

429/21/9/17

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Title of Ph.D Thesis: Print Culture and Women's Voices: A Study of Urdu Journals 1898-1936

Abstract

Research on Women's journals is Significant because, the Women's writings in these journals will tell us how women felt, what their ideas and aspirations were, and more importantly how they viewed their own problems i.e. whether they shared the views of their male 19th century social reformers or they differed from them; if so, to what extent and in what direction and what new questions they address, what justifications they gave in response. This will help us to understand the women's point of view or women's perspective, which is otherwise generally marginalised /ignored in traditional history.

The silencing of consciousness and resistance of women is much more visible in the South Asian Muslim women's history which for long remained at the margins of the 'mainstream male historiography'. Even though much has been written on Hindu social reforms, historical scholarship has not focused much on Muslim women reform movements. Even if such a work has been carried out, it largely remained concentrated on Bengali Muslim women. The social reform literature produced both by men and women in the Urdu language, which not less than half of the Indian Muslims spoke/speak, has not been fully explored and analyzed

In this thesis, I have examined the relationship between print culture and the construction of gender relations in colonial India. I studied Urdu women's journals published during the colonial period. Because Urdu is generally associated with Muslims in the Indian subcontinent,

my study relates to the gender construction among Muslims of the period. I have explored the complex relationship between Muslim female and male intellectuals and the Urdu print culture, and the way the intellectuals negotiated the question of gender in the context of colonial modernity.

Given the historiographical limitations where Muslim women's history is largely ignored, and where it is attended to, some aspects being missed out, my thesis has attempted to fill a gap. It attempted to retrieve many of the forgotten Muslim women's voices, and throw light on the multiple shades of their understanding on issues concerning them. The thesis has attempted to explore a new meaning and by implication, a new life to the core source material – Urdu women's journals. The thesis, one would hope has not only added to the gender history of modern South Asia but also lay focus on our understanding of the same. Further, it has dispelled the wrongly held notion that the Muslim women lagged behind their counterparts in other religious communities in terms of possessing progressive ideas and effecting social change.