



## The Emergence of Women's Voices in Early Twentieth-Century Hindi Magazines<sup>1</sup>

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Since I was 11 years old, my father has been looking for a suitable groom for me. I am 16 years old now and my father is going to marry me off to a 45-year-old man. Is there any way to call off this marriage? In this situation, what is my duty? Tell me what to do. (*Chand*, Nov. 1927)

I am the daughter of a rich father. I am well educated and 20 years old now. But my father and stepmother haven't let me get married yet. They want to keep me at home as a servant. Please tell me how I can get some peace in my life? If my father doesn't marry me off soon, I will run away from home. (*Chand*, Aug. 1929)

I was forced to marry someone in poor health. But I love my cousin. He loves me too. I do not want anyone but my cousin. Is it a crime to go away with him? Can I marry my cousin? I do not want to be with my husband anymore. Tell me what to do. (*Chand*, Mar. 1930)

I am a young widow suffering from my father-in-law's sexual misbehavior. Not only that, my brother-in-law has also started to molest me. My parents do nothing about this matter. They just told me it is my duty to serve my father-in-law faithfully. What can I do? (*Chand*, Nov. 1931)

I was forced to marry a man who is very foolish, filthy, and arrogant. His main job is to have trouble with people around him. Whenever I try to challenge his bad behavior, he shouts at me and uses violence terribly. I can't stand it anymore. I want to finish this life. Please give me some advice. (*Chand*, June 1933)



These plain and raw words were written by nameless women and addressed to the editor of the Hindi magazine *Chand* in the early twentieth century. In those days, many women had started to write letters or small notes to the editors to convey information about themselves, especially their miserable situation.<sup>1</sup> This paper will focus on the various narratives of anonymous women appearing in a number of Hindi magazines in early twentieth-century India. Some Hindi magazines, especially women's journals, gave women a voice and, as Francesca Orsini put it, a 'right to feel' (Orsini 2002: 275). For most women, women's journals such as *Grihalakshmi* and *Chand*, along with their readers' columns, were the first and only place where they could express their feelings freely and gain some sympathy and support from the editor and other readers.

This paper has three aims: firstly, it attempts to illustrate the emergence and changing nature of women's magazines by studying various magazines from the perspective of gender. Secondly, it seeks to show how narratives by anonymous women described society and themselves. Finally, it discusses the role played by women's magazines in improving the status of women. In this paper, the focus is on modern Indian women's narratives which illustrate not only women's ideals and duties, but also allow us to hear their own voices while discussing matters such as their new sense of individual worth and their emotions. The paper seeks to demonstrate the above points by examining these women's narratives as case studies.

### **Women and the social reform movement in the Hindi-speaking area of India**

We will begin by considering the historical backdrop surrounding the emergence of women's magazines, with a focus on the Hindi-speaking area of India, a region swept by a social reform movement in the late nineteenth century. Along with religious leaders, several distinguished Hindi literary figures began taking on central roles in this movement. These literary figures, who were all male, were also the founders of and contributors to various newspapers and magazines throughout India. Most of the reform they dealt with was related to the degraded circumstances of women, including women whose husbands had died, who had been forced into child-marriage, subjected to the *Pardah* system or had been unable to receive a formal education. The discourses left by these contemporaneous Hindi intellectuals provide a window into the situation of these women and the dominant opinions regarding them,



from the perspective of the reform-minded men of the Hindi literary world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **Status of widows**

Since the 1840s, reformers had tried to improve the miserable status of widows. In Hindu society, especially among the upper castes, it was believed that a wife caused her husband's death, and therefore the widow would bring bad luck to those around her. Immediately after her husband's death, the woman's life changed drastically. The death of the husband signaled the end of all joy and fun in a woman's life, and the beginning of a life of pain and hardship. Now she became her in-law's mere 'maid servant or slave' (Due 1985: 147).

In this situation, some intellectuals promoted the remarriage of widows as a rescue plan from the woeful plight of those who had lost their husbands. Badrinarayan Chaudhri 'Premghan', a prominent Hindi writer and critic, was one of those people. Premghan supported the idea of widow remarriage on the basis of the *Veda*, saying that this was not a matter of appropriateness or inappropriateness, but that it should be accepted as a proper right guaranteed under the *Veda* (Premghan 2007: 200f.). Although Premghan declared that widows had the right to remarry, it is doubtful that he had any real sympathy towards the pitiful plight of widows. When a high caste Hindu widow, Pandita Ramabai, converted to Christianity out of despair at Hindu society's attitude towards widows, Premghan criticised her harshly. He called her a 'serious criminal' and prohibited 'virtuous Hindu widows' from visiting Ramabai's *Ashram* which was serving as a protection facility for women (ibid.: 217).

Another Hindi intellectual, Pratapnarayan Mishra, also made a cynical remark about her, pointing out that 'Hunger made her a Christian.' (Mishra 1992: 133) Both Premghan and Mishra criticised Ramabai for her religious conversion, however they did not refer at all to the fact that neither Hindu society nor her community had provided her any support. In order to improve her miserable situation as a widow, she sought out salvation through religious conversion. Thus, male intellectuals offered their support to widow remarriage, showing their profound learning of the *Veda* and other sacred texts, but it is debatable whether they understood or sympathised with a Hindu widow's unenviable situation.



### **Child marriage**

In the late nineteenth-century, most girls married by the age of ten. Some of them could stay with their parents until their first menstruation, but others had to begin shouldering housework responsibilities in their husbands' families at a very young age. Many of these child brides were forced to bear children. Due to these severe circumstances, many young girls could not grow healthy, either mentally or physically. Several reformers of the day started to write articles in Hindi magazines and newspapers against this child-marriage custom.

Pratapnarayan Mishra argued that this was an 'evil custom' and that it had no basis in the *Veda Shastra* or *Purana* (Mishra 1992: 81). Premghan also showed his anger against this custom and appealed to fathers to stop marrying their daughters off too early. In his opinion, boys should marry at the age of 20, girls at 12 (Premghan 2007: 188-203). Maithilisharan Gupta, who was called the 'National poet', criticised child-marriage harshly in his representative poem 'Bharat-Bharati'. Since Hindus wanted to fulfil their obligation as parents and ease their burden as soon as possible, Gupta wrote, they arranged their children's marriage while they were still very young. Due to this evil custom, Indian's mental and physical strength had become weak (Gupta 1984: 139).

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These intellectuals were against the marriage of children and wrote several articles and literary works against this custom. However, the focus of their arguments was that this custom was responsible for creating weakness in the babies, which resulted in a weak nation. Their arguments were not concerned with the severe troubles little girls faced at this young age, giving up their studies, going about the household chores and enduring pregnancy and childbirth. It can be said therefore that these intellectuals never considered the troubles faced by these young girls as they argued against child-marriage.

### **Pardah**

According to the custom of Pardah, after marriage women were not allowed to go out freely and they were required to veil themselves to avoid showing their faces and hair to men. In the early twentieth century, several intellectuals and social leaders appealed to the public to stop this custom. Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, a representative Hindi writer and editor from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, wrote a magazine article against this custom. In it, he argued that Indian women should not only stay at home but should be able to do business like



women in England. Giving as an example the employment rate of English women, Dvivedi claimed that the strong spirit of these women was responsible for the fact that England was such a developed country (Dvidevi 1996: 220). He encouraged Indian women to take on jobs, which was quite a progressive opinion in that period. Balkrishna Bhatt, another pioneering Hindi writer and literary critic, rejected this custom and pointed out that part of this problem was in the minds of women who clung to this custom to show their virtue (Bhatt 1996: 180). Along with these intellectuals, it was Mahatma Gandhi who succeeded in making the anti-pardah movement public, by convincing many women to step out of their houses to take part in the social reform and independence movement.

### **Female education**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, female education was not common in Indian society and public opinion was mainly against it. Female education did not attract the attention of the government until 1854, when the importance of female education was first mentioned in an official document of the colonial government. However, the colonial government did not pay much attention to this issue throughout the nineteenth century; as a result, there was no official support for the development of female education in any province in India. Female education became a priority for several missionary groups, who started to work in this field. It was then taken up by domestic reformers. Since the mid-nineteenth century, several Hindi reformers such as Bharatendu Harishchandra, Pratap Narayan Mishra, Balkrishna Bhatta and Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, supported female education and wrote many articles on this topic. As a result of their efforts, the importance of female education became widely accepted by the public by the early twentieth century.

Another topic that became the target of discussion regarded the appropriate subjects to be studied by girls. Most of the male reformers advocated for a religious and moral education, based on Indian values, as proper and necessary for girls. They insisted on this traditional education because they feared a 'modern' education could make girls too modernised and independent like Western women. At that time, there were few women such as Rameshwari Nehru, Uma Nehru and Chandravati Lakhanpal, who voiced new opinions about female education. As could be expected, they had a different perspective regarding academic subjects, and argued that there should be no difference between boys and girls. They also stressed the importance of helping girls to develop fully as human beings. These voices were still



not loud enough, but surely started to be heard, especially in several women's magazines such as *Stri Darpan* and *Chand*.

### **Overview of early women's magazines**

In the social and independence movement, magazines and newspapers played an important role. Through these media, social reformers were waging fights against several conventionalities as we discussed above. During the social reform movement of the late nineteenth century, several reformers had emphasised the idea of improving women's social status and therefore the necessity of female education became a topic. This led to the initial publication of magazines aimed at women, beginning with *Stri Bodh* (1856-1950?), which was written in Gujarati.

Along with *Stri Bodh*, several women's magazines in various vernacular languages began to be published in the late nineteenth century, among them *Bamabadhini Patrika* (1863-1923) in Bengali, *Balabodhini* (1874-78) in Hindi, *Grihini* (1877-18??) in Marathi and *Akhbar un-Nissa* (1884-188?) in Urdu. These magazines featured mostly contributions from male reformers, and the content was controlled and censored to underline the importance of women's traditional gender roles. Therefore, in these magazines, hardly any attention was paid to women's issues or women's rights; moreover, there were hardly any voices from women in the 'women's magazines' of those days. We now turn to *Balabodhini*, the first women's magazine written in Hindi, to discuss the distinct features of early women's magazines which have been mentioned above.

*Balabodhini* was first published in 1874. Compared to other areas, especially Bengali and Marathi, the Hindi-speaking regions were a few decades behind with regard to the evolution of printed matter. This magazine was dependent on government funding and lasted four years. The editor, Bharatendu Harishchandra, was a highly respected reformist and educationalist, and he was also one of the most distinguished Hindi writers of his time. Along with him, male reformers wrote for the magazine as the main contributors. The aims of the magazine, Bharatendu claimed in the first issue, were to spread female education to promote the 'respectable woman' as a role model and to improve women's social status.

The magazine was only eight pages long. It contained advice for housewives and mothers in areas such as the management of children and the home, hygiene, and pregnancy. It also repeatedly made reference to the duties of housewives. The magazine did not include any



novels, poems, popular songs, anecdotes, non-didactic tales, or jokes. Those fictional genres were considered unsuitable for 'respectable women'. Since the goal of the magazine and its writers was to enlighten female readers to become 'respectable women', it did not include any discussion about social reform related to women. The examination of its content shows that the magazine provided limited information and knowledge to women and, contrary to Bharatendu's claim about its aims, there was no attempt to improve women's social status.

### **Popular women's magazines of the early twentieth century**

As it moved into the twentieth century, the Hindi belt experienced a new wave of women's movement. At that time, many organisations were led by women, and women's issues were discussed from the standpoint of women. This was when female education was being popularised, and the female literacy rate rose significantly. Along with these changes, the development of printing technology and transportation had a significant impact on the circulation of women's magazines. Literate women were now able to seek the space and obtain the tools to bring their own voices into the public sphere.

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Under such conditions, three important magazines for women were published from Allahabad, the center of Hindi publishing in those days. These three magazines, *Grihalakshmi*, *Stri Darpan* and *Chand*, gained popularity and continued publication for around twenty years each. In the next section, I examine closely each of these magazines.

### ***Grihalakshmi*, Lakhshmi of the home (1909-29)**

*Grihalakshmi* (hereafter, GL) was the first Hindi magazine which had a woman as its editor, along with several other female writers who contributed articles to the magazine.<sup>2</sup> GL was 40-pages long and included a variety of content, both of a fictional and non-fictional nature, which was informative for women. It included a wide range of articles on history, religion, women's issues, political problems and moral teachings, domestic and international news, editorials, readers' columns, and several fictional works in the form of novels and poems. In addition, GL published various photographs of socially active Indian women such as writers, social activists, and Maharanis around the country.

Although the aim of the magazine was, as the first issued proclaimed, to spread female education and to free women's minds from various superstitions and traditions, most of the articles emphasised the traditional role of mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law. Many articles



contributed by women for women encouraged them to hold onto traditional gender roles, in order to be respectable women. We can see this mold in its readers' columns as well. Some letters attracted pity, but if the writer of the letter was considered deviant, she gained no pity or sympathy, instead receiving strict admonishment from other readers. 'Self-devotion', 'sacrifice', 'virtuousness' and 'obedience to husband'—these are words we frequently see in GL.

### ***Stri Darpan*, women's mirror (1909-28)**

The year 1909 also marked the publication of the first issue of *Stri Darpan* (hereafter SD). The editors and main contributors to this magazine were women from the Nehru family—the editor was Rameshwari Nehru, Jawaharlal's cousin's wife, the manager was Kamla, Jawaharlal's own wife, while one of the main contributors was Uma, wife of another of Jawaharlal's cousins. Besides from the Nehru family, several female reformers, educationalists, and novelists contributed articles to the magazine. In each issue, four to five articles were written by women. SD was sixty to seventy pages long and a quarter of the whole magazine was devoted to editorial commentaries. The magazine featured various articles on history, religion, social issues, women's issues, political topics, moral teachings, etc. It contained both domestic and international news as well as book reviews. SD published both nonfiction and fiction, such as short stories, plays, poems and novels. In contrast with GL, SD ran very few photographs, illustrations, or advertisements in each issue. There was no readers' column section either.

According to the editor, Rameshwari, the aim of SD was to spread female education and elevate the status of women as individuals. This aim was well reflected in SD. Many articles were written by women for the uplifting of women, and they encouraged women to behave as individuals and members of society. Rameshwari herself used to write that a woman should not be expected to subordinate herself to a man; she should be respected as a human being. Several articles even questioned traditional gender roles such as self-devotion, sacrifice, and virtue. In many articles, we find words that are hardly seen in GL, such as 'companionship', 'independence' and 'awareness'. Although SD published many articles written by prominent women, it did not feature the readers' column section where non-elite women could express their opinion. Thus, the voices of anonymous women are missing from this magazine.



**Chand, Moonlight (1922-49?)**

In 1922, Ramrakh Singh Sahgal began to publish *Chand* (CD). Sahgal was a male social reformer and one of the most famous Hindi editors of the time. The articles featured in CD were also mainly written by men, but the magazine also had several female reformers, educationalists, and novelists as writers. The aim of CD was, as Sahgal claimed, to spread female education and to uplift women as individuals and members of society. In line with this vision, we find in his magazine a host of articles dealing with women's education and their role as citizens.

CD was eighty to hundred pages long, and it devoted a lot of space to both domestic and international news. Along with news, it also contained various articles on history, religion, social issues, women's issues, political issues, moral teachings, home economics, book reviews and editorial commentaries. The magazine also published several pieces of fiction, such as novels, poems, short stories, and plays. Some of them were written by popular writers of the day. In contrast to SD, CD featured many photographs, illustrations, cartoons, and advertisements, and some of them were vibrantly coloured.

In each issue, CD published various articles on topics related to women and politics. Sahgal, the editor of CD, always championed the social elevation of women and expressed his support for women's rights, most notably by writing about the right to divorce and remarry. This was an extremely bold opinion to hold in the 1920s. Sahgal's sympathy for the weak was also reflected in the readers' column section. Because of his attitude, each issue featured plenty of letters, and therefore, the readers' column section expanded. In terms of size and content, CD surpassed all previously discussed women's magazines.

**Voices of nameless women**

Let us now examine the readers' column sections of GL and CD. Compared to CD, GL did not devote much space to the readers' column section. From around 1923 until 1928, GL published only one or two letters per issue, and some issues contained none. When publishing a letter written by a reader, the editor did not add any comment, but asked other readers to write back. It was thus other readers who responded, sometimes with sympathetic comments and other times with harshly admonishing ones. Some letters did not receive any comments.

By contrast, CD featured plenty of letters in each issue under the editorship of Sahgal, the founding editor. Every issue had three to ten or more letters and all letters from readers received support from him.



From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, CD published the highest number of letters from its readers, but after 1935, as Sahgal stepped down from his position as editor of the magazine, this section gradually decreased in size and finally stopped around 1945.

Although the letters to the editor were written by both male and female readers of each magazine<sup>3</sup>, here I focus only on letters by female readers. This is because most of the male readers did not write about their own problems, but about the problems of others, community and society. Some of them argued against the custom of child marriage, mismatched marriage, caste discrimination, and corruption associated with a specific community. Other male readers called for support for girl's education, widows, and orphaned children. Some of them looked for partners for helpless widows and others asked widows to marry them. Thus, their personal problems or feelings hardly appeared in their letters. Compared to male readers, women wrote more emotional letters that spoke about their own problems. We can divide their letters into two narrative styles: letters that spoke about others and letters that spoke about themselves.

The first type of letters was written mainly by elite women who worked as social activists, educationalists, and writers. They wrote the letters to lament the plight of other women and asked for support and funding for girl's schools, women's shelters, widows' care homes and so on. Some women argued against conventions such as the Pardah system, the difficulties of widows or infant marriage, while other reported about the activities of women's associations.

Compared with the first type of letters, the second type was much larger in number. Various stories were written by women. Of course, we should note that there is a possibility that writers used a fake identity, especially male contributors might have impersonated female voices. One clear example of this comes from the December 1929 issue of *Chand*, in which Zahur Bakhsh, a male social reformer, confessed that since 1926 he had been writing some 'autobiographical' pieces under the guise of a woman in some issues of *Chand* (CD1929 Nov.: 465f.). His 'confession' suggests the possibility of other 'narratives' published under a fake identity.

As far as writers were concerned, most of them referred to themselves as young and not highly educated. They usually requested that their names and addresses be withheld. Some women, especially child widows, were seeking marriage partners. Other women lamented their own miserable circumstances, such as domestic cruelty and insecurity, repressed sexuality, poor health, or poverty. Several women



lamented the lack of respect shown towards them. However, the main theme that ran through these women's stories was the expression of their emotional needs. Their letters contained bold, vivid, and raw emotions and voiced prohibited feelings; therefore, they were challenging expected morals and social norms. In the pages that follow we will examine a few other examples.

### Letters for CD

In March 1930, a young married Kayasta from Bagarpur, aged 16, wrote about her extramarital affair with her cousin:

I was delivered to one person with poor health. But I love my cousin. He loves me too. I do not want anything but my cousin. Is it a crime to run away with him? Can I get remarried to him? I do not want to go with my husband. Tell me what to do?<sup>4</sup>

In his written response to this letter, Sahgal raised a concern about Hindu law: 'It's not love, just desire. We cannot solve this kind of problem until Hindu law admits the right to divorce. We should consider revisions to the Hindu Law.'<sup>5</sup> Responding to another married girl who suffered at the expense of her vicious husband, Sahgal considered her misery to be a problem of Hindu society. She wrote to ask for advice on how to free herself from her husband:

I was forced married to a man who is very fool, filthy, and arrogant. His main job is to have trouble with people around him. Whenever I try to challenge his bad behavior, he blows at me and uses violence terribly. I cannot stand it anymore. I want to end this life. Please give me any advice.<sup>6</sup>

Sahgal's response was compassionate:

In Hindu society, there is no medicine for this kind of vicious husband to treat. Because here, the bonds of matrimony are too strong to break. In this situation, if there is a way for this poor girl to be free, that should be supported by law and court.<sup>7</sup>

Sahgal did not blame any of the readers who wrote to him. Instead, he dealt with their problems as a common problem—'our problems'—and showed to other readers that these problems were to be discussed and solved by the community. Even when a reader confessed her affair, he did not criticise, but showed sympathy to her. For example, the daughter of an officer wrote about an affair she had been having with her neighbor for a couple of years: 'I love him and I gave my virginity to him. But now I am getting married to another man. Due to that my dharma will be corrupted. I am degrading myself furthermore [...].'<sup>8</sup>



Another young wife aged 19 from Muzaffarnagar sought advice about her conjugal relationship: 'When I got married, I was thirteen years old. After that I met someone and fell in love with him. Now my husband discovered our relationship and hates me. What can I do?'<sup>9</sup>

In response to the above two young girls in love, Sahgal showed sympathy and understanding:

Nowadays countless young boys and girls are suffering for not getting married with their loved ones. Why? Because there are strong restrictions on choosing a partner. We should talk about this matter with a calm mind.<sup>10</sup>

### Letters for GL

In a letter sent to GL, the daughter-in-law of a zamindar revealed her affair with her father in-law and made a confession:

During my husband's absence, day by day my father-in-law and I were getting closer. We were like husband and wife. One day my husband found out about our illicit relationship, but he did not say anything and left us. When I gave birth to a baby boy, my husband rejected him saying: 'I am not his father, but his elder brother.' Shortly after he died. Now whenever I see my baby son, I cannot stop thinking about my husband. I am bothered by terrible guilt. Dear editor, please tell me. How can I expiate my guilt? Will God forgive me someday?<sup>11</sup>

This letter attracted a stern response from a reader: 'It is impossible for you to be forgiven in this life. Since your husband has already passed away, you cannot expiate your guilt.'<sup>12</sup>

Another widow from Japarpur also revealed her illicit affair with her father-in-law. As she pointed out, she was approached by him after the death of her husband:

My father-in-law made advances to me and our illicit affair began. Eventually I started to love him, but I needed to do good to enjoy the immoral act with him to protect my soul. I mean, the dirtier my soul gets, the more religious acts I need to conduct.<sup>13</sup>

There were no responses to this letter, at least not in the next few issues. Compared to the letters and responses published in CD, there are clear differences in GL, especially in each response to the letters. Unlike Sahgal, the editor at GL usually did not reply to the letters by himself/herself but asked other readers to send in their opinions.



### **The role of Hindi women's magazines of the early twentieth century**

As we have seen above, in the early twentieth century, the culture of women's magazines was developing. Compared to the women's magazines of the late nineteenth century, in which the content was mostly controlled and censored to emphasise the importance of women's traditional gender roles, the magazines of the early twentieth century were no longer standardised. We find that they had their own distinctive characteristics, and therefore there were many types of voices and stories by various women.

Take, for example, their visual appearance. Each magazine had a different appearance in terms of size and volume. There were differences in the number of pictures, illustrations, and advertisements for each magazines—CD had a lot of them, while SD had very few. The percentage of pages dedicated to entertainment and useful articles was by no means uniform either. We also found wide differences in the responses of the editors of each magazine to their readers. In the CD, especially under Sahgal's editorship, we always find his supportive comments to the readers, but such an attitude is absent both in SD and GL.

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In addition to differences in appearance and content, we find variations in the women's voices in each magazine. There were many kinds of narratives and stories told by nameless and faceless women (and also, occasionally, by men), which challenged the norms enforced by a male-dominated society. For most women, especially those who were not celebrities, women's magazines and their readers' columns were the first and only space where they could express their own feelings freely and could gain some sympathy and support from the editor and readers.

These women's magazines played a significant role in the lives of many women at the time. First, magazines gave them a sense of unity. Many letters to the magazine from readers used words such as 'we' or 'our sister' when mentioning other readers. On several pages in CD, we even find the word '*Chand Parivar*', or '*Chand family*', and the editor Sahgal also used these words, especially in the readers' column section. When he responded to women who were in trouble, he did not blame them; instead, he suggested that 'we' should deal with the problem to change 'our' society. From his comments, we can imagine that CD aroused a sense of unity in readers with people outside their actual home and community. Thus, for some desperate women, CD became the only place where they could seek solace, as the following examples also



demonstrates:

When I was 17 years old, I married into a family. Since then, I have been suffering from domestic violence. I cannot take it anymore. I am desperate and all alone in this world. You, CD, is the only place where I could feel some hope.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the magazines offered many types of information and knowledge to women, as a result of which it can be assumed that many of them became more conscious members of society. Even magazines could show new ideas or possibilities to women, especially those women who were in trouble. In the reader's section of CD, we can see that Sahgal's responses sometimes did not answer the letters directly, although he tried to encourage them to break the conventions. In his responses to the letters from aggrieved daughters, wives, or widows, Sahgal sometimes advised them not to follow their undutiful husbands obediently and leave their husbands and/or in-laws.

Don't abscond from home with no means of livelihood. Rather, be brave to step out to get a job. Get married to a well-qualified man with some reliable person's help.<sup>15</sup>

It is not a virtuous wife's dharma or duty to follow the husband's unreasonable and immoral order. We call it total weakness. There is no other way than divorce.<sup>16</sup>

If you have courage, try to leave your vicious old husband and devote the rest of your life to serve our country.<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes Sahgal encouraged the women to go to the *Arya Samaj* to re-marry their loved one. His opinion, which was incredibly revolutionary for those days, was that Hindu law should support women's right to divorce and remarry: 'If both of you are determined to get married, you should ignore what the family or community says. Set your mind and go to any *Matri-mandir* or *Arya Samaj* to hold a wedding ceremony.'<sup>18</sup>

These magazines provided women with a new role and a space beyond the household, and thus they were windows to the wider world for common or non-celebrity women. What we need to realise is that even though the strict social backdrop of those times called for absolute obedience and virtue, there were in fact voices that challenged the system at that time. As this paper has shown, such voices, which belonged to faceless and nameless women, illustrate other, little-known dimensions of women's lives in the modern period and enhance our understanding of the social and cultural history of India.



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on talks given at the European Association of South Asian Studies Conference, Warsaw, 2016 and at the FINDAS International Workshop, Tokyo, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Though it is true that the magazine had several female writers, most of the contributions were from men. Even 'the first female editor', Mrs. Gopaldevi was, according to Orsini (2002), an editor in name only and the magazine was mostly written and edited by Thakur Srinath Singh. Francesca Orsini. 2002. *The Hindi public sphere, 1920-40: language and literature in the age of nationalism*, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> As for *Chand*, the ratio of male and female of the contributors was roughly 2 to 1.

<sup>4</sup> CD, March 1930, pp. 860-2.

<sup>5</sup> CD, March 1930, pp. 861f.

<sup>6</sup> CD, June 1933, pp. 219f.

<sup>7</sup> CD, June 1933, p. 220.

<sup>8</sup> CD, December 1930, pp. 251f.

<sup>9</sup> CD, December 1930, pp. 253-9.

<sup>10</sup> CD, December 1930, pp. 259, 261.

<sup>11</sup> GL, Asharh c.1925, pp. 230-2.

<sup>12</sup> GL, Savan c.1927, pp. 283f.

<sup>13</sup> GL, Asharh c.1927, pp. 188-90.

<sup>14</sup> CD, October 1929, p. 712.

<sup>15</sup> CD, August 1929, p. 489.

<sup>16</sup> CD, August 1929, p. 491.

<sup>17</sup> CD, August 1933, p. 429.

<sup>18</sup> CD, November 1931, p. 184.

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