

Colonialism, Health and Women's Print Culture in South Asia: A Study of Urdu Journals in Colonial India 1900-1930

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Abstract : It was in 19th century when the Indian educated class started to reform their socio-religious set up as an imperative to respond to the challenges put forward by the colonial empire. The colonial discourse on India from the very beginning was gendered, as the colonized society was feminized and its 'effeminate' character, as opposed to 'colonial masculinity' was held to be a justification for its loss of independence. The 'women health figure' is prominently in these gender discourses. The women's health received a much place in the colonial discourse. Lack of health consciousness, illiteracy, and belief in myths, rituals and superstitions were deemed the main factors taken as an indicator of miserable condition of Indian women's health. As the low position of women caused shame to the natives, reforming the condition of women, its health occupied a major place in their intellectual as well as activist engagements. Magazines (journals) for women began to appear in various Indian languages in the mid to late 19th century with Bengal leading the front. These sources (Magazines) like Harm, Tehzib un Niswan, Saheli, Khatoon etc. are essential for the study of the emergence of an ideology of respectable domesticity in Indian Muslim upper middle class. Similarly for the study of development of Women's health consciousness, women's magazines are very essential. These earliest women Urdu magazines were first started by men, and then followed by the women's own magazines. Various health issues, like pregnancy, child-rearing, menstruation, midwives training, Pardah, and health etc. were discussed at a time when it was impossible to discuss them in public sphere. These women magazines were brave pioneers, expanding the frontiers of women's roles, and consciousness at a time when those frontiers were severely limited. This paper will try to focus on how women responded to the question of colonial discourse about their bodies. How health consciousness developed among Indian Muslim women and in what way it contributed in the development of feminist consciousness in South Asian Muslim Women community.

Keywords : Ashraf class, khatoon, haram women, feminism

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