of daughter. The eminent writer Siddiqa Bano in journal ‘*Ismat*’ also favoured the mutual understanding of two parties in marriages which was ideal to lead a happy married life.

While discussing the rights of Muslim women regarding *Khiyar* (Mutual agreements in Muslim marriage), the journal *Saheli* gives the following version:

Sakina Begum from Lahore wrote an article in journal *Sharif Bibi* about the legality of *Nikah* (marriage) in Islam in which she explained the word *Nikah* as a sacred social contract between bride and groom which based on mutual agreement of both parties, procedure of *Nikah*, its various conditions and other related issues like *Mehr* (dower given to the bride) etc and also gives a list of relations with whom marriage is unlawful in Islam like grand-mothers, sister, grand-daughter, sister’s daughter, brother’s daughter, aunts etc.

In this regard magazine also included a fascinating novel *Gudar Ka Lal: Khawateen aur Ladkiyon ke liye Ek Nasehatkhez Novel* (Ruby in rags: a Novel with advice for women and Girls) which mentioned the incompatible marriage and polygamy.

About the practices of Polygamy, an article in *Tahzib-un-Niswan* mentioned the grief of a woman whose husband had four wives and she had looked after three children more of her husband from other wives. In spite of that, she was not well treated by her

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30 *Khātoon*, vol-6, no-6, (June, 1910), pp-278-80.
husband\textsuperscript{34}. However, Rashidul Khairi said that no man could do justice to more than one woman in spirit of Quranic injunction. He said that the Quran permitted polygamy in certain cases otherwise monogamy\textsuperscript{35}.

The editorial of \textit{Sartaj} contained a discussion about polygamy in Islamic context. In certain cases, polygamy is permissible. To quote:


Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also criticized polygamy strongly and stated Quranic injunctions. In that regards, he noted the social legislation which passed in Turkey to end polygamy there\textsuperscript{37}. Rashidul Khairi in his novel \textit{Saukan ka Jalapa} (Sorrow of Rival Wife) mentioned the helpless wife who suffered due to the remarriage of her husband. He also criticised fathers for abstained the daughters from their legal share of inheritance. For example, in \textit{Mauda}\textsuperscript{38}, a father preferred to keep his whole property intact rather than to share it for the welfare of his daughter\textsuperscript{39}.

About the right of Wirā’sat (Inheritance), Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah particularly mentioned the state of Punjab and U.P Tenancy Acts which denied the Muslim women their share of agricultural property\textsuperscript{40}. He also gave reference of Baluchistan, Sindh, Gujarat and Bombay where the Muslim communities deprived daughters a share of \textit{jaidad} (property) in their family. Thus, he suggested Muslim to follow \textit{Quranic} injunctions strictly\textsuperscript{41}.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Tahzib-un-Niswan}, vol-33, no-29, (11 October, 1930), pp-1017-1018.


\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Khātoon}, vol-5, no-1, (January, 1908), p-43.


\textsuperscript{38} place in Nagpur.


\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Tahzib-un-Niswan}, vol-32, no-22, (8 June, 1929), pp-537-40.

Also cited, \textit{Noor Jahah}, (Amritsar), vol-1, no-7, 8, (July, August, 1926), p-47.


In the February issue of *Noor Jahan*, 1930, gives a detailed information about the Muslim law of *Haq-ul-Mirās* (inheritance).

To quote:

The reputed journal *Muslīma* gives the following version of the law of inheritance:

Another important social matter which deals in women’s journals was early Child Marriage and various controversies related to it. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah stated that early marriage was prevailed in India and it was not found in other countries. The Hindus

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practiced child marriage which found in their religious text such as *Dharma Shastra, Smritis* and they performed it as their religious duty. The *Pandits* also gave interpretations on different marriage age which based on superstitious beliefs. The age of puberty gave priority of the consent of two parties at legal marriage which hardly followed among Hindus or Christian. An English critic Katherine Mayo who wrote *Mother India*, greatly criticised early marriage which prevailed among Hindus but she did not point out Muslim on that regard. Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also wrote about the opponents who tried to manipulate Islamic Laws. However, Syed Mumtaz Ali cited a list in which mentioned different ages and penalties regarding the age of marriage.

The magazine *Noor Jahan* cited a number of articles in it which discussed the *Sarda Act* against child marriage passed by the Central legislature. The author Mir Aziz-ur-Rahman stated that the *Sarda Act* was passed on 28th September, 1929 which fixed the marriageable age of girls and boys as fourteen and eighteen years. The marriage before that age was prohibited according to this Act. About *Sarda Act*, the journal *Zeb-un-Nisa* quotes:

This Act came into effect on 1st April, 1930 which applied for both the communities. He favoured the aims of this act and also pointed out that Islam did not support the early child marriage and argued that a universal registration of birth was necessary without which it was ineffective. Another writer from Saharanpur, Qamar Jahan Begum also wrote about the birth certificate of children supporting this act.

Regarding the early child marriage, the magazine *Zeb-un-Nisa* mentioned that it adversely affects the health of girls as they became mother in too young age and unable to

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51 *Noor Jahan*, (Lahore), vol-7, no-12, (December, 1929), pp-37-40.
bear the whole burden of family life. The child which born were also suffered from malnutrition due to their immature birth and the early marriages were also practiced by Lower class Muslim also. Later on, many voices of Muslim leaders arose against this act. One of the religious association of Muslim, Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind opposed this act when it was discussed in legislative assembly. The President of this organization, Maulana Mufti Kifayatullah in his newspaper Al-Jamiat opposed this act. The other member Maulana Muhammad Yaqub, criticized those Muslims who tried to impose this legislation in the presence of Muslim Personal law.

Coming to the question of Talaq (divorce), the journals included different terms and conditions of it with special reference of Quranic laws and mentioned the reasons for separation. Islam does not like Talaq (Divorce), though it is permissible in Islam under certain circumstances like maladjustments.

In an article on Talaq wa Khulà (Divorce and Separation), the editor Muhammad Ikram expressed his views that Talaq is permissible in Islam only in certain circumstances like maladjustment etc. It gives chance for further consideration or reconciliation between husband and wife. But if they do not find any way to continue their marital relation, they are free to separate from each other.

To quote:

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51 Zeb-un-Nisa, vol-1, no-3 (July, 1934), pp-4-6.
52 Noor Jahan, (Lahore), vol-8, no-2, (February, 1930), pp-119-123.
54 Anis-i-Niswan, vol-1, no-3 (March, 1939), p-57.
The journal *Muslima* laid stress on the following condition of *Talaq* in Islam. If the couples have differences between them, they may live separately for some time but it is not a permanent solution and it may create some other problems of their characters. Therefore, Islam gives an option either for reconciliation or for *Talaq*. In the case of *Talaq*, the husband is bound to give some proof of his accusation /bad character.

To quote:

55 As the women could not get justice due to the negligence of their husbands in early twentieth century, the Ulema and the elite classes took various steps to solve this problem. Thus, various journals acted to aware the women about their social rights of *Khulā* (Separation from women’s side).

To deter the women from the right of *Khulā* is against Islamic injunction as Islam gives them the right of *Khulā*. The women from places of Hyderabad, Bhopal and other provinces have availed this right. However, in Hindustan the Muslim men used to divorce their (noble) wife whenever they wished, but the oppressed women had no right to separate from their husband and they remained to live miserably. In extreme cases the oppressed women began to leave their religion. Thus, the women should raise their voice for the right of *Khulā* which given in Islam.

Farooqi Begum, the Editor of *Rahbar-i-Niswan* highlighted the main aspects *Khulà* which quoted at length

The journal *NoorJahan* emphasized the right of *Khulà (Haq-ul-Khulà)* and points out if right to divorce is the right of men, in that case, the right of *Khulà* is women’s right. If the male members overcome women’s right to *Khulà*, why the women cannot use the right of *Khulà* for their welfare.

To quote:

The contributor Asif Ali in journal *Anis-i-Niswan* gives a list of the circumstances in which a woman could seek *Khulà* like the disappearance of husband for four year, his negligence or failure to provide the maintenance of his wife for a period of two years, if he had been sentenced to seven years imprisonment or more, if he failed to perform his martial obligations without any reasonable cause for a period of three years, if he was impotent at the time of marriage and continued be so, in the case of insanity or any other disease for a period

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57 *Noor Jahan*, (Lahore), vol-8, no-2,(February,1930), p-144.
of two years, if a woman had been married off by her elders before the age of fifteen or puberty and the marriage had not been consummated, she could abandon the marriage before attaining the age of eighteen years. The other is if the husband treated his wife with cruelty, have the habit to assault her or make her life miserable and attempt to force her to lead an immoral life and to get rid of her property, to prevent her from exercising her legal rights over it and if he had more wives than one whom he not treated equally in accordance with Quranic injunctions. Thus, these were the grounds on the basis of which a Muslim woman could obtain Khulà.  

A Bill was also passed according to which the women could seek a judicial Khulà. It was introduced in Central legislative assembly in 1936 by Qazi Muhammad Ahmad Kazmi, the member of legislative assembly, M.L.A from Meerut as well as a member of Jamiat and enacted in 1939.  

However, the objection was raised by the Ulemas who were not satisfied with the proposed bill. According to which, the suits of the dissolution of marriage should be held in proper courts under the supervision of Muslim judges and if the judges was not Muslim, the suit should be passed from one place to another until it could find a Muslim official. After the decision, the suit would be referred back to the original court. If anyone appeals against the decision of trial court, then it would to the high court which decided again by a Muslim judge. About it one of the contributors of ‘Ismat in article Qanun Tansikhat-e-Nikah-e-Muslimat Ka Hashar also said that without the appointment of Muslim judges, the cases of dissolution of marriage of Muslim woman could not be conducted. Thus, the objection of Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind was continued even after the passing of this act. Later on in 1940, the Central Committee of Jamiat approved certain amendments in it under the Presidentship of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani.

The other related issue with marriage was about the fixation of Mehr (Dower money given to the bride). In the marriage contract, the woman is entitled for mehr but it should be

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fixed keeping in view the economic condition of the husband. It also protects the dignity of women by bonding in marriage and meant economic security of the girl.62

While addressing the meeting of Anjuman-i-Dar-ul-Khawateen, Agra Nazr Karar asked how many women received the dower money (HaqMehr) from their husband? At the time of marriage, large amount of money is fixed by girl’s family beyond the capacity of boy which is against Islamic injunction.

To quote:

63 Often the husband avoided prompt payment thought that the ex-wife would exempt him from payment as she being harassed for long64. Sometimes the Muslim husbands could seek support from the Ulema and Maulvis who articulated that those wives who would give up the right of mehr for the sake of their husbands, they were placed in paradise. They also lessen the amount of mehr sometimes without any strong reason. In this way, the men tried to keep away the Muslim women from their legal rights of mehr65.

The issue of Purdah was another important matter which raised discussion in Muslim community. The early social reformer of nineteenth century, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan favoured purdah for the Muslim women to protect their modesty. However, the modernist reformers of early twentieth century argued on customary (riwaji) purdah in the light of Quranic injunctions and Hadith which reflected in women’s journals.

A lady from Hyderabad in ‘Ismat define the meaning of Purdah in Islamic context. Purdah is beneficial for women because it protects their chastity and honour. Purdah is defined

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Also cited, Saheli (Lahore), vol-6, no-5 (May, 1930), pp-13-15.
63 Noor Jahan, (Lahore), vol-8, no-2, (February, 1930), p-143. 
Also cited, Saheli (Amritsar), vol-4, no-9, (September, 1928), p-44.
64 Tahzib-un-Niswan, vol-33, no-23, (5 April, 1930), pp-319-21. 
Also cited, Noor Jahan, (Lahore) vol-8, no-2, (February, 1930), pp-142-45.
as veiling which protects the women and their voice from the free mixing of male member. Islam gives more emphasis on Purdah than any other religion.

To quote:

66 Syed Mumtaz Ali, editor of Tahzib-un-Niswan stated that Quran did not instruct the women to be kept segregated or cover their face strictly instead it prescribed Shari’at based purdah which maintain modesty of women. According to this, the women could uncovered their face and hands within veil and move freely in public places. Actually, he does not favour to abolish purdah but said for the reform of existing custom in which the men and women should keep modest behavior and allowed the women greater freedom to develop their status67.

The editor of Khātoon, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah also had an open-minded thought on the institution of purdah and his view was based on the study of Holy Quran and Islamic teaching. He did not oppose purdah but favoured for the complete change of the customary veiling (rasmi purdah) as in India it become adhered to an evil custom (biddat). Thus, he argued against the customary purdah which is evidenced from Khātoon68. He stated that the purdah carried by women in India was in its extreme form which curtailed their freedom and socially restricted them. He said that such type of purdah was not prescribed in Islam and gave examples of the enlightened ladies from Prophet’s families in early days of Islam where they actively participated in all fields. He also gave references of Sharai’purdah from outside world where the women enjoyed greater freedom. Thus, the seclusion of women in India regarded as a social status and prestige of upper classes rather than any religious identity69. He further said about the Muslim jurists such as Abu Hanifa and Abu Yusuf who

Also cited, Purdah-Nashin, vol-7, no-3, (March, 1912), pp-12-17.
68 Muhammad Abdullah, Shaikh, Sawanith-Umi Begum Abdullah, Kohi-noor Press, Delhi, 1954, p-16.
69 Khātoon, vol-6, no-7 (July, 1910), pp-330-334.
agreed that the women could move outside their houses and exposed their face and hands and the men should lower their gaze in presence of women. In short, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah emphasized the Shari’at laws which suggested modesty for both men and women.\textsuperscript{70}

Another observer of customary purdah was Rashidul Khairi, the editor of ‘Ismat who opined that in Muslim society a woman could perform haj along with men but still they remained in strict confinement because if any stranger heard her voice it was considered haram (sin). Not only that if a woman got a chance to go outside, they sit in a doli which already covered. He remarked it a double kind of purdah which was horrible and such type of extreme isolation was not mentioned in Sharai’ Purdah.\textsuperscript{71} Thus, the early reformers regarded customary purdah as the main hinderance for the progress of women and there was no religious basis for it.

About the seclusion of women, various journals gave information of its origin with reference of epics, law of Manu and also from Quran. These studies proved that women were confined in their house from ancient times onwards in every religion and the ladies from Sharif families observed purdah. Thus, purdah was not a religious barrier but it was a social custom which was equally practiced by both Hindu and Muslim in different social context.\textsuperscript{72} The journal Saheli in article Purdah aur Islam (Purdah and Islam)\textsuperscript{73} stated the beginning of Purdah in Islamic perspective and included the view of social reformer Justice Ameer Ali who said that the seclusion of women was in vogue from pre-Islamic period (age of Jahiliya) when the women continued to enjoy freedom in every field. Thus, it is wrong to assume that women kept in strict purdah in early days in Islam.

The Purdah which was in vogue among the Muslim was not mentioned during the period of Khalifa. The women from upper section used to come in front of men. During the 7\textsuperscript{th} A.H, the Khalifa became old and the Islamic government suffered a lot under Tataris. At

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\textsuperscript{71} ‘Ismat, vol-62,no-6, (December,1938), pp-451-452
\textsuperscript{72} Anis-i-Niswan, vol-1,no-3(March,1939),pp-12-15.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Saheli}, (Amritsar), vol-3,no-6, (March,1927),pp-49-52.
\end{flushleft}
that time, there was discussion among the Ulemas that is the women opened their face, hand or not?

To quote:

Haya Meerthi in his article Rasmi Purdah published in Khatun-i-Mashriq says that in my opinion the present rasmi Purdah should be continued but he was against strict Purdah.

To quote:

The other magazine Purdah-Nashin in support of Purdah cited an article of renowned Muslim scholar, Maulana Shibli Nomani who gave instances of glorious purdah observed ladies from Islamic period and their achievements. Thus, he viewed that Purdah was not a hindrance and considered it as a symbol of Islamic culture. He was not in favour to discard purdah (be purdagi) but intended moderate form of purdah.

Apart from this, the periodical Anis-i-Niswan mentioned an informative article Ghoonghat(veiling). The author Shaikh Abdul Qadir wrote that Ghoonghat is not observed for going outsides, but it observed inside the Hindu household by women in front of father-in-law and all elder male relatives for respect. In this context, he differentiates Muslim purdah which followed inside or outside the home.

Besides the origin of Purdah, various journals cited the growing resentment which generated among the Muslim. During early twentieth century, the women from outside world such as Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Persia, Afghanistan and North Africa enjoyed the

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74 Ibid, p-49.  
76 Purdah-Nashin, vol-6, no-7, (December,1911), pp-4-8.  
77 Ghoonghat is a dupatta or head scarf worn to cover the head.  
liberty of movement but the Muslim women in India were deprived from it because of their strictness in purdah. The journal Khatoon-i-Mashriq cited an article Hamara Purdah (Our Veil) which stated the need of changes in customary purdah in India due to the changes in society. The writer gave references of outside world where the women left purdah and took part in various activities. He said that the liberty enjoyed by women in outside world is suited to the condition prevailed there, but that was not appropriate for Indian Muslim ladies. He also gave example of educated Muslim women from respectable Sharif families of Hyderabad such as Begum Khadiv Jung, Mrs. Ameer Husain and Mrs. Sofi who received education within purdah. Thus, Purdah was not an obstacle in the path of women’s progress.

Some remarked that purdah restricted women’s freedom and deprived them from education. However, the periodical Saheli mentioned the satirical verses of great poet Akbar Allahabadi in support of purdah who was a strong supporter of cultural identity of Muslim society. The journals also noted the name of modern reformist Begum of Bhopal, Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum who spoke at Madrasah-i-Sultania regarding the custom of Purdah and wrote the book Al-Hijab or Why Purdah is necessary in 1922. She herself visited many Islamic countries such as Turkey, Arab, Egypt and other western countries noticed that the women followed Islamic purdah. Thus, she advised such type of Sharai’ purdah to the country of Hindustan and argued that purdah was a religious binding on every Muslim woman and suggested various ways to impart education to the women.

The journal Purdah-Nashin noticed the view of Lady Dufferin about Tāalim-i-Niswan aur Purdah (women’s education and Purdah).

Also cited, Saheli,(Lahore),vol-21, no-5,(May,1930),pp-33-34.
Awaz-i-Niswan, vol-5,no,9(September,1938),pp-77-81.
80 Obtained M.A degree from A.M.U.
83 Saheli(Lahore),vol-21,no-4,(April,1941),pp-9-10.
Also cited, Noor Jahan,(Lahore), vol-8,no-7,(July, 1930), p-412.
85 Wife of Viceroy Lord Dufferin.
At the time of departure from Hindustan lady Dufferin opined, ‘those ladies who maintained their life in Purdah were lucky’. She said that Purdah which is prescribed in Quran was not a hinderance in the path of education. It is generally viewed that after gaining education, the women would become ill-mannered due to their negligence of upbringing, ill-mannered and bad company.

To quote:

The various articles in Saheli opposed the exaggerated form of purdah practiced in India according to which the women were confined in their houses and faced many health problems. Thus, it favoured Sharai’ purdah which practiced in European countries and suggested that the women should follow the injunctions of Quran and Hadith with regard to their dress and manners and maintained the modesty in purdah.

The male also criticized purdah which cited in Tahzib-un-Niswan. It is stated that purdah affected domestic works. However, many unmarried girls supported it and some were tried to prove that purdah was not an obstacle in the way of female education and the overall degradation of women.

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A moderate critic of purdah, Shahzad Jahan Begum believed in the system itself and she opined that if someone wanted to discard it, she welcomed her. She said about those ladies who abandoned purdah committed many mistakes in social gatherings because they were not trained how to conduct themselves in social gathering. Thus, she suggested the male members to accompany them in the initial stages and trained them the basic of conduct.

In another instance, Sufia Midhat Khanum wrote that in many families where purdah was not observed there were vulgar jokes exchanged between the brother-in-law(sala) and the sister-in-law(Sali). Thus, such type of conduct was not favourable in Islam. She said that those ladies who courageously leave purdah and took training in riding, mountaineering and participated in meeting with men were criticized by other as ill-mannered. The author did not criticise it as she thought it was baseless to judge someone ill-mannered if she did not observe purdah. She also pointed out some families where the unmarried girls were instructed that they did not show their face to women of other families. The reason behind this was many unmarried girls were lack of proper manners thus, the elders advised them not to expose themselves to the ladies of other families as it degraded their family status. However, many educated girls did not favour this perception.

In Saheli one of the article Purdah aur Qurani Ahqam (Purdah and Quranic law) mentioned the proper way of veiling with reference of Surah Noor and Surah Al-Hijab which clarify that Quran did not put unnecessary veiling and gave the concept of purdah for women in a dignified way. In fact, the journals of early twentieth century favoured Islamic Purdah and mentioned the name of Khimar purdah which was in vogue in Islamic period. Thus, such types of purdah keep the women from bad eyes and protect their chastity. It is said that Quran did not make it obligatory for women to cover face and hand but suggested to open those portion which is necessary.

The magazine Noor Jahan cited an article Purde par ek dilchasp Bahes (An interesting discussion on Purdah) which mentioned the opinions of many eminent

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91 Saheli,(Amritsar),vol-3, no-8(August,1927), pp-31-34.
92 Khimar was long cloth (orhni) which covers from head to toe.
94 Noor Jahan(Amritsar), vol-1,2, (February, 1926), pp-75-77.
personalities who argued on the matter of *purdah*. Pandit Nanak Chand\(^\text{95}\) opined to discard *purdah* as he thought that it was a detrimental for women’s social and educational development. Pandit Thakur Dutt\(^\text{96}\) also said to give up *purdah* but favoured to maintain decency. Another was Maulvi Mahboob Alam who did not favour the customary *purdah* in India as it restricted women in their houses which was not in accordance of Islam. He supported Islamic *purdah* and also gave reference of her daughter Fatima Begum who got graduate degree within *purdah*.

Thus, the journals reflected that there were three groups of people who debated on the issue of *purdah*. There were some who totally opposed to *purdah*, some were demanded to lessen the strictness of *purdah* with relevant religious injunctions. The other were wished to maintain *purdah* system but believed that the changes in *purdah* were contradictory to Islamic law.

Turning to other aspects, the relationship between husband and wife and their rights and duties have also been discussed. One of the writers of *Tahzib-un-Niswan*, Tayyaba Begum wrote about the duties of women towards their husband that the women should give priority towards husband’s duties. However, Mumtaz Ali stated that both have equal rights in society and they should respect the likes and dislikes of each others\(^\text{97}\).

The relationship between husband and wife is best explained by a contributor of *Payam-i-Ummid*. The husband should treat his wife politely in every situation and the wife should show their obedience and sincerity towards her husband. On certain occasion, the wife feel tired and helpless due to the over burden of household activities, at that moment she need husband’s sympathy.

To quote:

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\(^{95}\) Eminent educationalist of Punjab.
\(^{96}\) Influential Vaid Leader.
The women were guided to carry their relationship with in-laws respectfully. The conflict between the mother-in-laws (sas) and daughter-in-laws (bahu), conflict between husband’s sister (nand) and his wife (bhabi) were very common which raised due to the unawareness of women towards their duties.

To conclude it can be said that Urdu journals of women in north India of early twentieth century played the most constructive role in changing the marginalized condition of women which was due to the ignorance of education and prevalent of various social practices among them. Thus, the women became unaware about their legal social rights because of which they plunged themselves in backwardness. So, the emergence of women’s Urdu Journals means as a vanguard to socially aware the women about their various rights and made them to face the new challenges of their life in society.

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