CHAPTER-II

MARGINALISED CONDITION AND TRANSITIONAL PHASE OF NORTH INDIAN WOMEN IN THE LAST DECADE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the socio-historical perspectives, the condition of Indian women is an important aspect of study in every age. If we trace the status of Indian women, we find that there are many changes which took place from time to time. During the Vedic period, the women enjoyed equal status and rights as their male counterparts and their social status was higher than men. According to A.S. Altekar ‘the status of women is one of the best gauges of the spirit of civilization, its excellencies and its limitation. He also argued that the Vedic age was one in which women enjoyed singular freedom but the condition of women gradually deteriorated from later Vedic period due to the caste system. This is evident from the text of Sutras, early Puranas etc. Manusmritis says that ‘no woman entitled to freedom’. With the passage of time, the condition of Indian women considerably changed and was affected by several practices like Polygamy, Sati, Child-marriage, Purdah, ill-treatment of widows etc. However in early Medieval period, the education of women did not receive equal attention but was not totally ignored at that time. Only the royal Mughal ladies received sound education but the education for girls in general was restricted to primary level i.e Maktab only. As the society was plunged into age-old customs and traditions, few women of higher class gained privileged position and led their lives freely without any social subjection. In the historical records, we notice the model of

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Also cited, Altekar, A.S, Position of Women in Hindu Civilization: From Pre-historic times to the Present day, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1959, pp-1,13.
Also cited, Khatoon, ed. Muhammad Abdullah, Shaikh, vol-2, no-12, (December, 1905), p-577.
many outstanding ladies like Gargi, Razia Sultan, Chand Bibi, Gulbadan Bano Begum, Nurjahan, Zeb-un-Nisa, Queen of Jhansi, Mira Bai, Ahalya Bai who were remarkable for their outstanding achievement in the study of literature, art, philosophical system, politics and warfare etc but the other Indian women in general faced the difficulties and they could not gain the opportunities to develop their self-expression\(^5\).

However, with the beginning of the nineteenth century, an era of change began and the social reformers took up the subject of women as the central theme of their reform. They felt that the inferior status of women was one of the causes for the overall degradation of their condition and realized the need of education for women. At that time the condition of women in general and Muslim in particular was deplorable due to the ignorance of education and various social evils and practices of earlier ages which prevailed among them\(^6\). The modern writers like Azra Asghar Ali\(^7\), Barbara Metcalf\(^8\), Shahida Latif\(^9\), Gail Minault\(^10\) etc stated the various reasons behind women’s backwardness and stressed on women’s education which gradually improved their condition. According to C.A. Bayly, with the onset of colonial rule, many significant changes happened in Indian society. He asserts that the late pre-colonial and early colonial periods was a critical era in the formation of the social order of modern India and one in which indigenous forces of change continued to flow strongly\(^11\). Due to the revolt of 1857, the society faced great upheaval and suffered politically and culturally. In this social scenario, the British authorities first raised their voice against the prevalent social evils and customs. Various social reform movements like Brahmo Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Arya Samaj of Dayanand Saraswati and Prarthana Samaj of Atma Ram Pandurang etc. were started. The reformers faced various challenges for the emancipation and upliftment of women

\(^5\) *Purdah Nashin*, vol-6, no-7, (December, 1911), p-7.

\(^6\) *Khātoon*, vol-6, no-2, (February, 1910), p-75.


\(^8\) Metcalf, Barbara, D, *Reading and Writing about Muslim Women in British India*, New Delhi, 1994.


because the conservative sections of both Hindu and Muslim communities thought that the promotion of modern education and the improved status of women would interfere in their religion\textsuperscript{12}. Under the existing situation, the Muslim noble and elite families were not prepared to give up their traditional way of living and they opposed these social changes strongly. Thus the minds of Muslim women did not accept these changes as compared to non-Muslim women and their condition became more marginalised.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the \textit{Ashraf} Muslim families in North India realized the need to educate their daughters and the Muslim social reformers were enthusiastically advocated women’s education.

The reformist group of old generation who involved in the educational reforms of North India was started by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his associates. These reformists educated in the way of Islamic and religious tradition. The great visionary Sir Syed Ahmad Khan through his newspapers \textit{Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq} (1876) and \textit{Aligarh Institute Gazette} (1866) created a favourable platform for men’s education at the initial stages\textsuperscript{13}. In one of his speech he said that ‘I have often lamented the customs by which the females of India are left ignorance and have urged upon the necessity, if you really seek to elevate the social position of people, of educating your girls’\textsuperscript{14}. However, his top priority was of men’s education. According to him, the women would not provide education until a large section of men received sound education\textsuperscript{15}. His concern for women’s education was best expressed from his own writing in \textit{Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq}.

\begin{quote}
باشیر常德ی \textit{تہذیب و عقائد} کے لیے نمیکوں کا کہاں اپنا آہنگ و سیاح میں کہاں "(رہبادا اور خان)
\end{quote}

He favoured to impart western education for the men. He was not indifferent towards the education of women but he opposed to give them modern education which is proved from one of his address presented at Gurdaspur in 1884. He advised the Muslim women to follow the traditional education which they could receive at

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Tahzib-un-Niswan}, vol-36, no-47, (7 October, 1933), pp-975-976.
\textsuperscript{13} Also cited, \textit{Khātoon}, vol-6, no-6, (June, 1908), p-208.
\textsuperscript{14} Graham, G.F.I, \textit{The Life and Work of Syed Ahmad Khan}, London, 1885, p-257.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Khātoon}, vol-2, no-2, (February, 1905), p-83.
home and it would enable them to become good wife, skill mother and developed their moral and mental level\textsuperscript{17}.

At that time, many reformist writings were strongly opined the advantage of female education like Maulvi Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi\textsuperscript{18} who advocated women’s education through his novel \textit{Mir'at-ul-Uroos} (The Bride’s Mirror)\textsuperscript{19}, Khwaja Altaf Husain Hali who propagated the value of education among the women through his book \textit{Majalis-un-Nisa} (Assemblies of women)\textsuperscript{20} and Ashraf Ali Thanawi who not only guided the women about education but also introduced them about pious life and other knowledgeable affairs in his book \textit{Bahisht-i-Zewar} (The Ornament of Paradise)\textsuperscript{21}.

Rashidul Khairi was another famous Urdu novelist of early twentieth century who also supported the education of women which is reflected from his journal ‘\textit{Ismat}’ published from Delhi in 1908. He cited Zakiya Sahiba’s\textsuperscript{22} article \textit{Mazhab aur Aurton ki Tàalim} (Religion and Women’s Education) in his journal ‘\textit{Ismat}’ which gave references from the \textit{Holy Quran} in support of female education. It suggested that in Islam, education is compulsory for both men and women and the restrictions are imposed on the education of women due to our own ignorance and obstinacy\textsuperscript{23}. Another article \textit{Tariqa-i-Tàalim-i-Niswan} (System of Women’s Education) of Syed Ali Haider Zaidi highlighted the conservative outlook of Muslim community. He did not favour western education for the Indian Muslim women as it lead them to become ill-mannered. He wanted to spread education among the women which should help them in becoming good daughters, housewives and ideal mothers\textsuperscript{24}.

During that time, the Muslim intelligentsia organized the \textit{Muhammadan Educational Conference} (MEC) which supported the cause for the education of women. In the third Annual meeting of \textit{Mohammadan Educational Conference} held

\textsuperscript{17} ‘\textit{Ismat}, vol-14, no-8, (August, 1915), p-12.

Also cited, \textit{Khàtoon}, vol-2, no-2, (February, 1905), p-84.

\textsuperscript{18} Associate of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

\textsuperscript{19} ‘\textit{Ismat}, vol-14, no-6, (June, 1915), pp-15-16.


\textsuperscript{22} Wife of Maulvi Hakim Abdul Hai from Saharanpur.

\textsuperscript{23} ‘\textit{Ismat}, vol-1, no-7,(December,1908), pp-1-3.

at Lahore in 1888 the resolution was proposed by Shaikh Khairuddin\textsuperscript{25} and seconded by Khalifa Imamuddin\textsuperscript{26} to establish girls’ schools for the daughters of \textit{Sharif} Muslim families\textsuperscript{27}. Later on in 1891 another meeting of MEC was held at Aligarh in which a resolution was proposed by Ghulam-us-Saqlain\textsuperscript{28} and seconded by Maulvi Syed Karamat Husain to show concern on female education\textsuperscript{29}. Thus, the year 1896 is a landmark in the history of women’s educational movement as from that time onward a female education section was added to \textit{Mohammadan Educational Conference} which took up this issue with more determination\textsuperscript{30}. The associates of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who actively supported his mission of female education were great novelist Maulvi Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi and famous poet Khwaja Altaf Husain Hali. The other prominent personalities were Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan\textsuperscript{31}, Sultan Ahmad Khan, Haji Mohammad Ismail Khan, Maulvi Bahadur Ali\textsuperscript{32}, Mohsin-ul-Mulk\textsuperscript{33}, Maulvi Syed Mumtaz Ali and Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah.

With the rise of Aligarh Movement and \textit{Mohammadan Educational Conference} various efforts were made to promote women’s education. During that time, a group of young people arose with the new ideology of Islamic and western education which succeeded the older generation. The members of this group were Justice Syed Karamat Husain of Lucknow (1854-1917), Syed Mumtaz Ali of Lahore (1860-1935) and Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah of Aligarh (1875-1965). These groups strongly championed to do something for the betterment of women’s education and many women’s Urdu journals were published at that time to create social and educational awareness among women.

\textsuperscript{25} Member of Anjuman-i-Islam, Lahore.
\textsuperscript{26} District Inspector of Schools, Muzaffargarh.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Mohammadan Educational Conference}, Lahore, 1888, Resolution no.17,p-110.
\textsuperscript{29} Barrister of Law, M.A.O College.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Khatoon}, vol-11, no-5, (May, 1914), p-11.
\textsuperscript{31} Secretary of Sir Syed Memorial fund.
\textsuperscript{33} Honorary Secretary of M.A.O. College.
Thus, the growth of Women’s Urdu journals in North India played an important role in awakening the women segment of society. These journals regarded female education as a means which would improve the condition of women and the social reformers spread their message through it. The first women’s Urdu journal was *Akhbar-un-Nisa* (Women’s News) published in 1887 from Delhi by Syed Ahmad Dehlavi, the compiler of world famous Urdu dictionary *Farhang-i-Asafiya*\(^3^4\). About this journal, Imdad Sabri remarked that *Akhbar-un-Nisa* included women’s related articles and persuaded the women to maintain their dignity in Islamic framework. The journal of Syed Ahmad Dehlavi also deals the language and culture of women of Delhi *Begmati Zuban* (language of Sharif women)\(^3^5\). However, this journal did not last long and disappeared very soon.

It is also noted that *Akhbar-un-Nisa* was the journal which inspired the future generations in the field of journalism and it became a torch-bearer of other Urdu journals for women.

The prominent among these was *Tahzib-un-Niswan* (Women’s Reformer) edited by Syed Mumtaz Ali whose main motive was to promote female education through a journal and decided that the editor of his journal would also be a woman. Thus, he started the weekly journal *Tahzib-un-Niswan* along with his wife Muhammadi Begum in 1898 which was printed at the *Rifah-i-am* press, Lahore.

To quote:

\[\text{...}\]

\[^{36}\text{Rafa ibn Ahmad Javid, *Kamiyab*/Kamiyab,}\]

\[^{34}\text{Tahzib-un-Niswan, vol-21, no-27, (6 July, 1918), p-430.}\]

\[^{35}\text{Saeed, Anwar, *Pakistan mein Adabi Risā‘il ki Tarikh*, Ramna Print, Islamabad, pp-302-303}\]

\[^{36}\text{Also cited, Hasan, Fatima, pp-86-87.}\]
In one of his article *Larkiyon Ki Tāalim* (Education of girls) Mumtaz Ali emphasized the importance of female education and blamed the orthodox parents as they did not educate their daughters due to which they faced tragedies in their life like mismatched marriages, divorces and family disputes and they became unable to properly perform their duties as a housewife. He favoured a broader curriculum which included the simple and useful books of mathematics, languages and books on housekeeping, health-care and other matters in the course of female education\(^{37}\).

However, Mumtaz Ali published this journal at a time when most of Muslim families were not in favour of female education. Thus, he faced great opposition in publishing this journal but it did not deter him from this project. In the beginning, it had only sixty or seventy subscribers but later on the number of subscribers increased from three hundred to four hundred\(^{38}\). Thus, the journal *Tahzib-un-Niswan* succeeded to form a circle of women’s writers such as Nazar Sajjad Hyder\(^{39}\), Muhammadi Begum, Hijab Imtiaz Ali\(^{40}\), Zubaida Zareen, Jamila Begum\(^{41}\), Sanjida Ashraf Ali, Sultana Asaf Faizi and Saghir Humayun Mirza\(^{42}\) etc who wrote in this *Risā’la* (Journal). Later on, in 1904 Muhammadi Begum became the sole editor of this newspaper who contributed to an extent for the progress of women’s Urdu journalism. She wrote various articles, recipe books, household manuals, books of etiquette on *Khanadari* (house-hold affairs), *Adab-i-Mulaqat* (Meeting etiquette) as well as novels such as *Sharif Beti, Safiya Begum, Chandan Har, Arsi, Tin-Bahnoo-ki-Kahani* etc which covered pages of *Tahzib-un-Niswan*\(^{43}\). The journal however provided a global knowledge of women segment of society in various spheres of life.


Also cited, Hasan, Fatima, p-89.

\(^{39}\) Urdu Novelist.

\(^{40}\) Wife of Syed Imtiaz Ali ‘Taj’ (Son of Muhammadi Begum).

\(^{41}\) Feminist writer from Calcutta.

\(^{42}\) Editor of journal *Zeb-un-Nisa* (Lahore).

Mumtaz Ali also emphasized the need to start girls school but not in the pattern of government schools. He preferred to train the poor girls. He also point out that until the daughters of ashrāf families received proper education, the project to open girls’ school was impossible. Consequently, the schools were opened in the house of respectable families. Thus, Mumtaz Ali gave the motivation to establish girls’ schools for the daughters of ashrāf families at that time⁴⁴.