

Communal Understading and Widowhood: A Study of Hindi Magazine ‘Chand’

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ABSTRACT: Countless analysed reports on patriarchy and feminism in India published for decades, except women's condition remains unchanged. This article proposes the views of magazine ‘Chand’ at the beginning of the 20th century. It is a women’s journal, pioneered by Ramrakh Singh Sahgal and VidyavatiSahgal for a decade, addressing the community consciousness among women which later transformed into communalism. This paper attempted to focus on communalism and its emergence in the women's community through the periodical lens. The Hindi women's journals, such as Arya Mahila, Chand, and StriDarpan, played a vicious role in inculcating communal consciousness among women intellectuals. This article is interlinked with the widows and communalism. Widows were the absolute sufferers and partakers in the process of community consciousness of religious groups. This paper attempts to study in detail both widows’ involvement in fatalities in religious-cultural practices of the communities, and their suffering, which guise their identity endangered.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The numerous periodical works of literature in the Hindi region primarily came into existence in early twentieth century. However, ‘Chand’ focused on women’s issues and housed women’s writings such as purdah, widow remarriage, and female education. The community consciousness among the women of the world around them resulted in a massive number of the printing press of Hindi woman's journals in colonial north India. A large number of women's magazines, in different languages, appeared on the frontline to encourage the women towards self-expression and communicative skills in a domestic approach. The scenario of women's emancipation was taking place during the era of the printing press and female literature.

The emergence of Hindi periodicals implicates women’s issues in the Hindi public sphere and the literary activities of women. Beside that the women’s intellectuals of literary movement obtained a platform to express their views in these periodicals. Hence, women started to participate in socio-political discourse by involving them in literary activities. Later, women intellectuals become more vocal about women’s issues in Hindi Public Sphere. According to Nijhawan (2012), after the emergence of Hindi women’s periodical discourse and mainstream sifted from social reform to nationalism. The periodical phase of the Hindi region provided a forum to cultivate a political platform for women to be aware of the oppressive patriarchal structure of society to unbound and emancipate them by involving in reading and writing. However, the lower class women were not conscious of the new idioms and communicative skills with a stranger as elite middle-class women can do. Therefore, periodicals such as Grihalaksmi, Arya Mahila, and Chand not only provided the information about the perfection of the household but also broadened the knowledge of women from domestic advice to national politics.

Numerous Hindi women's journals were circulating in the United Provinces, initiated by the intellectual community of Allahabad and Benaras. The smaller printing press or poorly printed low-quality periodicals focused on a religious text, methodology literature, poetry, and romance narratives. Later it enlarges as the most affordable and constituted reading material and popular literature of the time. These religious texts persuaded the belief in communal consciousness.

Communalism is the most debated issue in India as it brings in many aspects of the society which narrate identity, gender, culture, nationalism, etc. During the 19th century, the British rule colonised many states, and their oppressive policy contained a strong feeling of oneness among the

colonised (Pandey, 2012:20). Journals and periodicals played a significant role to formulate a sentiment of oneness. Literary activities of the printing press, which involves freedom of expression, did not allow the native languages to express their voice of dissent. Hindi journalism faces a similar kind of situation. The first war of independence took shape in the Hindi belt, which spread in the context of the respective printing press. Print media played an important role to broaden the national movement. However, later it took the shape of communalism interspersed with nationalism occupied by the majoritarian community.

Communalism in the United Provinces took shape before the advent of colonialism. Politics was not as divisive as it is today. Religious groups promoted the revivalism of their respective religion. In a literary context, language became a symbol of one's identity and led to people's identity. Later, this identity emerged as a movement for language promotion glorifying slogans such as 'Hindi Hindu Hindustan'. Hindi in the Devanagari script began to be studied and promoted. Similarly, 'Chand' started its publication in Allahabad in Hindi.

'Chand' symbolises a sense of beauty. Uncommonly, its beauty linked with women who identified as the essence of attraction accordingly, the word 'Chand' itself attracted the women as the Hindi audience. Consequently, countless women and readers are attracted to Chand, and later they gain popularity among the women's community. Ramrakh Singh Sahgal played a significant role as editor, and his wife Vidyavati Sahgal initiated the responsibility as Director of 'Chand' from 'Chand Press' in Allahabad. Chand cost annually for six rupees; however, the price for the Six months was three rupees. The journal focuses on women's issues during the movement for social emancipation and political transition. Women of the elite and middle class acquire a local platform of collective identity and connectivity. The writings of women provided new idioms and perspectives on the mainstream literary periodicals. To address the social injustice in the household, Chand established its existence. During the early twentieth century, it identified that reform of social evils not only emphasises the necessity of various social issues such as caste, religion, and political consciousness, but it carries forward the emancipation of women's status.

United Provinces: A Historical Background

The British ruled in United Provinces from the early to the mid-20th century. British

ruled in the united provinces to capture the resources and brought out many divisive policies. These policies became a reason for the movement of reviving Hinduism and strengthened Islam in the United Provinces. From 1856 to 1902, this region existed as two separate parts known as North-Western Provinces and Central provinces. Agra and Awadh were the central regions that came under the British Raj. On 1st April 1937, 'The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh' took shape (Tatsuni, 2009:5-6).

Islamic and Hindu revivalism took shape simultaneously in the United Provinces. At the beginning of the 20th century Muslims and Hindus, at least in the United Province, was changing due to a slowly rising spiral of social contention (disagreement), which over the generations turned into social aggression: symbolic (as in provocative religious processions), societal (as in conversions and Shuddhi), and physical (Saberwal, 2006:255).

Shuddhi and Sanghathan Movement in the context of Widows:

Hindu revivalists promoted the 'Suddhi and Sanghathan' movement; re-conversion was the main objective (Mohanty and Sundararajan, 2002: 116). Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha launched the program of Shuddhi and Sanghathan on a large scale in 1923 in the region. The Shuddhi movement promoted the re-conversion of Hindus, who converted to Islam; however, Sanghathan was promoting unity among Hindus. Firstly, they constructed a full-bodied Hindu masculine male opposite the emasculated/effeminate Hindu. Secondly, they evoked as rapists, seeing him as the 'other.' Third, it allowed the space for a passion for a Hindu female's 'chastity' and 'purity' someone to be protected from 'them', (Muslims) providing a 'justification' for this movement. Swami Shradhanand take this opportunity to launch the Shuddhi campaign in the United Provinces. The Shuddhi and Sanghathan movements attempted to prepare the Hindu woman as a citizen, as a sister in arms, to construct militant Hindu nationalism. The Hindu woman not only played the role of being cast just a 'traditional' notion of mother and wife or a 'victim'; she was also to be 'empowered' as an 'agent' of violence (Gupta, 1998:727).

It was not only that the Hindu masculinity was constructed, but it was in opposition to the sexually charged, lustful Muslim male, against whom Hindus and particularly their women had to be defended and protected. By branding Muslim men as rapists and Hindu women as victims, there

was also an attempt to efface differences based on class/caste within each community (Gupta, 1998:730). Women's power in the sense of masculinity is a question that is discussed and celebrated, often in the control of the incident, which occurred during riots (Sarkar, 1991:2062). Women's masculinity becomes one of the big reasons for the debate and celebration of empowering women. Communalism in pre-Independence periods believed women as representations of cultural purity (Ganneri, 2013:7). Women be a sign of religious, ideological figures, and honour (Mehta & Shah, 1992:2522)

Stories of forcible conversions, rape, and abduction of Hindu women floated in the United Provinces. In 1923, in a speech delivered by Madan Mohan Malaviya as the President of Hindu Mahasabha in Banaras, he made the first attempt to create a history of present-day abductions. These types of delivered speeches disturb the society.

Widowhood and Communalism:

The late 19th century witnessed a bitter conflict between the Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma on the widow's remarriage. The religious fundamentalists vigorously opposed the proposed issue of widow remarriage. It (widow's remarriage) had tended to argue that widows could not control their natural sexual cravings, leading to abortions (Gupta, 1998:732). It is the issue of saving religious purity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chand published a special issue of widows in 1923. This special issue of Chand focused on the problems related to widowhood. But later, it was confronted by outspoken critics of religious fundamentalists.

"Hindu woman, of whatever kind and form, could efficiently breed and thus her reproductive capacities were to be channelled to produce a Hindu child" (Gupta, 1998:732). It visibly declared that the Hindu male not only sets the limit for the women, but they impose strict control on the widow proliferation. They established the narration to save the pure Hindu Aryan race through the womb of widows. 'It was clearly stated that a loss of a Hindu widow was not just the loss of one person, but also of many more' (Gupta, 1998:732). Hindus added on to Muslims, making it a double loss (Gupta, 1998:733). Hindu leaders stated in public places that

"Our sexually unsatisfied widows especially are prone to Muslim hands and by producing Muslim children; they increase their numbers and spell disaster for the Hindus... Muslim' goons' are especially seen outside the houses which have Hindu widows... You yourselves

say, would you like our Aryan widows to read 'nikah' with a Muslim?" (Gupta, 1998:733).

The VidhwaSahayakKarvalaya" (office to help widows) at Agra took out a series on widows, in which the main plea was the moral contamination of Hindu society occurring due to their running away or being abducted by Muslims (Gupta, 1998:733). The series of incidents was creating a picture.

"The series are supposedly based on true stories and accompanying them are pictures in which on one side is depicted the Hindu widow in 'Hindu clothes' and on the other is the same woman as a married Muslim in 'Muslim attire'. The stories have titles like 'RampyariurfShirdara Begum', 'How I became Fatima from Champa', 'Shahzadiya Devi, who was Rakko before', etc" (Gupta, 1998:733).

Widows and Chand

'Chand' published its special issue (VidhwaVivahAnk) on widow's remarriage in April 1923. It faced criticism by fundamentalist groups in 1923. An Article 'Chand kiNiti Par Apeksha' was published by Ramrakh Singh Sahgal in 'Chand'. The article faced criticism from the people who were not in favour of widow remarriage. The author/editor of the article tried to justify its foremost aims and objectives of the magazine. The entire article explained its writings to intellectual class on widowhood. People who opposed the widow remarriage disagreed with the policy of the 'Chand' demonstration.

'Chand' diverted its pre-defined path alleged by gentlemen (see, Chand November 1923, 12). Intellectual class was unhappy with widow's issue they were suggesting the new name for the issue. According to them, editors should change its name from women's journal to widows magazine. In this article, the editor was trying to prove his generosity to the gentleman who were questioning on widow issue.¹ The editor of the journal justified that he is not in favour of the widow's remarriage, but he raised the problem faced by widows. People who are not flexible with the idea of the widow's remarriage and opposing it should take it an appropriate manner. Widow remarriage was not ideal for Hindu society. For Hindus, marriage is a lifetime and sacred bond which can never be weakened. According to the Hindu society, widows should devote their life to worshipping the god so

¹ "Jo vidhwaon ke Vishay me kuch likha hai usko padhkar kuch sajjno ke vichar badal gaye hain unka kahna hai ki chand ko abs Stri samajik patra na kahkar yadi Vidhwa Viwah Sahayak patra kaha jaye to anuchit na hoga." (November, 1923, 10-11).

there will not be any loss. They are goddesses we cannot raise questions about their moral fibre and cannot force them to remarriage. With this attitude, people who believe in the traditional form of religion raise objections in the widow's remarriage.²

In his article 'Chand ki Niti par Apeksha', Sahgal justifies the questions raised by the fundamentalist groups on widow's remarriage.³ The editor (Sahgal) of the journal justified himself by the authors who penned various poems, articles and discussed against the widow's remarriage. Fear and anxiety of the fundamentalists group can recognize through the editors' justifications.

Later, the editor explains his concern about the child widows who have never seen their husbands' faces even though they did not remember the person they got married. Fundamentalist groups showed their fears with those widows who cannot control their sexual desire and drowned the Hindu society except widows who kept seclusion and upholding their purity. They become indebted to them.⁴

Conversion also has been done simultaneously. "The converted widow was perceived as a risk to their vaunted Hindu nation. She put at risk the grand strategy of Hindu identity formation itself, i.e., denial of both difference and the right to difference"(Gupta, 1998:733).

"However, women were assuming an activist role in this communal rhetoric, their role was being determined by men the effective 'use' of gender constructs, stereotypes and myths of lustful

Muslims, need for women masculinity, all these have a broader history" (Gupta, 1998:733).⁵

According to the editor, every community has vicious men and women. Therefore, control over society and widows' emancipation was not possible. Similarly, many examples appear where girls approached their family to be married to their relatives but religious beliefs were denied which resulted in girls running away from their house. Consequently, prostitution, choosing an unsuitable partner and the widow's conversion to other religions lead Hindu society to suffer. A single fault of Hindu families led the conversion into a widow's life, which ruined their lives and endangered Hindus' existence. Following this drastic declination of Hindu society, the widow's remarriage permitted among the Hindus. The anxiety of religious groups appears in the form of a widow's remarriage. Losing of purity of Hindu widows it was required to marry those widows because they were endangering the Hindu society due to increasing the population of other religious communities.

As a result, it said that the widow's remarriage only advocated saving the Hindu community from the threat of conversion to other religions. Widows' remarriage can control the increasing population of different organisations. Considering this article, we cannot be sure about the changes in the lives of widows stated by the social reformer are genuine. They were more concerned as a saviour of Hindu sentiments; it was not the widows' real emancipation.

Widows' remarriages, it is necessary to prevent the reason behind widowhood. Therefore, prime control over child marriage, old age marriages, and daughter-in-law marriages. These are the underpinnings issue of widowhood. To control the underpinnings of evils, it is our utmost responsibility to save the purity of widowhood. Without holding over the other sins related to women, the widow's declination cannot control until then; they encouraged the widow's remarriage. Chand justified its proclamation to the people by arguing about widows' remarriage that hurt others' sentiments and views.

'Vidhwa Vivah Mimansa' a book published by Chand Press, where Chand particularises its

²"Koi bhi samjhdar manushya Vidhwa vivah ko apna adarsh nahi samajh sakta koi bhi yah kahne ka sahas nahi karega ki vidhwa vivah avashya karna chahiye" (Chand, November, 1923,12.)

³"Kuchh sajjo ko yah bhi shikayat hai ki ham Vidhwa vivah ke viruddh kuch nahi chapte! Vidhwa ank uthakar ap dekh le usme shri Ramkrishna Mukund Laghate, tatha Purushottamottan Das Ji Tondon Smt. Padmabai Sajji Rao ke lekh Smt. Krishnakumari ji Baghel adi kavitate or aise hi dusre Vishay or sammitiya padhe jo vidhwa vivah ke viruddh likhi gaye hai." (Chand November, 1923, 12.)

⁴"woh dekhti hain ki hindu dharm me unke liye apni iccha poorn karne ka koi marg nahi hai toh woh apni iccha se kisi dusht (Muslims) ke sath bag jati hai." (Chand, November, 1923, 12.)

⁵"Aur wahi Stri Islam ya Isai daharm ko swikar karke swayam Hindu dharam ki ghatika hoti hai" (ibid).

statement that the journal is not supporting the widow's remarriage⁶.

Therefore it is clear that how Chand reacted to the issue of widows' remarriage. It is affirmed that Chand raised its concern on Widows' remarriage to take benefit and to save egotism of the religious community⁷.

The editor shows his concern about the decline of Hindu society which was in the grip of the widow's deed. He requested to social reformers not to hate with widows; their primary concern should be to save the Hindu community, which will remain exist⁸. The editor's concern with the sorrow of a child widow who left their home at their young age and dragging themselves into the gutter of prostitution and their undergone conversion into the other religion, such as Christianity and Islam is most painful for ideal Hindu society.

Communalism and its Impact on Hindu Women:

Hindu society was following the patriarchal system for ages. At the end of the 19th century, the anti-Muslim movement began: ShuddhiSanghathan and cow protection movements were explicitly anti-Muslim. "In a twist to age-old Sanskritization process of upper-caste Hindus turning to vegetarianism to distinguish themselves from meat-eating Untouchables and Muslims, the Cow Protection Association made meat-eating an anti-Hindu position" (Mujumdar, 1995:3). Women became the subject matter of Hindu revivalism. Organizations' such as RashtraSevikaSamiti, and Matrashakti, promoted the Hindu right-wing ideology through religious teaching (Mehta& Shah, 1992:2523).

Bacchetta argued in her book 'Gender in the Hindu Nation' that, from 1936 onwards, the RSS created separate family organizations' to mobilize various sectors of society and union for

all professions (Bacchetta, 2000:263). RSS found the 'Women Rights Wings' with the support of Laksmi Bai Kelkar, who was the founder of the Women Rights Ring in 1936, to make Hindu women self-reliant and to encourage them to masculine power. They were giving the self-protection training against the Muslim men because they were the real enemy of Hindus. According to these organisations,' teaching Muslim men were identified as the abductor, rapist, and molester of Hindu women.

Purdah Practice:

The Journal Chand (1924) focused on the issue of purdah practice. Women herself were more conscious about Purdah practice. They were raising their concern issues in journal volumes.

The purdah practice and other customs of Islam brought destructive changes in the lives of Muslim women of the northern region. Usually, it is believed that purdah practice became the rescuer of women from men's abusive eyes and voices. Azim argued, that purdah practice became a withholder of women's freedom (Azim, 1997:125). Veiling practices such as sari or dupatta or burqa among the women community bound them not to access public places. They stayed away from public places. With these practices, women were unable to access the public areas of a job and markets and movie theatres (Temsah and Desai, 2014:4).

II. CONCLUSION

Re-conversion ceremonies were the order of the time. But women who were involved in reforming activity had formed their association with education and vocational training though they were the worst sufferers of Hindu male anxiety. Taking into account widows' questions always remained unsatisfied. Widows' suffering becomes worsened than women of other communities. Women fought to carve space for themselves among the Hindu and Muslim communities. Though, the veiling practice was common for Hindus and the other organisation. A few women questioned it, and few were in support of favouring the veiling practice with safety concerns. Prejudices against women remained effective in both. Shuddhi and Sanghathan movement was to protect the Hindu cultural identity and take away from other groups' cultural and religious practices. Widows were the prime concern of the action. However, widows and other women were advised to be careful of Muslim men as they were considered to be potential rapists. Such incident were inculcating the communal consciousness in society through women's magazine.

⁶“Isse logo ka sandeh or bhi badh gya hai ki ham vidhwa vivah ke kttar pachpati hai kintu yah logo ka bram hai vidhwa vivah ko to ham hriday ki samast shakti se dhikkarte hain”(Chand November, 1923, 12.)

⁷“Kintu jis parsishthi me aj hamara Samaj jakda hua hai or vidhwaon dwara samaj me jo jo anarth upasthit ho rhe hai unhe Samaj sudharak ki haisyat se ham kadapi naho deskh sakte”. (Chand, 1923,12.)

⁸ “Yuvtiuo ka Ghar se nikal jana vaisyavriti dharan kar jeevn vyattit karna musalmani athava isai dharm swikar kar apne kul Samaj or desh korasalat ki or dhakelana” (Chand November. 1923,12.)

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