CHAPTER III

THE ROLE AND PROBLEMS OF WOMEN JOURNALIST
IN PRE-INDEPENDENT INDIA

The Role of Women Journalists in Pre-Independent India

Drawing from the details of historical facts presented in the previous chapter, one has no doubt to say that when we look back to the contribution of women in journalism in pre-independent India, there did exist a section of women working in the journalistic front. These women journalists may not have been as many in number as their male counterparts but we realize that they were emerging in this field. According to Sharma, some of these women journalists were related to progressive men, many of them involved in movements for religious and social reform and / or national independence.¹

It is clear that the social reform and nationalist movement, which emerged in many parts of India during the 19th - 20th centuries played an important role in creating an environment, in which at least some women could venture into new fields of activity, such as journalism, albeit within relatively defined and protected spaces. Concerning this point, Tharu Susie and K. Lalita wrote, “The social reform movement, which directed towards alleviation of the suffering of women and betterment of their position in society, were primary responsible for creating conditions favourable for the emergence of women writers”.² Similarly, Sisir Kumar Das asserted, “The social reforms, many of them directed towards the alleviation of the suffering of women and betterment of their position in society, were primarily responsible for creating condition favourable for the progress emergence of women writers in the 19th century.” ³ Women, however participated in writing activities more freely when Mahatma Gandhi launched the wide support of social education and nationalist movement. His advent in nationalism, claimed by the historians, was the main factor that fired the imagination and created a much more congenial climate for the women writers. Inspired by him, the women writers hence raised the women’s question in 20th century.⁴
The studies on women writing in pre-independent India provide a clear understanding that it was not until the late 19th century that women started venturing into writing and journalism. In this respect, their work mostly appeared in such forms as women’s periodicals, journals and magazines, both in English and Vernacular languages. Though the number of women contributing to women’s periodicals, journals and magazines were few in the beginning as there were very few educated women. By the end of 19th century and the early 20th century, with the spread of women’s education, the number of them increased gradually. The available documents indicated that during this time we witnessed the emergence of important women’s periodicals, journals and magazines like, ‘Bharati’ (Bengali) edited by Swarnakumari Devi, Hiranmayi Devi and Sarala Kumari Devi between 1884-1912; ‘The Indian Ladies Magazines’ (English) edited by Kamal Sattianand in 1902; ‘Stree Dharma’ was run by Sarojini Naidu in 1938, ‘Savitri’ (Telugu) by Pulugurti Lakshminarasamamba in the early years of the century; ‘Stree Darpan’ (Hindi) by Rameshwari Nehru, started in 1909; ‘Karnataka Nandini’ (Kannada) edited by Nanjangudu Thirumalamba in 1927 and such others as ‘Bamabodini Patrikas’ (Bengali), ‘Sundari Subodh’ (Gujarathi), ‘Hindu Sundari’ (Telugu), ‘Zenana’ (Telugu), ‘Stree Bodh’ (Gujarathi), ‘Stree’ (Marathi), ‘Khatoon’ (Urdu), ‘Tenzib Niswan’ (Urdu) and ‘Ismat’ (Urdu). In these periodicals, journals and magazines, the period saw women as the contributors and editors. The papers were circulated widely and it is obvious from the articles that they were intended for women readers.

On studying the historical materials based on colonial India, it is clear that the women who rose as journalists in general, may they be editors or what we today classify as journalists and writers, emerged from not just one state or region but throughout India. These women wrote letters, editorials, essays, articles and prose in different languages. Hence, they indeed helped in moulding the present day journalism. In Bengali we witnessed Mokshodayani Mukhopadhyay (1848-?) who brought out the first issue of Bangla Mahila (women of Bengal) as a newsletter, designed to support the exchange of information among women and stood for women’s rights as well as pledged to fight for women’s cause; Swarnakumari Devi (1856-1932) the editor of ‘Bharati’ known as a literary magazine, wrote several articles on women’s cause, geology and made a matter of editorial policy to give priority to popular articles on science; Sarat Kumari
Chaudhurani (1861-1820) published a number of thought-provoking essays on the women’s question such as ‘Ekal-o-Eklaen Meye’ (This age and its women) in Bharathi the journal Swarnakumari Devi edited;\(^8\) Krishnabhabini Das (1864-1919) sometimes contributed articles in Bharati, her article published in Bharati 1922 explained how she gave up wearing western clothes on her husband’s death, and took to wearing the ‘Thaan’ a plain widow’s sari, and began to observe all the austerities and self-abnegation of the typical Hindu widow; Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1954) daughter of Swarnakumari Devi, succeed her mother as the editor of ‘Bharati’ and edited the nationalist Urdu paper ‘Hindustan’, through these two papers she raised the radical issues of independent India; Urmila Devi (1883-1956), a widow, wrote numerous articles on the efforts of women to further the cause of Khaddar and Swadeshi, in 1921, she described in ‘Banglar Katha’, a Bengali weekly, how young Bengali girls were travelling the country, dressed in khadi saris and spreading the message of swaraj; Lila Roy (1900-1970) edited the journal ‘Jayashree’, which had the blessing of Rabindranath Tagore, in 1940, when Subhash Chandra Bose went to jail, she was nominated as the editor of the ‘Forward Block Weekly’; Violet Alva (1908-1969) began a women’s magazine, the ‘Begum’ (later renamed ‘Indian women’) in 1944;\(^9\) Aruna Asaf Ali (1909-1996) edited ‘Inquilab’, the monthly organ of the congress, in its 1944 issue, she advised freedom fighters not to allow any academic and futile arguments on questions like violence and non-violence to divert people’s attention from the stern reality of today.\(^10\) In Marathi, Muktabai (1841-?) wrote an essay about the miserable life of the untouchable in ‘Dnyanodaya’, an Ahmednagar journal; Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858-1922) edited a journal called ‘Mukti Prayer Bell’ and contributed a long letter to the editor of the ‘Bombay Guardian’ criticizing the treatment given to people suspected of plague at the segregation camp set up by the government in 1879; Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924) usually wrote letters on justice Ranade’s behalf; Kashibai Kanitkar (1868-1948) in 1889 published her first essay ‘Women Past and Present’ in an important contemporary journal, ‘Subodh Patrika’, and reviewed Ramabai’s High Hindu Women (Book) for ‘Manoranjan’, the literary monthly, in 1911, she reviewed the progress of women’s education under imperialism in ‘Vividhadynvisthar’, a monthly journal and in 1916 she wrote articles in ‘Navayug’; Indira Sahasrabuddhe (1890-?) presented provocative articles in reformist journals such
as ‘Manoranjan’, ‘Navayug’ and ‘Udayan’ from 1910; Geeta Sane (1907-?) who, since 1927, wrote regularly on social issues in ‘Stree’; Malinbai Tulupule raised the issues of low caste women who worked in the factory in ‘Stree’ and Malati Gadgil focused her work about the plight of the muslim women in the slums. Her articles were also published in ‘Stree’.

In Telugu, Bandaru Achamaba (1874-1904) wrote a number of essays published in leading journals such as ‘Hindu Sundari’ and ‘Saraswati’; Darisi Annapuranmmma (1907-1939) a journalist wrote several issues about social reform. In Kannada, Nanjanagudu Tirumalamba (1887-1892) started the ‘Karnataka Nandini’ (daughter of Karnataka) for three years, which she ran almost single-handedly; Kalyanamma (1894-1965) ran a children’s magazine, ‘Saraswati’, single-handedly, she was editor, proof reader, contributor and advertising agent, later, her magazine’s reputation and influence grew – women and men began to write for it, the range of subjects in Saraswati was broad – politics, fine arts, current affairs, all came within it scope – but its principle objective was the all round development of women; Shyamala Devi (1910-1943), wrote for ‘Jayakarnataka’, the magazine published by her husband, in 1941, she became its co-editor and the journal began to pay more attention to women and women’s question, she started a separate section called ‘Mother and child’ where she declared that it was designed for discussion of the social and political rights of women and their aspiration to progress, it would introduce women of outstanding achievement, discussed the development of children and the principle of education, the status of women in the early vedic period was discussed several times, the journal also dealt with topics of political significance at a time when India was asserting itself against British rule; Saraswatibai Rajwade (1913-?), contributed articles and reviews in 1929, for sometime she edited a magazine called ‘Suprabhata’ (An Auspicious Morning) and was a regular columnist for ‘Kathavali’ (a series of stories) and ‘Nisarga’ (Nature), she wrote on a broad range of themes, there were articles on health, inter-caste marriage and the problems women face in different walks of life as well as on aesthetics, language and literature. In Gujarathi the period saw Sharda Ben Mehta (1881-1970), she worked in Gandhiji’s national weekly ‘Navjivan’ in 1919; Hansa Mehta (1897), who studied journalism in England; Vidyagauri Nilkanth who helped her husband in reading proofs of the magazine.
‘Jnansudha’. In Hindi, Mahadevi Verma (1907-1987), began editing the Hindi magazine ‘Chand’, she edited and wrote for this magazine over several years, in one editorial entitled ‘Sahitya aur Usmen Striyon ka Stan’ (Literature and the position of women in it), in 1935, she made a careful survey of the women writers, she argued, it was not so much the objective disadvantages they suffered, but their lack of confidence in themselves and the value of what they had to say, many of these essays were reprinted in ‘Srinkhala Ki Kariyan’ (The links of our chains).

In Urdu, the research found Sughra Humayun Mirza (1884-1954), her reformist writings appeared mainly in the women’s magazines she edited, including ‘Musheer-e-Niswan’ (women’s counselor), ‘Al Nisa’ (The women and Zaib-un-Nisa (women’s adornment); Nazar Sajjad Hyder (1894-1967), her articles were published in the prestigious literary magazines like ‘Makhzan’, which was published in Lahore, she was also honorary editor of ‘Phool’, the new legendary Urdu weekly for children and contributed to epoch-making women’s magazines such as ‘Khatoon’ (Aligarh) ‘Ismat’ (Delhi), and ‘Tehzib Niswan’ (Lahore); Rasheeda Jahan (1905-1952) a daughter of Sheikh Abdullah who edited women’s magazine in ‘Urdu Khatoon’, she edited the magazine ‘Chingari’. In English, the period witnessed a number of women’s issues writing by Sarojini Naidu, her speeches which focused on Women’s franchise and women’s rights were often published in journals and magazines, one of her famous speeches titled women’s education and the unity of India pointed out the purdah system as a great stumbling block in the way of social reforms appeared in the pioneer journal ‘Stree Bodha’; Madam Bhikaji Rustom K. R. Cama, she started the well known monthly journal ‘The Bandemataram’ supporting the revolutionary, Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954), she wrote regularly on matters of public interest, law, politics and women’s issues for important British journal of 19th Century.

Study of women and work in India also showed the participation of Indian women in journalism. The study pointed out that the earliest women’s journals and magazines were owned by the male social reformers and religious thinkers whose aim was to discuss on women’s problems. Helen Gostelli explained that the pioneer women’s journals and magazines started by reform minded Indian elites were brought out for the purpose of uplifting the women of their communities. In Bengal, the Brahma Samaj
published ‘Bamabodhini’ (1863) and ‘Paticharika’ (1878), the women’s magazines which discussed the role of women in ancient Hindu society and women’s education. Later, women themselves took on the task of publishing and editing. In Bombay, the reformist Parsi leader of Parsi Community started ‘Stri Bodh’ (1857) discussing the difficulties of women. In Madras, an Indian Christian social reformer Dr. Sattinadhan encouraged his wife Kamala Sattinadhan to start Indian ladies magazines (1901-1981) which focused on the achievements of women. In North India, Rameshwari Nehru edited an early women’s magazine in Hindi, ‘Stri Darpan’ (1909-1925).  

It is not only the aim of women’s periodicals, journals, and magazines that the above mentioned study concentrated on, the same study also focused on the role played by women journalists in relevance with the function of women’s periodicals, journals and magazines. In this regard, the study indicated that during the pre-independent India, women activists began to use the periodical press to publicize the organizations they were seeking to build. For example, Sarala Devi Chaoudurani, daughter of activist Bengali Brahma parents and wife of an Arya Samaj leader, wrote an article in the English language journal, ‘Modern Review’ 1919 to describe the national women’s organizations. Further, the Women’s Indian Association (1917) and the All India Women’s Conference (1927) brought out their own journals, ‘Stri Dharma’ and ‘Roshni’ as integral components of their organizational efforts. Under the leadership of committed Indian nationalist, such as the Irish Theosophist Margaret Cousins and the Punjabi Christian Amrit Kaur, these organizations, and their journals pushed for political representation, education and legal reform for women along with the demand for Indian independence. In addition, Irish Theosophist, Annie Besant, also took her place alongside Indian women in the struggle for independence and women’s rights. Besant, who came to India in 1883, purchased the ‘Madras Standard’ in 1914, and later changed its name to ‘New India’. 

The details of women’s periodicals, journals and magazines where women actively participated in pre-independent India was further explained by the study of history of Indian literature. This study revealed that the prominent women’s journals and magazines of this period were ‘Bamabodhini Patrika’ (1863, Bengali), ‘Amirta Vacani’ (1865, Tamil), ‘Vamabodhini’ (1874, Hindi, ed. by Bharatendu), ‘Satihita Bodhini’ (1883, Telugu ed. By Viresalingam), ‘Priyamvada’ (1885, Gujarati), etc. All these
journals and magazines were the reputed ones, brought out mainly for women and some of them were exclusively devoted to women’s problems. It is however to be noted that along with the women’s journals and magazines with their action and exclusive devotion to women’s problems in the upper middle class / caste as aforementioned, there were a few journals and magazines that took up the problems faced by men and women of oppressed classes / castes too. The most well known journal dealing with the caste problem was the Marathi weekly ‘Dinabandhu’ (1874), published by the Satyashodak Samaj, which drew inspiration from Jyotirav Phule. It was a coincidence that the Bengali magazine ‘Bharat Sramajibi’ (The Indian Labour), the first journal for the working class, was published in the same year. It was edited by Sasipada Banerji, a young member of the Brahmo Samaj who actively involved in social work. In addition in 1879, a Tamil journal, ‘Curyotayam’, was started in Madras by a group of people, who called themselves Ati Tamilian, they belonged to the scheduled class. Their journal printed essay on their problems and tales about their life. In 1885 another Tamil journal, titled ‘Tiravita Pantiyam’, was published under the editorship of J. K. Pattinam exclusively for the benefit of the scheduled castes and tribes of Tamilnadu. Notably, the kind of social awareness manifested in contemporary plays about the labourers in the indigo and tea plantation, or the coolies, or the agricultural workers was reflected more extensively in the mentioned above journals.

**Background of Women Journalists in Pre-Independent India and Content of Their Writings**

Considering the background of women journalists in pre-independent India, we found that they normally belonged to the progressive upper middle class / caste of society. Yet there were a few, who belonged to the orthodox upper middle class / caste. With the exception of Muktabai, Mang girl and few others, the women writers and journalists in general were not expected to arise from socially oppressed classes / castes. It must not be forgotten also that almost all of these women had been married. Some were housewives and some were even widows. They were encouraged to pursue their education through the teaching of the male members of their families. In some cases, tutors were called at home for the educational benefit of the female members before they
were introduced into schools and colleges. As they had been brought up in an atmosphere where the male members of their families were actively involved in the social reform and nationalist movement, their thoughts were naturally influenced by progressive and enlightened ideas of social reform and nationalist movement. The study on women of the ‘Tagore’ family of Jonasan in the late 19th century and first two decades of the 20th century showed how women writers and journalists of this family were brought up in a cultural atmosphere where their creative facetiousness could easily develop. Since women of this family got the opportunity of education at homes, schools and colleges and belonged to Brahma Samaj background, they could cast off many customs, then began to imbibe progressive views and patriotic feeling. Gradually, many of them excelled in literary, educational, journalistic and socio-cultural advancement. Saudamnini and Swarnakumari (daughter of Debendranath), Jnandanandini (wife of Satyandranath), Prafullamoyic (wife of Birendranath), Indira (daughter of Satyendranath), Prajnasundiri, Sobhana and Sushma (daughters of Hemendranath), Hiranmoyi and Sarala (daughters of Swarnakumari), Hemlata (wife of Dwipendranath) and many others wrote books or contributed to periodicals. Among the journals edited by women of the Tagore family, mention can be made of ‘Bharati’, edited by Swarnakumari (later on by her daughters Hiranmoyi and Sarala), ‘Balak’ edited by Jnandanandini, ‘Punya’ edited by Prajnasundari, ‘Ananda Sangit Patrika’ edited by Pratiba Devi (daughter of Hemendranath) and Indira Debi, ‘Bangalakshmi’ edited by Hemalata Debi and ‘Ghare-Bire’ edited by Manjushri Devi, daughter of Surendranath Tagore. With special reference to Swarnakumari Devi, the most prominent woman writer and journalist of the period, E. M. Lang who prefaced Swarnakumari’s English translation of her won fiction Kahake (English: an unfinished song, 1973) remarked that from her father, Swarnakumari inherited her passionate love and admiration for her native land, her ardent desire to rouse it from its lethargy, to inspire it to progress and to help it to cast off the yoke of its debasing tradition.²²

The study on educated women in the second half of 19th century conducted by Ulrike Stark is another crucial work enabling us to draw the link between women journalists and background of their families. According to Ulrike Stark, Hemantakumri Chaudhurani (1865-1953) was provided education with the best possible schooling,
which at that time inevitably meant a mission school, by her father, Navinchandra Rai, the formost Brahma Samaj leader of Punjab, an active social reformer and educator. For her higher education, she was sent to the prestigious Bethume College in Calcutta, a model institution for female education, which was popular with Bengali bhadralok and progressive Brahmos. After some years, she was married to Rajachandra Chaudhari, the Secretary of the Sylhet Prathana Samaj in 1985. The marriage was conducted according to Brahma Samaj rites.  

Following her father’s and later on her husband’s footsteps, Hemantakumari started and kept on working as an advocate of female education, author of a number of Hindi books for women and editor of a monthly women magazine ‘Sughrini’, the first Hindi journal edited by a woman. ‘Sughrini’ was initially published in Lahore by her father. She took responsibility of it in 1897 until 1899. She resumed her journalistic activities again from 1906, and published a monthly women’s magazine in Bengali titled ‘Antahpura’. 

Similarly, in the case of Sarojini Naidu, the outstanding woman journalist of early 20th century, the study on her social background indicated that the circumstances in which she grew up very much supported her capability of writing. Born in a high Bengali Brahmin family where her father was a unique combination of science and literature, while her mother played a role as the ideal housewife. Sarojini took full advantage of female education provided for girls of her time and even benefited more for having a chance to study in England for which other women in her time had never dream. Guilding by English friend like Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse within the atmosphere of happy and wealthy home, Sarojini quickly developed talent of writing and gained recognition in literary world since her young age. In the narration of the story of her early poetic endeavour she stated that at the age of 13 she could write a long poem ‘a la lady of the lake……’ 1300 lines in six days, a full fledged passionate drama of 2000 lines and when her age reached 14 and 16 she extended her talent in novel and journals. The skill of writing later on pave a way for her to join nationalist movement as the leader of the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) where she continued writing for the cause of women in ‘Stree Dharma’, the magazine of AIWC.
It is to be noted however that despite the mentioned women journalists were educated, the ideas of their writing were shaped to the large extent by the ideas of male reformers and nationalists. In this respect, the study of reformed family in 19th century asserted that the new women emerging from the liberal intelligentsia’s families (the term intelligentsia being used here refers to elite or middle class and denotes thinkers, writers, journalists, lawyers, civil servants, teachers, etc.) still austerely abided to the command of their male members of the family. The life story of Vidyagauri Nilkanth, a woman reformer and journalist, who was brought up in a Gujarathi family and being influenced by the ideas of the Brahmo Samaj and Prathana Samaj, told us that though she could jointly edit the magazine ‘Jnansudha’ and wrote books with her husband, her primary responsibility was the domestic work. Ramanbhai, her husband was too busy with his public life to interfere in the day-to-day running of the house. The household duties, therefore was left to Vidyagauri. Editing magazine and writing books for Vidyagauri, in fact was merely the extension of her husband’s work. 27

Taking into account the social background of the women writers and journalists, Sisir Kumar Das divided the family background of women writers (or journalists) into 2 groups. The first belonged to the well-to-do English-educated family group. Among the first group Sarojini Naidu, a freedom fighter, a champion of women’s cause, a poet and a journalist was the prominent one among them who had the advantage of being born in an enlightened family. The latter group belonged to the middle class without much formal education. Women who belonged to the latter group were mostly housewives with no formal education but came from well-educated and respectable families which encouraged female education. They were particularly fortunate to be helped by their husbands and enlightened in-laws since the general attitude against women taking to pen in those days was still hostile. 28 In brief, we can assume that though the women writers or journalists took to pen as they were more educated than the rest of women of their time, their primary role was still confined within the household, that is they had the sole responsibility of being an ideal daughter, mother and companion of their male members of the family. Any other work they desired to do came only after they fulfilled their primary role.
The life sketch of Hemanthkumari, the editor of a monthly women’s magazine called ‘Sughrini’ demonstrated how women writers and journalists had to sacrifice their intellectual pleasure to the domestic duties when the crash among the two elements arose. According to Hemanthkumari’s experience, she had to stop publishing the magazine because her husband was transferred back to Sylhet in 1889, although the magazine was run successfully for about two years. This particular assumption was also proved by the words of Gupapriya, a woman reformer and journalist, who edited two journals, ‘Mangai’ (1947) and ‘Pudumai Penn’. Asking what would happen if the magazines had come in the way of her house work? She replied promptly that she would have discontinued the magazines.

The question arises from the above explanation is, how did the women writers and journalists of pre-independent India find time to write, when their primary role was still subject to the household work like other women of their time. The answer is that since these women writers and journalists belonged to the well to do families, which could easily afford hired help for household work, they found spare time for themselves. Having the privilege of servants assisting them in the domestic chores left them enough energy to edit a journal or magazine. Gupapriya explained that normally the magazine was run only in the spare time that she and other women got together in the afternoon. Besides, being educated, it was natural for them to spend their time in a field related to writing such as poetry, stories, essays, prose, articles, etc. whereby satisfying their intellectual capacity. It is therefore not exaggerated to state that writing for women in pre-independent India in fact was an act of catharsis in an unequal society, which helped women reflect on gender role and specificity of their lives. This activity of women writers and journalists was considered to be leisure pursuit, relaxation and the way of releasing tension and strain from household rather than work. However, their way of relaxation was very much different from the rest of women of their time because others preferred to chat, gossip, read, listen to radio programs, go to movie or brood.

It is remarkable that though women writers and journalists of pre-independent India could find time for writing and the degree of their writing varied, it was not to their highest capabilities as they could not forsake the role they played in their families. At the most to writing, they gave their time, which they managed to find for themselves. It is for
this reason that the pioneer women writers and journalists could not join mainstream newspapers run by male owners or editors, which then demanded a lot of time and dedication. The most they could participate in the mainstream newspapers was to contribute articles occasionally. Moreover, since the writers and journalists of the mainstream newspapers were more subject to imprisonment due to the antagonistic role the papers played as a weapon of the native to fight against the British Colonial master at that time. Women automatically were barred to join the mainstream newspapers of the period. This major barrier faced by women ultimately forced them to write mostly for women’s periodicals, journals and magazines where they could work in their spare time as freelancers covering topics revolved around the roles and problems of women in general.

On analyzing the text written by these women writers and journalists, Surekha Panandikar pointed out that the content of women’s magazines of the pre-independent India was a combination of contemporary women’s issues, stories, poems, serialized novel, cookery, embroidery, knitting. However, it was wrong to presume that the early women writers confined themselves only to familiar themes of marriage, birth, young brides longing for her parents, etc., because they also showed the feminist awareness when they expressed injustice of feeling miserable for giving birth to a girl child. The same consideration was taken by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita too. They observed that along with some of the issues raised by male reformers and nationalists like the evil of purdah, the idea of compassionate marriage, the hardship of widowhood, an utopian vedic community, etc., the women writers simultaneously displayed the complex dimensions in which women’s subjectivity was being sculpted.

From the historical facts, we can assume that the women’s issues in women’s magazines and journals of pre-independent India mostly centered around the problems of their own upper class and caste. The issues of sati, polygamy, women’s education, women’s property right, widow remarriage, child marriage, female infanticide and so on, which were introduced by the male social reformers and nationalists, were focused more often, while other issues relating to the low class and caste women (The low caste women were permitted to remarry among their caste and had nothing to do with the issues of sati, polygamy, women education, women’s property right, etc), who earned a living as
agrarians, artisans, workers in mills, mines and plantations were neglected. In this matter, Vidyut Bhagwat, the director of women’s study centre, University of Pune remarked that the above mentioned women’s issues reflected only the interest and the concerns of the elites because most of the demand made and the reforms suggestion covered and concerned only with the women from the upper strata of the caste society. Henceforth, the magazines and journals written by women writers and journalists of pre-independent India at the most was a tool that felt for and exposed the problems of the upper class/caste women solely and not for the Indian women as a whole. In regard to this controversy, Nivedita Menon shared the same idea with Bhagwat, she commented that the issues like widow’s oppression, purdah, child marriage, growing gender gap in education only reflected the concerns of the upper caste who constituted the bourgeoisie. It did not affect the majority of Indian women because the majority of the total female population were involved in agrarian, manufacturing and trading activities, whether as part of household or family based enterprises or as independent workers, producers and traders. According to Menon, unlike the upper caste women whose moral code was governed by Manusmriti, the status of ordinary women was generally governed by local or community customs, which often gave more freedom than what was available to higher caste women.

The late 19th century and early 20th century India marked a number of women journalists, who at the same time were prominent freedom fighters, poets, novelists, short story writers, feminist critics, playwrights, song writers, etc. entering into various fields of journalism. In this particular time, the period witnessed the sprouting of women editors, though they may not have been large in number; nevertheless, they took full responsibility in running the women’s journals and magazines. However, it is notable that most of women journalists in pre-independent India were just the contributors of letters, prose and essays occasionally. Concerning this point, Padmini Sengupta, on her study ‘Voluntary social service’, resolved that the role played by women editors and women contributors during this period could be regarded as philanthropic rather than professional. She put it “There were of course journals for women such as the Indian ladies magazine, started as early as 1903 by Kamala Sattianadhan in Madras. There were the Sri Dharma and many others, as well as papers in the Indian languages, but many of
these were not business ventures and were merely run by philanthropic woman or by institutions to push the cause of women’s emancipation.  

The underlining feature among the women journalists of pre-independent India whether they were editors or simple contributors is that they initially started this line of work by assisting the movements conducted by leaders like Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, etc. including other leaders of Brahmo Samaj. Besides the feminist writer like Sarat Chandra Chatterjee also created an atmosphere more congenial to the expression of women in general. The study on the contribution of women in literature in Bengal by Malavika Karlekar revealed that between 1856 – 1910 only in Bengal, there were almost 400 works produced by Bengali women. These works ranged from short poem to full-length novel and autobiographies. During the same period, to cater to a growing readership, over 20 periodicals, which dealt primarily with women’s issues, were being published. Interestingly women were associated in various editorial capacities with these publications.

Problems of Women Journalists in Pre-independent India: An Analysis

Analyzing from the above mentioned documents we can come to conclusion that the role and problems of women journalist in pre-independent India appears as follows:

Firstly, the number of women venturing into journalism in pre-independent period was very low. This is owing to the fact that women’s education at that time was not popular in India. Relating to this, Rama Shankar Maurya pointed out while the education of women was unknown in India, a great deal of prejudice against it existed. Some even believed that educated women would lose their husbands. Many believed that girls who had received western education would make slaves of their husbands. The study of women’s education in India revealed that though the reform organizations like Brhamo Samaj, Prathana Samaj and Arya Samaj played an important role in spreading women’s education, the effort was restricted to a small section of upper caste / class urban women. The Bethume School in Calcutta, one of the pioneers of higher education for women established in 1849, where Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was a secretary, had great difficulty in securing students. The young students were shouted at and abused and sometimes even their parents were subject to social boycott. The figure of female
education during the British India period showed that during the period of social reform movement the gap between male and female education was very wide. For every 1000 boys in school the number of girls was only 46.\textsuperscript{45} Till 1920s, the progress in women’s education was still very low as the Hartog Committee (1929) pointed out that only 10% of girls of school going age were enrolled in British India.\textsuperscript{46}

Secondly, women of colonial India who took the benefits of education could perform their role as writers and journalists only when they were backed by strong and effective support from their families. This is the reason why there were a low number of women venturing into journalism in pre-independent India. These women journalists, when we trace back their social background we find that most of them were from the wealthy, aristocratic and sophisticated families. In brief, they belonged to the top rung in the social literary area, which constituted of a very small number. However, there were a few women journalists whose social background did not support them to pursue their study nor their work as journalists. The study on social background of women journalists unfold that the women writers and journalists who belonged to the orthodox and unwealthy families had to encounter double problems compared to those women journalists who were from enlightened families, as they had to spend longer hours in domestic work and hide their activities of reading and writing from the eyes of other members of families.

Thirdly, most of women journalists in Colonial India preferred to contribute essays, feature, articles, reviews, etc. to the women’s magazines occasionally, rather than committing as full-time writers. The reason behind lies on the fact that they could manage their spare time to do it at home, where their domestic responsibility was not disturbed. To sum up, women writing activities in this period was not considered a means to make women becoming economically independent. On the contrary, it was regarded either the extension of their male members of family work or social work.

Fourthly, owing to the fact that the earliest women’s magazines of pre-independent period were being operated by the male editors, writers and journalists whose objective of founding the magazines was to remove social evils relating to women’s cause, acquaint women with information and equip them with skill and proficiency in essential household tasks. The ideology deriving from this objective hence
played an important role in shaping the content of the magazines. According to Smt. Surekha Panandikar, the content of early women’s magazines was a combination of contemporary women’s issues, stories, poems, serialised novel, cookery, embroidery, knitting, etc. To quote her words, “They are mostly a combination of few literary contribution like stories, poems, serialised novel, an article or two on women’s issues and page devoted to cookery, embroidery, knitting – the so called womanly activities”. 47

Fifthly, since there was a belief that women writers and journalists limited their capability only within issues relating to kitchen and bedroom, the general attitude towards women writing was not much appreciated. As Nanjanagudu Tirumalamba, the editor of ‘Karnataka Nandini’ wrote in her first editorial that, “The general attitude towards women in Karnataka is not very high. People think that women are incapable of writing. They also think that we are not qualified to give opinion on matters of social reform because our experience is limited to the house-keeping”. 48 The very attitude towards women writers of pre-independent period has been carried until the present day as Malladi Subbanna wrote, “It is a patent fact that women writers of the day by and large confine women’s position and status to the kitchen and bedroom. There are many problems confronted by contemporary women like lack of individuality, financial helplessness, political neglect, social exploitation, dowry, purdah, prostitution, child marriage, compulsory widowhood, mental turmoil, abuse, violence, atrocities, rape, killing and torment by sadistic husband, etc. Many of these problems do not arise from the subject matter of the works of women writers”. 49

Sixthly, since educated women of pre-independent India ventured into journalism through the encouragement of the male members of the family, who were either involved in media institutes or other organizations of social reform and nationalist movement, their ideas of writing to a large extent was directed by the thoughts of male social reformers and nationalists. Henceforth, their writing relating to contemporary women’s issues in general did not challenge the prevalent values of patriarchal system. In fact, it was rather an attempt to improve the condition of women within the framework of patriarchy. The evidences were shown in the numerous articles emphasizing on the role played by ‘the new women’, who were expected to be a good companion of husband, an efficient housewife and an ideal mother of children.
Seventhly, contrary to the women journalists of today, journalism for women of pre-independent India was not a means to access economical or financial independence but rather aimed to fulfill or satisfy the male social reformer’s aspiration to see the emergence of new women in the society. In this respect, the educated women as they were called ‘New Women’ were not expected to be capable only in the domestic work but also in the intellectual field, although their primary role was supposed to be involved with domestic chore. This situation occurred out of the need of male reformers whose aim was to make women in becoming a good wife, good companion of husband and good mother like Victorian women. To sum up, journalism for women journalists of colonial India was rather a sort of social work as well as philanthropic, not the profession. This intellectual activity, therefore not merely helped them to spend their time in creative work, but enabled them to interact with the outside world too.

Eighthly, considering the content analysis, we find that the content of women’s magazines of pre-independent India was catering to middle class and urban-oriented. It had little relevance to the lives of women in the lower strata. Contemporary issues like Sati, remarriage of widow, women’s education, etc. reflected only the interest of male elites and proved to benefit only the women from the upper class and caste. Similarly the columns of cookery, sewing, knitting, house decoration, etc. were of interest for the women from the upper class and caste.

Ninthly, in spite of the cooperation of almost all the enlightened people and dedication of the editorial team and writers plus the support of readership, women’s magazines or journals of the colonial period were short-lived. The main problem was that the funds at their disposal was very limited. They were not backed by steady, solid, flourishing publishing houses nor were they supported by a well-developed marketing system. In fact, they came into existence because of the effort of a dedicated individual or, at best, a group of individuals who strongly felt women deserved to have a platform of their own. So none of the women’s magazines were commercial ventures, calculated to become money-spinners. This situation subsequently affected negatively the growth of women writers and journalists as it led their work to become sporadic and lack of continuity. Contrarily the male writers and journalists had every opportunity to take full advantage of developing their skill of writing when compared to the female counterparts.
because the life span of the contemporary newspapers seemed to be longer than the women’s magazines.

Lastly, despite women in colonial India played an active role both as a social reformer and a journalist. They have been portrayed by the historians merely as the social reformers. In variation to women journalist, the male counterparts could reach to the recognition in both levels.

The Relationship between Women Journalists and Women’s Magazines in Pre-Independent India

Bengali

Articles presented at the National Seminar on women’s Magazines in India and contribution to literature and women’s cause indicated that the first magazine for women in Bengali was published in 1854. It was called ‘Masik Patrika’, ‘Monthly Penny’ magazine. The paper was jointly edited by Sri Peary Chand Mitra and Sri Radhanath Sikdar. Swapna Dutta, in her article, pointed out that in this magazine, there were no women editors nor women writers either. ‘Masik Patrika’ was followed by ‘Vama Bodhini’ in 1863; ‘Abala Bandhab’ in 1869; ‘Banga Mahila’ in 1870, ‘Bala Ranjita’ in 1873; ‘Hindu Lalana’ in 1875; ‘Paricharika’ in 1878; ‘Krishti mahila’ in 1881, ‘Banga Basini’ in 1883 and ‘Antahpur’ in 1890. Among these, Krishti Mahila edited by Smt. Kamini Seal was the first women’s magazine actually edited by a lady, but it was a magazine meant exclusively for Christian and had a distinct Christian flavour. The first women’s magazine edited by lady and circle for the Bengali women in general was Antahpur. It was edited by Banalata Sen and Hemanta Kumari. Hemanta Kumari, born and brought up at Lahore, knew several languages. She stepped into journalism by first editing a Hindi magazine for women called ‘Sugrihini’ when she was just fifteen years old. The magazine also had a Marathi version called ‘Grihini’. She edited Antahpur for several years.

All women’s magazines which came after Antahpur were edited by women. Some of the well-known ones were ‘Bharat Mahila’ (1905) edited by Sarayu Dutta;
‘Paricharika’ (1926) edited by Rani Nirupama; Banega Nari (1923); ‘Kishori’ (1931) edited by Sudha Sen; ‘Rupasree’ (1934) edited by Bela Devi; ‘Roop Lekha’ (1935) edited by Jahanara Chaudhari, incidentally, Roop Lekha was the first magazine for Muslim women; ‘Grihalaxmi’ edited by Kanak Prabha Devi; ‘Meyeder Katha’ (1941) edited by Asha Devi; ‘Srimati’ (1948) edited by Mira Chaudhary, ‘Chare Baire’ (1948) edited by Mangusree Devi and ‘Ma O Meye’ (1955) edited by Kabita Bakshi. There were some more; but by and large, these were the women magazines which appeared between 1855-1955. Unfortunately most of these magazines either languished after a while, or died a natural death – except for ‘Vama Bodhini’ which continued to flourish for the next 42 years.

The content of Bengali women’s magazines in 19th and early 20th century was mainly informative and educative. Even the stories and poems had distinct morals. This is partly because the contributors were mostly men although some women writers also wrote for them.

For a detailed content analysis, from ‘Bamabodhini Patrika’ edited by the male editor, it was observed that the magazine reflected the idea of male reformers imposing the moral code to the ‘new women’. In this regard, Indira Chowdhury pointed out that most of the articles often carried the image of an ideal mother influenced by Victorian notion. These articles stressed on women’s kindness to her subject and women’s firmness in dealing with her children. Indeed, the education and demeanour of Bandramahila was one of the foremost concern of the male articulators of this discourse as the articles written by Keshub Chandra in 1873 noted that the need for educating women aimed to make the wife competently shoulder the responsibilities of being a good wife and companion to her husband and later be a good mother to her children.

In ‘Antahpur’, though the magazine was edited by women editors, the articles showed the influence of their male predecessors. For instance the article in the ‘Antahpur’ 1904, on ‘The Inner Quarters of the Hindus’ written by Nagendrabala Debi insisted on the acceptance of the ideal of female virtue, which played an important role in defining the domestic space. She also stated that wisely responsibility lay in keeping the husband away from the prostitutes who were supposed to be skilled in the traditional sixty-four
arts including music. Further, she expressed her idea that if women provided this recreation within the domestic sanctuary, they would save their aberrant husbands.

In ‘Bharat Mahila’, Swapna Dutta found that the very first article in this magazine was about female education in ancient India, especially the Vedic age. After that, came a serialised historical novel ‘Nur Jahan’, which was the Bengali translation of an English novel. Then it was followed by a ‘Jataka tales’, a travelogue, article on Ms. Mulbury, noted social reformer of the time, serialized novel ‘Adrista-lipi’, a book review, an article on the founder of Mahakali Pathshala (a girl school in Calcutta), a champion of female education, household hints, the techniques of preserving marriage, the desirability of breast-feeding, two poems, one by Girindra Mohini Devi and another by Ramani Ghosh, a chapter on current affairs, ‘Sama Prasanga’, this particular issue was about the boycott of foreign goods by Indians, the resignation of a British viceroy, revolution in South Africa, the hardships endured by the non-whites in Transval, Natal and other British colonies and finally, about female education in Japan.

In ‘Srimiti’, published in 1948, the content started with an editorial where the editor stated that the objective of the magazine was to encourage women to contribute, to bring about better and happier world. Following the editorial were congratulatory messages, quotation from Gandhi and Tagore, serialized novels, short stories, reminiscence, a travelogue, a series of articles on budget planning, buying furniture, skin and hair care, nursing, care of the expectant mother, child care, recipe, embroidery designs, etc. Further, there were also a section on reviews on books, film record, radio programs including a section for children. Finally, a page on current affairs at home and abroad. 50

Marathi

A study of Marathi Literature came up with one notable monthly journal titled ‘Vividh Inan Vistar’. It emphasized women readers, although claimed to be for both ladies and gentlemen. A scholar called R. B. Gunjkar edited it and the journal included both honour and literary editors.

A contemporary of ‘Vividh Inan Vistar’ was ‘Manoranjan’ (1895), which achieved excellence in poetry as well as fiction. ‘Manoranjan’ also published Bengali and
Hindi translated fiction. However, its principle objective was to raise the issues of middle class women. Manoranjan was the work of K. R. Mitra. Yet, according to Shanata Kirloskar’s study, magazines like the ones mentioned folded after two or three years because the proprietors were irregular, shortsighted and indifferent to their publications.

By the third decade of 20th century, educated parents in India sent their daughters to school and several women actually graduated. There were more women readers and educated women were persuaded to write. One notable journal around the turn of the decade was ‘Gruhlakshmi’ (1927). It’s outlook on women is worth mentioning here; it raised the esteem for women. For them, woman is the strength, wealth, glory and beauty of a nation. The founder of ‘Gruhlakshmi’ was V. B. Marathe and there were also two women editors, Piroj Anandkar and Tara Tilak. But the main content of this magazine however, was more or less ‘conventional woman’s fare’. The magazine carried information for domestic works and child-care etc.

In 1929, however, a serious article on equal rights and suffrage by ‘Manorama Pradhan’ appeared. Manorama Pradhan called for women to assume a greater responsibility than homemaker and mother. Later, people wrote about matters like the All India Women’s Conference etc. Yet, even this marvelous work was short-lived. It lasted only for three years.

Around the same time, ‘Manorama’ also began and was prominent as a major periodical. Well-known men and women writers wrote stories or articles for it. There were also women using pen names. This stands as the first known case of authors under assumed names in India. But the source, here, claims that the use of a ‘pseudonym’ was to protect the author from nuisance.

By 1927, ‘Khabar’ had its own ‘women’s page’, but it was not sufficient and by August 1930, ‘Stree’, its successor, was started. It received articles and stories from both men and women of sound education to enlighten women readers and help them to develop their personalities in order to contribute to social progress. The writers of Stree encouraged women to develop their main strength; but at its onset, it was a guideline for home management.

‘Stree’ was obviously the most important women’s magazine before India’s independence. It lasted for more than sixty years, and broadcast circulation for fifty of
those years. ‘Stree’ was a product of a publishing house whose precedent work, ‘Kirloskar Khabar’ (News) began in 1920. The founder of Stree was a social reformer and artist named Shankar Rao Kirloskar. The former magazine (Khabar) strove for diligence and excellence. It attracted writers and poets who shared Shankar Rao’s attitude.51

**Gujarathi**

In Gujarathi, women have been contributing their work since the formative years of journalism. It was around the year of 1857, that the uprising against the British brought them out, breaking the shackles of orthodoxy and conservatism. ‘Stree Bodh’, the first women’s magazine in Gujarati, was started in 1857 and continued nearly 100 years. It closed in 1952.

In the monthly magazine named ‘Chetana’ and weekly magazine called ‘Sudarshana’ 1893. Smt. Priyamatic under her pen name Jyotisna Shuldha was its editor. At the same period, journalism in Gujarathi also witnessed Smt. Leelavati Munshi as joint editor of ‘Gujarat’ with her husband Shri. K. M. Munshi. On her writing relating to women, it is reported that she treated women as a human being, one knowing life and its weaknesses, ready to dare all that a man may hope to do, a rebel, loving adventure, romance and beauty. Her style of writing was simple, subtle, slashing, playful or emotional as the occasion required.

In the women’s page of ‘Gujarat Samachar’ under ‘Ghar Ghar Ni Jyot’ and in the column ‘Puchun Na Puchun Vinodini’ of ‘Shri Magazine’, Ben Neelkanth contributed her romantic essays, short stories, articles on social welfare and child welfare. All these issues written by her were read with keen interest. They all dealt with human nature, upliftment of one’s thoughts and lives, especially the power to ascertain the depth of a woman’s mind. In a magazine called ‘Yatrik’, Kumudini who did freelance journalism used to involve with this magazine from 1955-1957. She wrote regularly for the papers ‘Janma Bhoomi’ too. Her writings in this paper involved comments for the film division. From 1962-1980 she took editorship for ‘Navnit’.

In Bombay, the Gujarati paper called ‘Griha Madhuri’ was run by a woman editor Labhu Ben Mehta. She and her husband worked together as the editors of ‘Akhand
Anand’ for 10 years. Her writings were filled with a lot of idealism. She depicted the innermost feeling and sentiment of women of her time.

In ‘Janma Bhoomi’, Preeti Sengupta who was poetess, a non-resident Indian, wrote a travelogue. While in ‘Sakhi’ magazine, Padma Phadia had written a number of articles and stories especially awakening the women folk who had closed their minds regarding their own kind ill treatment by mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Her writings showed them in so many little ways that they too were once daughters and daughters-in-law. 52

Kannada

In Kannada, we can trace the association between the first women’s magazine ‘Karnataka Nandini’ and the nationalist movement inspired by Tilak. From all available records, Karnataka Nandini started in 1916, under the editorship of Ms. Nanjangoodu Tirumalamba. Nanjangoodu was regarded as the first woman journalist of Karnataka. She published the magazine under severe hardship; as there was no printing, she had to go all the way to Dharwad to get that magazine printed. The magazine existed for 4 years and there were 12 issues. It used to carry selection from holy scriptures. It also used to carry articles on women’s education, pathi-vratha dharma, role of Hindu women, etc. The language in Karnataka Nandini was highly sanskritized. Basically it drew its inspirations from scriptures and nationalist movement. Due to Ms. Tirumalamba’s association with Tilak, the magazine was carefully scrutinised by Britishers.

Following ‘Karnataka Nandini’, ‘Sanmargha Darshini’ appeared in 1922. This magazine was started by the same editor Ms. Tirumalamba of Karnataka Nandini. Though it was classified by many readers as women’s magazine its canvas was not strictly restricted to women’s issues. It evoked Nationalist feeling and shared ideas of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. It questioned many social practices like idol-worship, animal killing, spending for jewels, etc. It used to carry articles on ethical aspects of life and used to give advice on education, good companionship and how to become ideal citizen, etc.

The first women’s magazine, which consciously started questioning male dominated values and argued for women’s equality in all areas of human activity in
Kannada, was ‘Saraswathi’. It was a monthly published under the editorship of R. Kalyanamma in 1920. It was an illustrated magazine combined with articles. The front cover always carried non-conventional pictures, like—women deeply involved in different activities like teaching, writing, music, charkha, etc. It used to urge women to become warriors and carry biographies of well-known women like Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sujeetha Kripalani, Sarojini Naidu, Parvathi Devi Kesari, etc. It also used to publish articles like women of Tamilnadu, women journalists of USA, etc. In one of its editorials, it stated “Woman is not restricted to house; she should be able to come out of house and help others who do not have a home”. In another issue it stated “Bharath Mata has not only given birth to great sons, but great daughters too”. In short, the magazine’s position was equal to men, competent and capable of understanding any subject and issue.

Furthermore, the magazine also questioned the issue of motherhood, equal wages and discussed issues like prostitution and the role of men in perpetuating it. It encouraged women leaders and published analytical reports on some of the meetings from women’s point of view. In addition, it used to publish articles on wide range issues like Ayurveda, nuclear submarines, decimal systems, freedom in Bulgaria, nutritious food, etc.

It is remarkable that ‘Saraswati’ was not shy of political issues like Bhoomad movement, freedom struggle, etc. On the contrary, it played significant role in nationalist awakening. It started with 300 subscribers and it reached up to 2000.53

**Telugu**

In Telugu, Usharani Bathia claimed that women’s magazines started in Andhara nearly 100 years before independence. They were edited by women who distinguished themselves in different fields like medicine, social work and education. The magazines dealt mostly with the political and social issues like child marriage, widow re-marriage, women’s education, exploitation of women for immoral purpose and the practice of bride price.

The earliest women’s magazine titled ‘Saatihitabodini’, was started in 1883 from Rajamundry and edited by Kandukuri Veeresaligam. It was evident that in this magazine, some contributors conducted special features covering women’s problems. In the same year, Smt. Haltadi Vankataratnamma started ‘Jamana’ a monthly journal for women with
the chief aim of propagating women’s development. This was followed by a number of women’s journals started and edited by women. Among them, Smt. Venkatartamma started ‘Anasuya’ a monthly from Kakinada, which strongly advocated the need for women’s education, and the boycott of superstitions and old customs, which hampered the growth of women.

Around this time, there was an increase in awareness among women to voice their views through the platform of journals and magazines. Thus some of them came forward to start the magazines. In 1919, a monthly magazine called ‘Streeharma’ was started by Smt. Malathi Patwardhan. The editorials in this journal pertaining to women’s education and social work were well received by the public. Among the publications brought out in those days, special mention may be made of ‘Vivekavati’ edited by Ms. Archbald of Madras Christian Literary Society. Other than the above mentioned, there were magazines called ‘Savitri’ and ‘Andra Lakshmi’. The former was monthly, started by Smt. P. Lakshminaresamba, while the latter was edited by K. V. Ratnamma.

Another women’s magazine in Telgu served as a model and inspired many women to take up to publication of women’s journals was ‘Vivekavardhini’. It was started by the pioneer in Telgu literature and social reform, Handukari Veereedijarn. His views on social reform, widow remarriage and social justice for women were forcefully conveyed through the pages of this magazine.

Special mention should be made of the journal ‘Mahila’ brought out by Dr. Kaachamamba. The journal was solely devoted to the cause of women’s emancipation and development. Special mention may also be made of ‘Grihalakshmi’ started by late V. N. Kesari from Madras, which served as a platform for taking up many women’s careers prevalent in those days. Among the many publications that were started in pre-independent days, those journals that deserve special mention were ‘Balika’ (1896), ‘Grihalakshmi Vivekamu’ (1902), ‘Sundari’ (1909), ‘Hindu Yuvati’ (1923), ‘Bharat Mahila’ and ‘Andhra Mahila’ (1925).

It is noticeable that some of the journals mentioned above were started by women who did not have formal education or the introduction to western literature and culture. But they succeeded in making their journals effective tools for bringing awareness among the readers. The content of journals written by women writers mostly confined to the
prevailing social and economic problems. It was presented in the variety of forms such as stories, articles and features. Further, there was an extensive coverage of the seminars and conferences held by women’s organizations. In addition, there were book reviews, Indian and foreign news snippets, articles on health and child-care besides stories and tips on good home keeping. In general, women were exhorted to come out of their homes to participate in the country’s independence and journey to progress.  

Oriya

In Oriya language, the first Oriya magazine edited by a woman and meant exclusively for women readers was ‘Asha’. It was published in 1892 from Cuttack. The founder-editor of this magazine was Reba Roy. As ‘Asha’ belonged to the Brahma sect, Reba Roy, with her background in Brahma, ventured to magazine naturally. However, the magazine was started with a missionary zeal, trying to make women feel the necessity of education and to break the shackles of age-old superstitions and ignorance. It also published tales from Indian History and mythology, glorifying the roles of talented women. At the same time, it gave a call to the Oriya women to give up purdah and illogical superstitions. From modern period onwards, in Oriya, there was no other magazine that has contributed to the women’s cause more than Reba Roy’s Asha. Asha was published at the time when not only in Orissa but in entire India, the education and social status of women was abysmally low.

Despite the number of Oriya women’s magazines in pre-independent India was relatively few, there appeared the women editors of some important magazines. In 1924, Sarala Devi was the editor of ‘Sabita’. In 1933 Sharat Kumari Santane edited ‘Prabhat’. The renowned social worker and freedom fighter Malati Chauhari was the first editor of ‘Krushale’ in 1938 and much later in 1957 the famous writer and politician Nandini Satpathy edited the well known magazine ‘Dharini’. Apart from what described Kuntala Kumari Sabt, the famous Oriya poetess wrote in Hindi, during her stay in Delhi during 1927-1937, and edited a few Hindu magazines like ‘Stree Bhusan’, etc.  

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Hindi

In Hindi language, the study of journals in Hindi revealed that Bhartendu Harishchandra of Benaras was the first one to raise women’s issues in the Hindi region. He brought out a Hindi journal for women called ‘Bala Bodhini’ in 1874. Despite his effort to raise some consciousness about emerging democratic ideas and nationalism, the women’s movement did not coalesce until 35 years after the first publication of ‘Bala Bodhini’.

The first women’s journal run by women in Hindi was ‘Sugrihiini’. It was founded in 1888 from Allahabad. Hemanta Kumari Devi was the one who began publishing this journal. She was considered as the first known woman journalist in Hindi. The very next year ‘Bharati Bhagini’, another journal for women in Hindi, came out from the same city. It was published by Hari Devi.

In 1909 Rameshwari Nehru established the ‘Prayag Mahila Samiti’ in Allahabad and began a serious journal for women called ‘Stree Darpan’. Following Stree Darpan a closely linked journal ‘Kumari Darpan’ was brought out under the editorship of Roop Kumari Nehur. Stree Darpan became the most important instrument in the women’s movement in the Hindi province. It published stories and poems by women on women’s education, on purdah and on degradation and exploitation of women by men. In 1918 a Hindi Sahitya Sammelan on literature was organized at Indore. Among the topics on which papers were solicited was literature suitable for women in the Hindi language. Gandhi chaired this conference in which, for the first time 700 women took part and discussed literature in Hindi. Smt. Gangabai, Smt. Hemant Kumari Chaudhari, Pandita Mano Ramabai, Smt. Rembai and Smt. Magamba spoke on women’s education and other women’s issues.

Out of the total Hindi women’s journals in pre-independent India, the three important ones were ‘Grihalakshmi’, ‘Stree Darpan’ and ‘Chand’. All three were published from Allahabad, which was also the centre for the middle class nationalist movement. ‘Grihalakshmi’ was edited by a man and a woman. ‘Stree Darpan’ was edited only by a woman, and ‘Chand’ had only male editors though the manager was a woman. Grihalakshmi and Stree Darpan both began in 1909, while Chand was first published in 1922. From the feminist’s point of view Stree Darpan was a little ahead of Grihalakshmi.
and Chand a little ahead of both. In spite of the fact that both Grihalakshmi and Stree Darpan raised women’s issues and problems from a similar viewpoint, Grihalakshmi continued to emphasize the traditional roles of mother, sister and a daughter-in-law. The desired ideal relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the ideal behaviour for a wife, the demeanour and conduct towards the family expected from a good daughter-in-law, and the behaviour of the other family members towards her, were all subjects covered in articles in Grihalakshmi. Stree Darpan did not carry such articles. However, exploitation and injustice against women was repudiated in both Grihalakshmi and Stree Darpan. Chand, which was supported by major writers in Hindi, seemed to be larger than those two journals both in size and perspective. In the year of its inception, it brought out three special issues: on widows, on education and on child marriage.

In 1922 Hindu Mahasabha was bitterly criticized in Chand because it ignored the question of Hindu widows. Chand did not restrict itself to treating women’s issues only from the viewpoint of problematic gender relationship or from an anti-male point of view. Rather its approach was to look upon such problems as social question and to seek ‘reform’ in the interest of revolution.

Though the details of content of each Hindi women’s journal was different from each other, in general it shared the same ideology in making of Indian women into an ideal housewife in the context of nationalist movement.

It is notable that in the early years of the 20th century, there were a number of women journalists both as the contributors and editors in Hindi women’s journals and magazines. The prominent among them were Asha Devi, Bhagwan Devi, Paliwal, Dhanrani Kunwar, Gayatri Devi Verma, Kala Devi, etc.56

Tamil

In Tamil language, the women’s magazines were sometimes edited by men and sometimes run entirely by women. The very first one was ‘Panmati Bodhini’, started in 1891. The editor’s name was not known; but most of the articles were written by women. The reason for bringing out this journal, according to the first issue, was to bring reform, culture, peace, good behaviour and intelligence to women along with knowledge of what they ought to do, so that they could lead a good marriage life. The first issue under the
title ‘The women’s Adornment’ suggested hundred rules for women to follow, straining
docility, non aggressiveness, patience, etc. There were several other journals of this kind
in later years.

In 1905, a spokesman for women’s freedom named E. Subrmania Bharati started
a magazine called ‘Chakravatini’. The magazine aimed to bring out the betterment of
women. As the thought of male editor was highly influenced by Victoria model, the paper
carried the issue in which pro-English education for Indian women was discussed by
men. The article on women’s education stressed on the necessity of women to learn
music, healthy exercises and nursing. Further, the moral code or women’s ‘Dharma’ such
as ‘woman has to listen to her husband’ was considered a crucial part of education also.
Interestingly, though the editor believed in the intelligence of woman, he suggested her
not to remain single, but marry and worship husband as God. To be precise, the purpose
of women’s education in pre-independent India was not to encourage women to demand
‘freedom’ for their life, but to please their husbands, so they will not be ill treated.

After a few years, the women’s magazines run by women came into existence. In
1909, ‘Hitakarini’ was started by Pandit Visalakhi Amal with many articles and stories
stressing ‘proper’ behaviour for women. In 1912 there was another journal called ‘Penn
Kalvi’ run by Revu Thayaramma. It had the usual articles on education, early marriage
and dowry. In 1924 appeared ‘Chintamani’, run by Sister Balammal. This was meant
especially for the betterment of women and for improving their knowledge. The articles,
which could be taken as representative issues were the articles on epic stories, Marco
Polo’s travel and stories of heroic Indian women. In the same year, Jagan Mohini press
brought out the journal ‘Jagan Mohini’ in which many women wrote too. In addition, in
1944 an annual called ‘Nandavanam Ladies Special’ was brought out with articles for
and by women.

Among the women’s magazines and journals, the one that was bold and most
assertive was ‘Taadhar Marumanum’ run by Margatavalli Ammal, a wife of the
nationalist, published from Karaikvdi in 1956. Since Maragatavalli was a widow, she
pleaded the cause of widows. Further, she also invoked men to create love in the hearts of
women, like Rama did in Sita’s. Notably the texts in the magazine were presented in the
form of comic, songs and articles. What is significant is that the songs appeared in the manner of men advising women.

Towards the end of 1940, Tamil women’s magazines witnessed the emergence of a well-known woman writer and journalist named Gugpriya. She edited two journals ‘Mangai’ and ‘Pudumai’. These two journals published mostly articles on child-care, interviews with Gandhi on women, reports on women politicians and articles on women. It is however to be noted that though Gugpriya stressed the women’s need for change, she still felt that women’s primary concern was her home. According to Gugpriya’s idea, politics was not important in comparison with her domestic role. This was evident in the Mangai in its confidential column. It was telling woman, who wrote about her problems with her mother-in-law to serve her mother-in-law first, and did whatever she herself wanted in the spare time. ⁵⁷

In a nutshell, most of the women’s periodicals, journals and magazines in pre-independent India share the same features as follows:

1. The very pioneer editors, journalists and writers of the women’s magazines in colonial Indian were the male reformers, and women stepped into this field later. As Smt. Surekha Panandikar stated that most of the women’s magazines in the 19th century were owned and run by the male reformers and though the women writers increased the number of women contributing to the women’s magazines afterward, the editors of magazines were still men. Thus the male editors were not bound to be sensitive to some women’s issues, which women really know where the shoe pinches. ⁵⁸

2. The women’s magazines in pre-independent India had distinctive purpose of educating women. The dedicated editors sought the cooperation of eminent scholars, writers and educationists. Studies found that while the well-known writers and scholars contributed literary pieces, the orthodox pundits wrote about Ramayana and Mahabharat in the women’s magazines. ⁵⁹

3. Political leaders made use of women’s magazines to motivate women to join the struggle of Independence. ⁶⁰

4. Since the making of Indian women into the ideal housewives was an objective of the women’s magazines, it was not surprising to see stories, poems, serialized
novels, articles on women’s issues and pages devoted to cookery, embroidery, knitting – the so called womanly activities as the content of the magazines. 61

5. The increasing number of women journalists in the change of socio-economic and political context of the early 20th century enhanced a number of articles focusing on women's problems from women's perspective, not from men's point of view as it happened in 19th century. As the social attitude towards women in 20th century gradually changed, the new ideas of achieving the rights of women in all spheres of life became the main objective of writing. 62

6. In spite of the cooperation of all enlightened people and dedication of the editorial team, the pioneer women’s magazines could not survive for a long term. Illiteracy among women, economic constraints combined with unsympathetic attitude of the alien government made the survival of the early women’s magazines difficult. But the remarkable thing was that if the shutter was closed on one women’s magazine, a new one was started. 63

7. Most of the women’s magazines were meant for urban women. So they naturally, catered to the needs of educated women, who could read and afforded them. There were hardly one or two, which were published for women in rural areas. The only consideration shown to the grass-root women was through publishing a story written with rural background or any news items happenings in rural areas. 64

Profile of Women Journalists in Pre-Independent India

Swarnakumari Devi (1856-1932) (Bengali)

Swarnakumari Devi, was the first woman poet, novelist, playwright, song writer and journalist of colonial India. She was the tenth child of Debendranath Tagore and sister of Rabindranath Tagore.

She married when she was 13 years. Five years after her marriage, she published her first novel. Throughout her life she wrote around 125 books.

In regard to her journalistic work, she became the editor of the journal called ‘Bharati’, a monthly magazine, which dedicated its space for literature and culture. She edited this journal more than 35 years.
As a social reformer, she found the Ladies Theosophical Society in 1882. In 1886, she started the Sakhi Samiti. The aim of the Samiti was to help the helpless orphans and widows in education and work.

**Sarala Devi Ghosal (later Chaudharani) (1872-1946) (Bengali)**

Sarala Devi was born in 1872. She was the daughter of Swarna Kumari Devi and the niece of Rabindranath Tagore. Since her mother was a versatile writer, journalist and ardent worker for social reform, she then imbibed the spirit of patriotism.

She became the editor of ‘Bharati’ in 1895. Through this magazine, she wrote provocative editorials about Hindu-Muslim unity and the work of Indian National Congress. In 1905 at the age of 33, she was married to Rambhoy Dutt Chaudhary a popular Arya Samajist and a well-known nationalist leader. Thereafter she shifted to Punjab where she supervised the work of ‘Hindustan Press’ Urdu paper, which was edited by her husband.

Considering the activities of social reform and nationalist movement, she involved with and contributed her energy for women’s upliftment. In this respect, she opened the Arya Samaj branches for women in Punjab and started the Bharat Stree Mahahmandal in Lahore in 1910. The chief aim of this organization was to spread female education and organized selling centres for women’s handicrafts and did medical treatment to women.

**Mokshodayani Mukhopadhyay (1848-?) (Bengali)**

Mokshodayani was born approximately in 1848. She was the daughter of the renowned lawyer, Girish Bannerjee. Her family was famous for its scholarship and she grew up in an atmosphere of learning.

In 1870, she brought out the first issue of ‘Bangla Mahila’ (Women of Bengal). Bangla Mahila was a newsletter, designed to support the exchange of information among women. It stood for women’s rights and fought for women’s causes. One article written by her was about the distinction between real freedom for women and aping of western women’s manner and thought. In this article she did not agree with those who claimed that Bengali women were suppressed or not free. She insisted what Bengali women
needed was not ‘freedom’ in western concept, but they needed access to higher education and a new style of dressing.

Mokshodayani was not only a journalist of 19th century but simultaneously a poet.

**Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani (1861-1920) (Bengali)**

Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani was a prominent journalist and writer of her times. She belonged to an eminent family in Calcutta. At the age of ten, she was married to Akashary Chandra Chowdhary, a poet who had close links with the Tagore family. Throughout her literary work, she was encouraged and supported by Tagore.

Sarat Kumari published a number of thought-provoking essays in the magazines. Her provocative essays on the women’s question were published in ‘Bharati’, the journal, which Swarnakumri Devi edited.

**Krishabhabini Das (1864-1919) (Bengali)**

Krishabhabini Das was a journalist as well as a social reformer. She was from Bowbazar. She received education from her husband when they were in England about 8 years.

In 1885, she wrote a book, ‘England-e-Bangamahil’. The book was about the freedom of English women that it was prescribed in India.

Being a journalist, Krishabhabini Das exposed her personal life as she directly experienced through ‘Bharathi’. In that article, she described of how she gave up wearing western clothes on her husband’s death, and took to wearing the thana, a plain widow’s sari, and began to observe all the austerities and self-abnegation of the typical Hindu widow.

As a social reformer, she devoted herself to promoting the Bharat Stree Mahamandal, the organization established by Sarala Devi Chaudhurani.

**Urmila Devi (1883-1956) (Bengali)**

Urmila Devi was both a journalist and a social reformer. She was born in an upper middle class Hindu Vaisya family. Her early education was at Loreto Convent in Calcutta. She was married in her teens to Ananta Narayan Sen, but continued her studies.
She seriously threw herself into the Non Co-operation Movement, after she became a widow in 1930. In 1921, she defied the ban on selling Khadi and was arrested. In the same year, however, she set up the Nari Karma Mandir in order to popularize spinning and weaving among women.

Urmila Devi wrote numerous articles on the effort of women to further the cause of Khadar and Swadeshi. In 1921, she described in ‘Banglar Katha’, a Bengali weekly, how young Bengali girls were travelling the country, dressed in Khadi saris and spreading the message of Swaraj.

**Lila Roy (1900-1970) (Bengali)**

Lila Roy was a social worker, a revolutionist, an activist and a journalist. She was born in Goalpara, Assam in 1900. Her father Girish Changra Nag, was a deputy magistrate.

In 1923 she had an M.A. in English from Dacca University. A year later, she and her friends founded the Dipali Sangle and established a school, which later became the centre of political discussion. In 1925 she joined the Sri Sangha, a revolutionary society of Dacca. She married Anil Baran Roy in 1929. In 1930, when her husband was arrested, she ran the organization and later faced the same situation like her husband.

After her release from jail in 1937 she joined the Congress and the next year founded the Bengal Provincial Congress Women’s Organization. She became a member of the women’s subcommittee formed by Subhash Chandra Bose; later, she became a member of the central executive body of the Forward Block. When Bose went to jail in 1940, she was nominated as the editor of the ‘Forward Block Weekly’.

**Aruna Asaf Ali (Bengali) (1909-1996)**

Aruna Asaf Ali was a prominent freedom fighter, journalist and activist of her times. She was born in a Bengali Brahmin family 1909 and was educated at the Sacred Heart Convent in Lahore, and then was sent to a Protestant school in Nainital. Refusing to hear of her parent’s plan to marry her off, she took up a job of teaching at the Gokhale Memorial School for girls in Calcutta. Shortly afterwards, she met Asaf Ali, a Muslim Barrister from Delhi and finally, in 1927, she married him against her parents wish.
Aruna Asaf Ali became a radical nationalist and an advocate of uncompromising struggle against British rule. She participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement in the 1930s, and went to jail. In August 1942, she hoisted the Indian flag at Gowalia Tank Maidan in Mumbai. Subsequently, she went underground with her socialist friends in 1943 with the object of channeling and directing the fury of angry mobs into a disciplined resistance to the British.

She ventured into journalism around 1944. The motive behind was the political aim. The role she played in journalism was the editor of ‘Inquilab’, the monthly organ of the Congress. After which, in 1958, she launched ‘Link’ with Edatata Narayanan as editor. Link was the political philosophy magazine aiming to promote the cause of the left.

**Malati Choudhary (Oriya)**

Malati Choudhary practiced journalism while she was a freedom fighter. Her ancestors were from the East Bengal or today’s Bangladesh. After the death of her father, when she was three years old, her mother took her to Darjeeling. Finally, when she was 14 years old, she was admitted to study in Shantiniketan.

Since childhood Malati felt strongly about nationalism. She continued the nationalist activities even after her marriage in 1927. In this regard, she started taking course of woven khadi and farm produced rice. Above all, she and her husband started a Congress Smayabdi Sangha and publishing a magazine for salt Satyagraha.

**Muktabai (1841-?) (Marathi)**

Though Muktabai’s writing found to be extremely scarce, Muktabai contributed to Marathi journal is important for the history of women in journalism. Her effort was probably the earliest surviving piece of writing by a mang woman, an ‘untouchable’

About the autobiography of Muktabai, we know only she studied at the school in Pune found by Savitribai and Jotiba Phule (1827-1890). Muktabai wrote an essay called ‘O learned Pandits’, in a journal called ‘Dnyanodaya’, when she was 14. This essay questioned the injustice given to the low caste men and women.
The essay written by Muktabai was originally published in Dnyanodaya, an Ahmednagar journal. It was reprinted in the Dnyanodaya Centenary Volumes, edited by B. P. Hivale, in 1942.

**Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) (Marathi)**

Pandita Ramabai was never a journalist, but a social reformer and a writer who contributed to journalism occasionally when the time needed. She was born in a cultured Brahmin family, where her mother taught her Sanskrit. Being an eminent scholar, later she was publicly honoured with the title ‘Pandita’.

Ramabai wrote quite a number of books, the most important ones were ‘Testimony’, ‘The High Case Hindu Women’ and ‘The Stree Dharma Neeti’. Further, she also contributed considerable numbers of letters and essays to the newspapers of her times. The most known among them was the letter published in ‘Bombay Guardian’, criticizing the British Government for its handling of women during the plague epidemics of 1897.

In 1889, she travelled all over the United States in order to raise a fund for women’s organization ‘Sharda Sadan’, a home for widows and women’s education. However, Ramabai’s critical mind on Hinduism, as she rejected the idea of golden age for Indian womanhood, including her exposure of the ugly face of Hinduism made it impossible for her to be accommodate within a reformed Hinduism. So she eventually converted to Christianity.

**Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924) (Marathi)**

Ramabai Ranade was a wife of Mahadev Govind Ranade, a prominent judge, a social reformer and a journalist of 19th century. Being educated by her husband, later she took the crucial role in nationalist movement. Her contribution for the nationalist movement ranged from the founding and participating of women’s organizations to writing.

With special reference to writing, though there is no record mentioning about her particular work, we know that she was the one who wrote many letters on Ranade’s
behalf. She also scanned newspapers and books for ideas that might be of interest to him. Moreover, after his death in 1907, she edited and published his speeches and writings.

**Kashibai Kanitkar (1861-1948) Marathi**

Though Kashibai was given no formal education from her mother, she was known as a journalist, a novelist and a short story writer in her times. Like other women writers of 19th century, she wrote about women's cause, the main core of social reform and nationalist movement.

After marriage at the age of nine, she was lucky enough to receive education from her husband. He taught her how to read and write in Marathi and English. As a result, Kashibai found her way in literature.

Kashibai presented her first essay, ‘women past and present’ while attending the weekly meetings for women organized by the Prathana Samaj. In 1887 the piece was published in an important contemporary journal, ‘Subodh Patrika’. Thereafter, in 1889 she reviewed Pandita Ramabai’s High Caste Hindu Woman for ‘Manoranjan’, the literary monthly which Apte, the Marathi novelist had started. In the same year she also edited Ananibai’s letters for publication. In 1911, she further reviewed the progress of women’s education under imperialism in ‘Vividhadyhivisthar’, a monthly journal and in June 1916, she published an article asking, “Are contemporary plays giving good shape in society?”

**Geeta Sane (1907-?) (Marathi)**

While pursuing journalism, Geeta Sane also wrote novels. She was born in a family where her father, who turned to be a lawyer, got deeply involved in the Home Rule Movement.

In spite of choosing to study science and later teaching mathematics, she could manage for writing. She started writing for the journal in 1927. Her first piece was an angry response to the turmoil caused by the Khan-Panandikar affair. The furor was due to marriage between a Hindu and a Muslim. Since then, she wrote regularly on social issues. Most of her articles were published in ‘Stree’.
Geeta Sane married when she was twenty-six. After marriage she also took active part in the freedom movement and was one of those charged in the famous Meerut conspiracy case of 1929 influenced by the left.

**Shanta Patil (Marathi)**

Shanta Patil was recognized as a freedom fighter and a journalist as well. She was born in a revolutionary family. Born in such a family, which breathed sedition, then joining nationalist movement, it came naturally to her.

The nationalist feeling imbibed in Shanta was from her father, the German language scholar who escaped arrest from British government, exiled in Pondicherry, a French colony for 5 years. Shanta’s family returned to India in 1920. Then, her father agreed to join Shantiniketan as a teacher of German. After a few years in Shantiniketan, he again plunged into politics. Shanta too became involved in public affairs.

Along with political activities, Shanta’s father started a magazine called ‘Patidsar’. The magazine provided a platform to fight the obnoxious custom of the Patil community and exposed the persons who perpetuated such customs. Thus ‘Patidsar’ became a mouthpiece of social reform.

Shanta started involving in ‘Patidsar’ when her father was away for his political activities or during his imprisonment. In this respect, she and her sister wrote articles for the magazine, edited it and did proof reading. Further, in order to save money, all incidental work was done by both of them, i.e. wrapping the magazine, pasting stamps on them and carrying them to the post office. In the interview, she told the interviewer that she had no formal schooling, but the informal education she received at the hand of her father equipped her to bring out ‘Patidsar’. She said, “Both of us were virtually associate editors of this journal. More than me, my sister had inherited my father’s powerful pen”.

In 1930, inspired by Gandhiji, Shanta joined Salt Satyagraha. Her sister too wanted to join it, but one of them had to remain behind to bring out the magazine. Finally, the decision was made. Shanta was so insistent on joining the Satyagraha that her sister gave in.
Maahadevi Verma (1907-1987) (Hindi)

Maahadevi Verma was one of the most renowned writers of modern Hindi literature. She was a poet and a journalist. She successfully captured the thoughts of Hindi readers.

She was born in 1907 at Farukhbad in Uttar Pradesh. As her father was a liberated Arya Samajist, she received her education at a missionary school as well as at home. Though Mahadevi married after her graduation, she refused to go to live with her husband.

Mahadevi Verma, later, became the principle of the Prayag Mahila Vidyapith and began involving the Hindi magazine ‘Chand’, where she expressed her feminist thought through editing, writing and illustrating over several years. In one editorial titled ‘Sahitya aur Usmen Striyon Ka Sthan’ (Literature and the position of women in it) 1935, she made a careful survey of the women who had been writing in Hindi since 1920. The main problem for women writers, she argued, was out of their lack of confidence in themselves.

Bandaru Acchamamba (1874-1904) (Telugu)

Bandaru Acchamamba was born in 1874, in a village called Nandigama. Similar to other women writers in her days, she received informal education through sitting nearby her brother while he was initiated into traditional scholarship. After he left for further study, she then worked on her own.

Bandaru Acchamamba perhaps was the first feminist historian in India, who simultaneously played a role as a journalist and a writer. Her writings on women’s history (published in a book, ‘Alaba Sacchrita Ratnamala’, A garland of great women’s life histories), had been serialized in the social reformer Kandukuri Veershalingam’s journal, ‘Chintamani’, while her essays, stories and poems were published in leading journals such as ‘Hindu Sundari’ and ‘Saraswati’.

As a scholar she was never a cloistered academic. Right through her brief adult life, she played a crucial role in building up women’s movement. In this regard, she started Brindavan Stree Samajam, (Brindavan Women’s Association), and also travelled
all over India. In addition, she held discussions with scholars and drew journals in local language for her information.

**Kalyanamma (1894-1965) (Kannada)**

Kalyanamma was a writer and a social reformer, who faced the problems of widowhood. Born in a traditional family, she was not supported in education. Inspite of being deprived of education and burdening long hours of domestic labour as a widow, she however managed time to read and write. After passing her lower secondary examination in 1906, soon she began publishing short stories, articles, and translation from Tamil.

Fond of writing, Kalyanamma then ran a children’s magazine called ‘Sararswati’ in 1921, which she herself acted as the editor. The magazine later became popular and received support from social workers and administrators as well. As a result, many well-known authors, both men and women, began to write for it.

The range of subjects in Saraswati was broad – politics, fine arts, current affairs, etc. but its principal objective was the all-round development of women.

As a talented writer, her writing skill was not limited only to editing but furthered to other forms of literature e.g. short stories for children, plays, essays and novels. Most of these works dealt with the question of child widows.

Apart from being a committed writer, she also dedicated herself to women’s organization, the Sarada Stree Samaj. As the founder of Sarada Stree Samaj, she was the secretary of the organization until 1926.

**Nanajanagudu Tirumalamba (1887-1982) (Kannada)**

Like Kalyanamma, Tirumalamba too became a widow at the age of thirteen. After the miserable fate, her father however encouraged her to study. She read classical poetry and religious texts at home, and soon started writing by herself.

Tirumalamba was very talented in literature. She wrote various kinds of poems, novels, plays, and even started running a magazine called ‘Karnataka Nandini’ (daughter of Karnataka). Karnataka Nandini came into existence in 1976. It was the first women’s magazine in Kannada. Her idea on supporting widow’s education, fighting for widow’s
dignity, but opposing remarriage seemed to be the main theme of her writings. For sometimes she also taught young children and ran the children’s magazine.

Though Tirumalamba’s idea on women was still very much influenced by the male reformers as she believed that education was necessary because it would help women to become better wives, mothers and daughters. Beneath her traditional stance, her feminist consciousness was awakened as she defense for women’s capabilities, their intellectual powers, and their rights.

**Shyamala Devi (1910-1943) (Kannada)**

Shyamala Devi was considered as a journalist, a short story writer, and an activist in the All India Women’s Conference.

Many of Shyamala’s writings were published in ‘Jaykar Naraks’ where in 1941 she became a co-editor. After she took this part, soon the journal began to pay more attention to women and women’s question. Besides, she started a separate section called ‘Mother and Child’, which was designed for discussion of the social and political rights of women and their aspirations to progress. In addition, the journal also dealt with topics of political significance at a time when India was asserting itself against British rule.

Shyamala Devi died when the journal she edited was in trouble, as her husband wrote in the preface to the 1945 edition of Hu Bisulu “When we had repaid our loans and were about to relax, she died”.

**Nazar Sajjad Hyder (1894-1967) (Urdu)**

Nazar Sajjad Hyder was born in 1894 in Kohat, where her father was posted as a supply agent to the British army. Originally her family belonged to Lucknow and Moradabad. She married to Syed Sajjad Hyder Yildirim, a pioneer of the modern Urdu short story writer and champion of women’s rights in 1912.

According to Nazar Sajjad’s family background, she grew up in the atmosphere where writing was already the familiar activity to her. Her aunt Akabri Begum was referred as a famous reformist writer. Her stories and articles were published in the prestigious literary magazines like Abdul Quadir’s ‘Makhzan’, in Lahore. Interestingly, she was also honorary editor of ‘Phool’, the now legendary Urdu weekly for children, and
contributed to epoch-making women’s magazines such as ‘Khatoon’ (Aigarh), ‘Ismat’, (Delhi), and ‘Tehzib Niswan’ (Lahore).

Like her aunt, Akbari Begum who was deeply involved in issues of social reform, she brought up the idea of the All India Muslim Ladies Conference. Moreover, she opened girl’s schools in various cities of the United Province now Uttar Pradesh.

**Rasheeda Jahan (1905-1952) (Urdu)**

Rasheeda Jahan was an Urdu writer. She was born and brought up in Aligarh. Her father was Sheikh Abdullah, the prominent social reformer who edited a women’s magazine in Urdu, ‘Khatoon’. Women’s concern was often debated in her family.

Rasheeda studied in Lucknow, then went to the Lady Hardinge Medical College. There she showed an early activism, running literary classes and free medical clinics for women. In 1931, she made her name in Urdu literature with a play and a story in the anthology Angare. The play titled ‘Parde ke Picche’ dealing with abortion and other health issues showed its anger to traditional Muslim society. As a result, Fatwas were issued against her, and she was warned not to go out on her rounds without a bodyguard. In addition, she also edited the magazine ‘Chingari’.

**Madam Bhikanjji Rustom K. R. Cama (English)**

Madam Bhikanjji Rustom Cama, nee Patel, a daughter of Sorabji Framji Patel was a versatile revolutionary as well as a journalist. She was born in 1869. After she completed her education at the Alexander Parsi Girl’s School, she married to the son of K. Rustom Cama, a Parsi reformer.

It was due to the freedom movement, she involved in Europe in 1902 that led her to involve in journalism. In 1907, when the renowned Indian journalist and revolutionary, B. C. Pal, editor of ‘Swaraj’, was prosecuted for his sedition writings, Madam Cama felt the need of having a press of her own away from the clutches of the British Government. Her dream materialized in 1909, when she shifted to Paris. To carry on the required propaganda work she started the well-known monthly journal the ‘Bandemataram’. This journal was supported by voluntary contributions and there was no fix subscription.
The famous Press Act was imported to India by the bureaucratic government in 1910. By this act, several editors were sent to jail and the press was closed down. Madam Cama however was not defeated by this high handed measure, so she encouraged her countryman and wrote in Vol. 1 March 1910, of her journal that the Press Act was a confession of the defeat on the part of the Indian Government and not the revolutionary party. She emphasized that the act would not affect the future of the revolutionary cause since its journals and books were printed abroad.

Another article in 1911, Madam Cama appealed to the Indians in Europe to make the best of their stay in the West, by taking all kinds of physical training. Above all she asked them to learn to shoot straight because “the day is not far when coming into the inheritance of Swaraj and Swadeshi, you will be called upon to shoot the English out of the land, which we all love so passionately”. The copies of this journal finally found their way to America, Egypt and many parts of Europe and India. At one time nothing less than 426 copies were intercepted at the Oxford Post Office.

Madam Cama was very popular in socialist circles in Paris. When V. D. Savarkar’s arrest and recapture became known, she used her influence with such effect that ‘affair Savarkar’ was at once taken up in the socialist paper. Madam Cama engaged socialist advocate Jean Longquest to watch the proceeding of the Hague Tribunal on Savarkar’s behalf and represented him there.

The British Government was alarmed and the Governor General issued orders for the interception of Madam Cama’s mail. A thorough check was made on all the seaports. But Madam Cama was not defeated by these moves. Her leaflets and parcels reached India via Pondicherry.

Madam Cama fell seriously ill in 1914, but the moment she recovered, she set about her work again with the same old vigour and enthusiasm. At this time, she helped in distributing copies of the Gujarathi Ghadar and carried on copious correspondence with the Indian revolutionaries in all parts of the world.

She died on 13th August 1936 at Bombay. This brave lady who sacrificed her all for the liberation of her motherland and spent practically her whole life in exile in a far off land, was amongst the pioneers of freedom struggle.
Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) (English)

Sarojini Naidu a prominent nationalist, activist, orator, poet and journalist was born in Hyderabad where her father settled for his service. She was a daughter of Asher Nath Chattopadhaya, a philosopher, scientist, poet and teacher.

In spite of having poor health, she stood first in the matriculation examination of entire presidency. She however, had no craving for further study. Ill health compelled her to discontinue the studies from time to time.

She began writing English poetry at the age of 11. However, it was in 1905 with the inspiration of Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons that she surprised the Indian literary world with her poetic power. From that year onwards, her poetic career began.

Sarojini’s close association with the nationalist movement began at the eighteenth session of Indian National Congress, which was held at Bombay in 1904. The decade between the Bombay Congress (1904) and her first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi (1914) was her time of learning. It was also a period of her future work in the social, political and literary sphere.

During the nationalist movement, Sarojini was among the few women who joined ‘Satyagraha’ led by Gandhi and involved in the women’s movement. In 1925 she succeeded Gandhi as President of the Indian National Congress and in 1928 she helped in founding of the All India Women’s Conference.

Though Sarojini Naidu’s role in struggle for independence was portrayed as a freedom fighter, a poet and an orator rather than a journalist, in reality she wrote quite a number of essays and prose. Her work related to women issues, several times appeared in ‘Stree Bodh’ and ‘The Indian Ladies magazine’.

Lakshmi N. Menon

Lakshmi N. Menon was a parliamentarian of high repute as well as a journalist, writer, diplomatic educationist and activist. She was born in Trivandrum. In 1930 she married Prof. V. K. Nandan Menon, an educationist.

Lakshmi herself studied at Madras, Lucknow and London, acquiring high qualification as an educator. She began her career at the Queen Mary’s College, Madras, where she taught until 1926.
She ventured into journalism as an editor of magazine called ‘Roshni’. It belonged to the All India Women’s Conference, which she was considered as one of the founder members and served for sometime as its secretary and president in 1955-57.

In 1949-50, she headed the UN section on the status of women and children. Back home, she served in the External Affairs Ministry as Parliamentary from 1952-57, Deputy Minister from 1957 -1962, and Minister of state to 1967. Retiring from political service in 1967, she turned to social work and writing.

**Violet Alva (1908-1969)**

Violet Alva was a social worker, administrator, lawyer, legislator and journalist all into one. She was born in 1908 and was educated at St. Xavier’s College and Government Law College in Bombay. After her marriage to Joachim Alva, she participated in social work, journalism and the freedom struggle. Both were actively involved and were jailed several times, so in every sense the Alva’s were true companions to each other, serving the country together, showing each other the path and sharing their family responsibilities.

In 1942 during the Quit India Movement, Violet went to jail with her infant child. In 1944 she began a women’s magazine ‘The Begum’ later renamed ‘Indian Women’. From 1945 to 1953, she was the secretary of the Agripura Rehwasi Sevamandal at Bombay. In 1946-47, she was the deputy chairperson of the Bombay Municipal Corporation. In 1947, she served as the Honorary Magistrate in Bombay. From 1948 to 1954, she was the president of the Juvenile Court at Bombay. She was the actively involved with and presided over numerous social organizations like the Young Women’s Christian Association, Business and Professional Women’s Association, and the International Forum of Women Lawyers. She was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1952 and in the same year, she was also the first women to be elected to the standing committee of the All India Newspaper Editors Conference. Beside, she was Union Deputy Minister for Home Affairs from 1957 to 1962, when Jawaharlal Nehru was Prime Minister. She served as deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha from 1962 to 1966 and again from 1966-1969.
Violet Alva was an example of women in her times, who played several role into one. She was also a successful wife and mother. She firmly believed that a woman was capable of having both a successful career and a happy family life. 65

The content of Chapter IV will be to continue this topic until the present time. As before, details have been given to all relevant aspects, such as those presented in the preceding chapters. It is expected that the following topic would shed sufficient light on the role and problems of women journalists of the present time.
End Notes
Chapter III


4. Ibid. p. 65, 322


8. Ibid. p. 217, 237, 262


18. Ibid


20. Ibid. p. 170 - 171


24. Ibid p. 48
31. Ibid p. 53
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35. Ibid p. 2
39. Women of India. p. 249
52. “Gujarathi magazine”. Paper
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60. Ibid p. 3
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