



باو فاسن سے سرشار پاکیزہ اپنجل
چاند بے طالب دیدار پاکیزہ اپنجل
وہ بھی بڑھتا ہے بہتی ہے طبیعت اسکی
وہ میا شوق کا دربار پاکیزہ اپنجل
اہل دق ہی فقط تیرے پرستار نہیں
ہم بھی ہیں تیرے پرستار پاکیزہ اپنجل



Anand Foundation

Urdu Women's Magazines:
A Living or a Dying Legacy

Report by Muthara Khan



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کے بارے میں یہ سب کس
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Anand Foundation

**Urdu Women's
Magazines: A Living
or
a Dying Cultural
Legacy?**

Research report by

Muthara Khan



Author's Note



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Chapter I- A Walk Through Delhi's Literary Lanes

My search for contemporary Urdu women's magazines led me to the alleys of Daryaganj, Delhi's historic hub of literature. Every Sunday, this place transforms into a bibliophiles' paradise, with pavements overflowing with books stacked in precarious towers—some covered in dust, others gleaming under the sun. Here, you can find everything from leather-bound classics to yellowing newspapers that tell tales of a bygone era. Lost literary treasures occasionally resurface, making it a natural starting point for my quest.

A quick Google search pointed me toward a vendor reputed for dealing in Urdu magazines. With hopeful anticipation, I made my way through the maze of booksellers. Yet, to my disappointment, only old printed editions of Urdu magazines were to be found—relics of a past where these publications had once thrived.

Determined not to give up, I spoke to a vendor who, sensing my growing dismay, gestured toward the iconic Urdu Bazaar near Jama Masjid. "Try there," he suggested, "You might find something." Urdu Bazaar, an extension of Delhi's cultural and literary past, has long been known for its collection of Urdu books, poetry anthologies, and religious scriptures. I walked through its narrow lanes, my eyes scanning every shop window, my voice repeating the same question: "Do you have any Urdu women's magazines?"

One after another, the responses remained unchanged. A shake of the head. A dismissive shrug. Some shopkeepers even seemed surprised by my inquiry, as if the very notion of a women's magazine in Urdu was outdated. But there was one common thread in their replies—they all pointed me toward Rizwan Book Depot.

Following their directions, I finally found myself standing before a small shop, tucked between larger, more vibrant bookstores. Rizwan Book Depot was unassuming, its display spilling out into the open air—books stacked upon books, sheltering from the harsh sun under a makeshift canopy. Rizwan Book Depot held a treasure trove of Urdu literature. Shelves and stacks contained books on a wide array of topics—religion, philosophy, history, and even medical subjects like gynaecology. The sheer diversity of literature was striking, proving that despite the declining readership, Urdu remained a language of knowledge and depth.



*Figure 2 Display of Urdu books at Rizwan Book Depot
(Image by Muthara Khan)*

Figure 1 Display of various Urdu books at Rizwan Book Depot

It was here, among the dusty piles and forgotten pages, that I saw them—two Urdu women’s magazines. In that moment, after nearly resigning myself to failure, my heart swelled

with joy. It was a small victory, but it carried within it a much larger story—one of erasure and of a language that continues to fight for space in a rapidly changing world.



Figure 3 Two Urdu Magazines on display along with other Urdu books and a row of Miswaks (Image by Muthara Khan)

A conversation with Rizwan Sahab, the owner of this decades-old shop, painted a stark picture of the decline of Urdu women’s magazines. He reminisced about an era when numerous magazines thrived, listing names like *Pakeeza Anchal*, *Shamah*, *Mashriqi Dulhan*, *Mashriqi Anchal*, *Gulfaam*, and *Filmi Sitaarein*. But today, he lamented, most of them are out of circulation. *Pakeeza Anchal*, along with its Hindi counterpart *Mehakta Anchal* and *Humah Digest*, are a few that still survive; the rest have shut down.

When I asked him why these magazines are shutting down, his answer was blunt: “With the arrival of phones and other gadgets, people have stopped reading altogether—especially Urdu magazines.” He explained that, back in the day, there were magazines specifically catering to men and women. “Men’s magazines mostly featured adventure and crime stories, while women’s magazines focused on romance,” he said. The oldest and most popular of them, *Khatoon-e Mashriq*, was another casualty of the times, shutting down during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Discussing sales, his voice carried both resignation and inevitability. “The sale and circulation are extremely low. I’m sure these will shut down soon too,” he admitted. While there



was no fixed age group for buyers, he noted that men and women of all ages still came looking for them—though the numbers dwindled with each passing year. “People who are into Urdu literature come and buy them, but there are no permanent customers anymore,” he added.

Figure 4 Kutub Khana Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu (Image by Muthara Khan)

Determined to dig deeper, I visited another, larger bookstore—*Kutub Khana Anjuman-e Taraqqi-e-Urdu*, an institution that has stood for the promotion of Urdu language and literature since 1939. As I shared my research topic with the owner, he let out a short laugh and said, “You better pick another topic; you will find nothing about Urdu women’s magazines here. It is a dying culture.” His perspective mirrored that of Rizwan Sahab, though he added that social media had provided such an immersive source of entertainment that people had moved away from print magazines entirely. “All the women who come here looking for entertainment now only buy Urdu novels,” he remarked. Despite the discouragement, I managed to find a magazine started by the Ministry

of Preservation of Languages called *Khwateen Duniya*. However, due to its low demand, only an old edition from 2021 was available. While browsing, a gentleman sitting nearby overheard my conversation and handed me a list of Urdu periodicals that had once been dedicated to women. Most, if not all, had ceased publication.

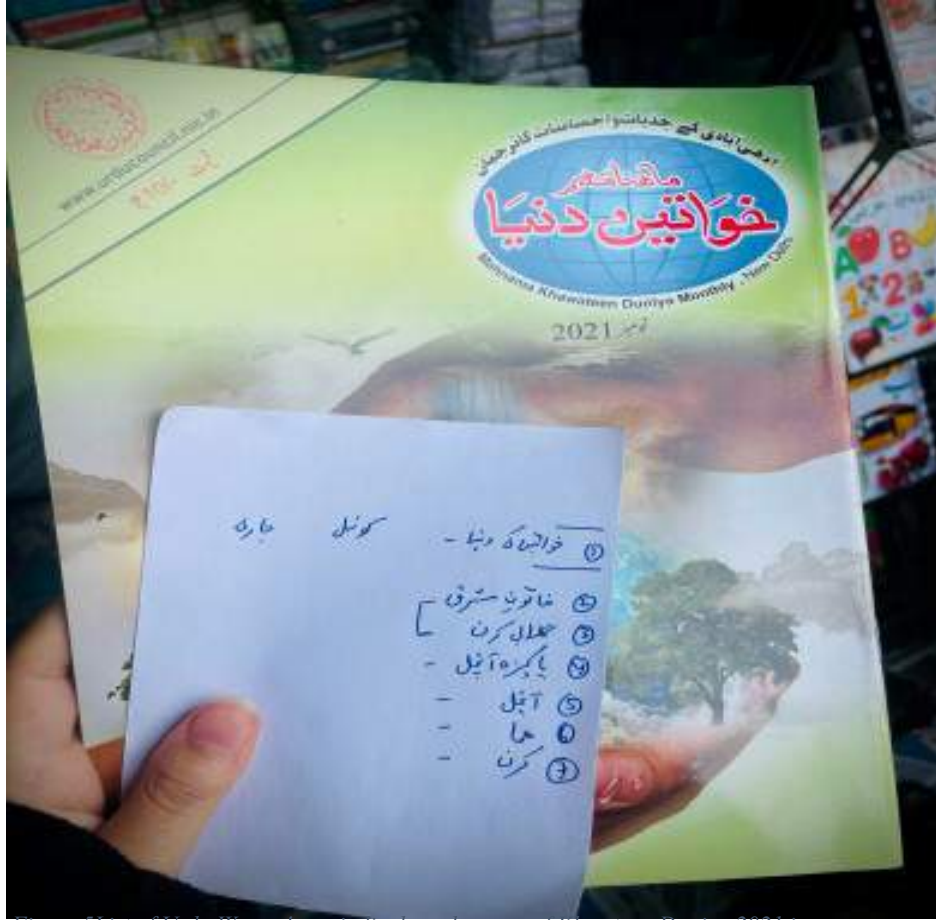


Figure 5 List of Urdu Women's periodicals and a copy of *Khwateen Duniya* 2021 issue
(Image by Muthara Khan)

So, with three Urdu magazines in my hands, I returned home—eager to explore their pages and uncover the world they sought to preserve.

Chapter II- Urdu's Journey in Delhi

In tracing the connection between Urdu and Delhi, it is crucial to acknowledge the city's historical role in shaping the language. As highlighted in a Hindustan Times article, '*Safarnama e-Urdu: Tracing the origins and journey of the language in Delhi*, Urdu, which emerged in Hindustan under the influence of Persian, Arabic, and regional dialects, was once the lingua franca of North India. Recognized by **the** British Linguistic Survey of India, it replaced Persian as the official administrative language in the 1830s. The language played a pivotal role in the independence movement, with the Progressive Writers' Movement (1936) harnessing its literary power to challenge oppression and inspire reform. However, after Partition, Urdu suffered a sharp decline in India, becoming a victim of political and communal divides.



Figure 6 Photo of Urdu Bazaar (Image from Indian Express)

Delhi, which once flourished as a hub of Urdu literature and culture, has also seen this decline. Prestigious institutions such as St. Stephen's College and Hindu College, which once housed thriving departments for Indo-Aryan languages, now struggle to sustain them. The historic

Urdu Bazar of Old Delhi—once a thriving centre for publishers and poets—has dwindled, with only **seven** of its original **sixty-four** publishing houses still operating. The article notes that while festivals like Jashn-e-Rekhta **and** Jashn-e-Adab have renewed interest in the language, Urdu’s commercial viability remains a challenge. However, despite this decline, bookstores like Maktaba Jamia report a growing demand for Urdu literature, with younger readers—including non-Muslims—expressing a newfound appreciation for the language and its literary heritage.

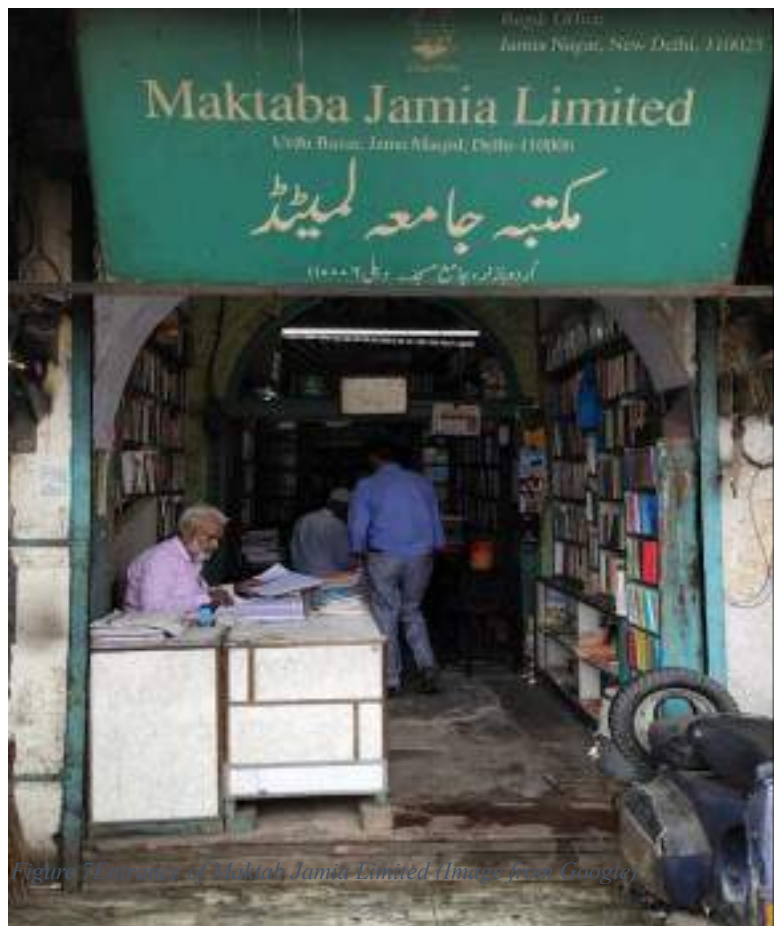


Figure 7 Entrance of Maktaba Jamia Limited (Image from Google)

Chapter III- Delhi's Urdu Periodicals

Coming to the history of Urdu Magazines in Delhi, as discussed in an article from Zikr-e Dilli titled "*Biswin Sadi and Other Popular Urdu Periodicals in Delhi, 1960-70s*," Urdu, once widely spoken across Delhi and its surrounding regions, was not just a language of poetry but also of revolutionary writing, employment, and popular fiction. Despite the challenges Urdu has faced post-1947, Delhi remained a thriving hub for Urdu periodicals, particularly during the 1960s and 70s, when magazines in both Hindi and Urdu enjoyed a substantial readership.



Figure 8 Biswin Sadi cover from 1942 (Image from Rekhta)

During this period, several Urdu magazines like *Shama*, *Biswin Sadi*, *Rumani Duniya*, *Jasoosi Duniya*, *Pakeeza Anchal*, and *Khilona* (for children) were widely circulated in Delhi. Notably, *Biswin Sadi*, edited by Ram Rakha Mal Chadha (Khushter Girami), was one of the most popular Urdu magazines, selling 40,000 copies per issue. The magazine featured a diverse range

of content, including political humour, cartoons, pulp fiction, romance, poetry, and even household and cookery tips. Major Urdu writers like Amrita Pritam, Krishan Chander, Balwant Singh, Raja

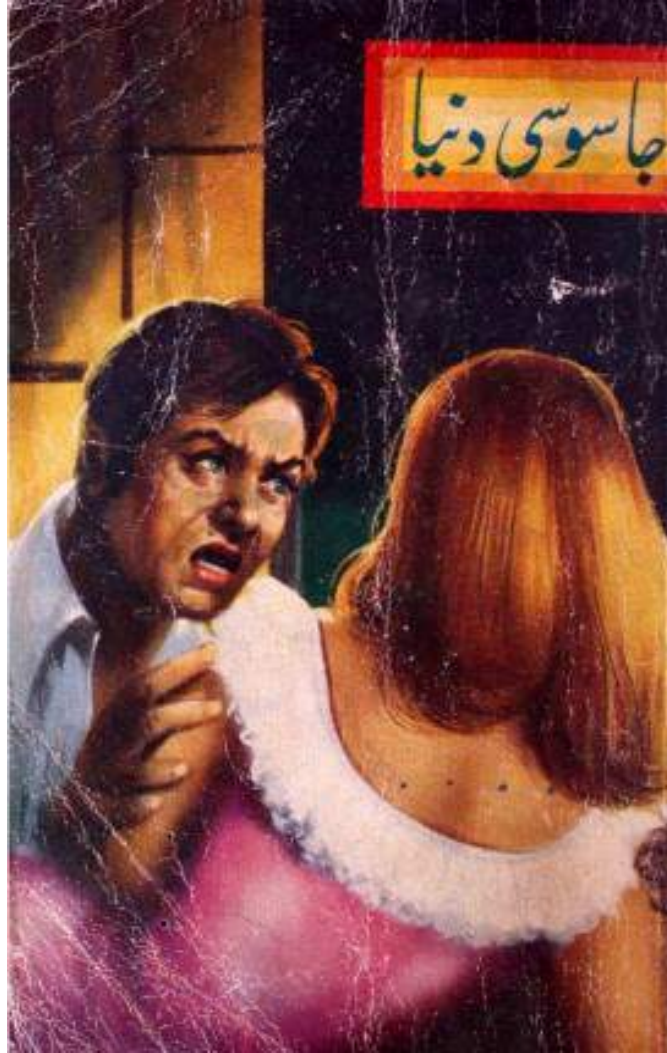


Figure 9 *Jasoosi Duniya* Cover (Image from Rekhta)

Mehndi Ali Khan, Khushwant Singh, and Sahir Ludhianvi contributed to it. Interestingly, *Biswin Sadi* was first launched in pre-Partition Lahore (1937) and later reestablished in Delhi in the 1960s.

Other publications like *Jasoosi Duniya*, featuring detective fiction by Ibne-Safi, also gained a large readership. These magazines catered to diverse audiences—covering everything from science and magic tricks to stories for children. According to Jamil Urfi's *Biswin Sadi Memoirs*, Urdu periodicals found a strong readership among Punjabi refugees in Delhi, many of whom were

more familiar with Urdu than English or Hindi. The magazine's early days in Lahore were also marked by a fascinating anecdote—its office stood between a mandir and a masjid, both of which were destroyed during the Partition riots, yet the *Biswin Sadi* office remained untouched.

Chapter IV- Urdu Journalism and Women's Urdu Periodicals

The history of women's contributions to Urdu literature and journalism has often remained overlooked. As highlighted in an article from *Dawn* titled "*Literary Notes: A History of Women's Urdu Periodicals*," women poets and writers of the 18th and 19th centuries were largely excluded from mainstream literary records. The earliest tazkiras (biographical accounts of poets), such as Hakeem Faseehuddin Ranj Meruthi's *Baharistan-i-Naz* (1864), marked the first attempt to document women poets, listing 174 poets in its later editions. However, many women preferred anonymity due to societal constraints, a trend that continued into the 20th century with poets like Zahida Khatoon Shervaniya publishing under initials instead of their full names.

Beyond poetry and prose, women have played a crucial role in Urdu journalism for over a century, both as editors and contributors to women's periodicals. However, little research has been conducted on the subject. In a groundbreaking study, Dr. Jameel Akhter published *Urdu Mein Jaraaed-i-Niswaan Ki Tareekh* (2016), a two-volume work documenting 250 Urdu eriodicals launched exclusively for women. The first volume explores magazines from the 19th century to 1947, while the second examines those published post-independence, including over 100 women's magazines in Pakistan and a significantly lower number—less than 40—in India.

The earliest known women's Urdu periodical was *Rafeeq-i-Niswaan* (Lucknow, 1884), launched by a Christian missionary, followed by *Akhbar-un-Nisa* (Delhi, 1884). Magazines such as *Mu'allim-i-Niswaan* (Hyderabad, 1894), *Tahzeeb-i-Niswaan* (Lahore, 1898), *Parda-i-Ismat* (Lucknow, 1900), and *Khatoon* (Aligarh, 1904) played a pivotal role in educating and empowering women. Muhammadi Begum was the first woman to edit an Urdu women's magazine, serving as he editor of *Tahzeeb-i-Niswaan*, while Begum Mumtaz Ali edited *Musheer-i-Maadar* (Lahore, 1905).

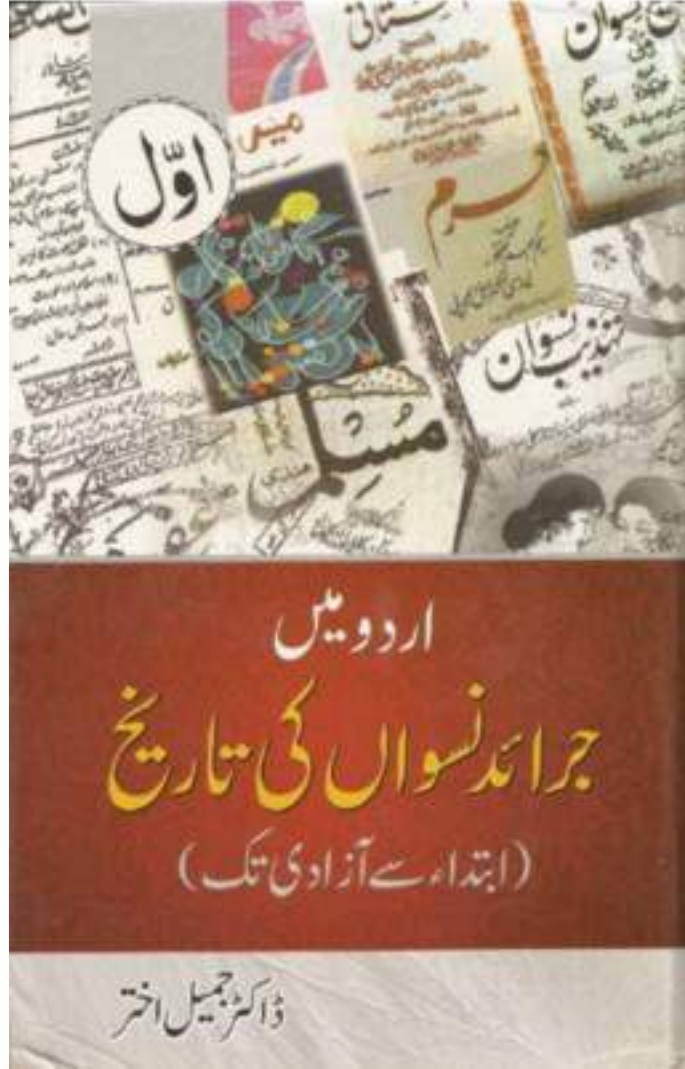


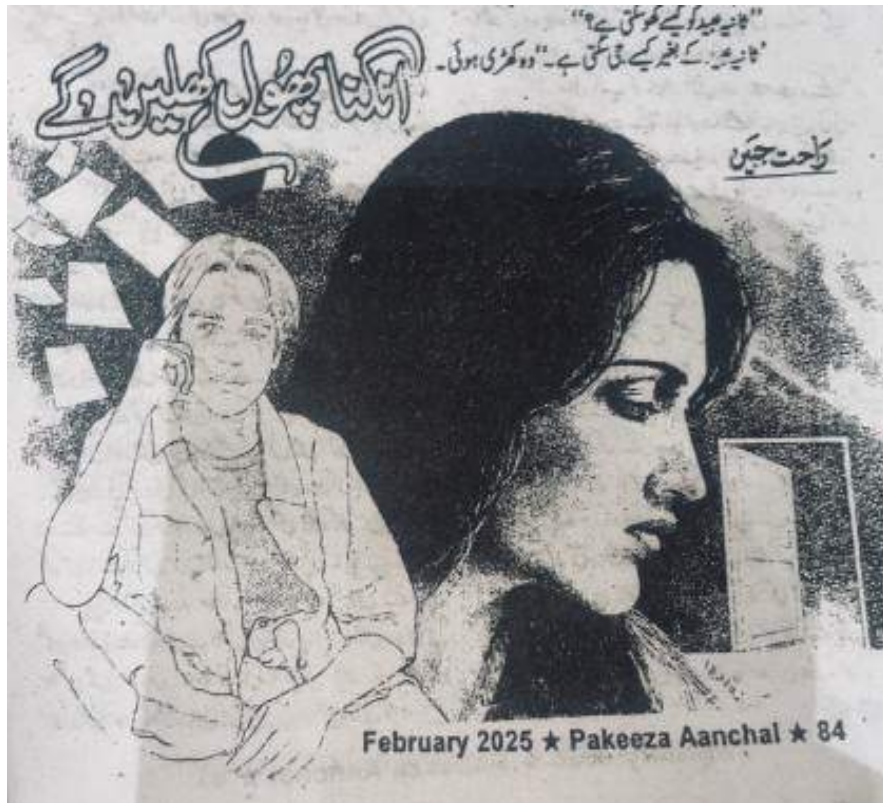
Figure 10 Urdu Mein Jaraaed-i-Niswaan Ki Tareekh (2016) cover (Image from Dawn)

These periodicals not only helped in creating awareness and advocating women's rights but also laid the foundation for later women's publications. Dr. Akhter's book, enriched with scanned images of rare magazines, serves as a valuable reference for scholars of Urdu literature and mass communication, shedding light on an often-overlooked yet crucial aspect of Urdu print history.

Chapter V- Pakeeza Anchal: Between Tradition and Transition

Priced at a hundred rupees, *Pakeeza Anchal* stands as one of the last surviving Urdu women's magazines. Its cover, adorned with the image of a bride draped in heavy jewellery and laborate clothing, is vibrant, a stark contrast to the monochrome pages within. The magazine is substantial, running 290 pages—far more than a typical magazine. The editor's note, written in eloquent Urdu, extends warm wishes for the new year, ending with a message from *Pakeeza Anchal*: “شوخ ہے ہر فورصم ہے ہر”, meaning, *Stay happy, stay busy*.

Despite its longevity, the magazine retains an old-world charm—its pages are still printed in black and white, with colourless images accompanying the text. The content is varied, spanning articles on lifestyle, beauty, food, and spirituality. However, the bulk of the magazine is dedicated to short stories and serialised novels, their narratives stretching across multiple issues.



These are accompanied by intricate graphic illustrations, evoking the aesthetics of a time when storytelling relied on the written word rather than digital visuals.



Figure 12 Graphic Illustrations in Pakeeza Anchal



Figure 11 Poetry in Pakeeza Anchal

The poetry section, filled with *nazms* and *ghazals*, adds a lyrical touch, making the magazine a repository of both prose and verse.

Minimal advertisements further distinguish *Pakeeza Anchal* from modern magazines; its pages are text-heavy, designed for an audience that still values the immersive experience of reading. It is a reminder of an era where print culture thrived—one that now stands on the precipice of disappearance.

All the pieces in *Pakeeza Anchal* are unmistakably written from a woman’s perspective. The stories primarily revolve around themes of romance, domestic life, and entertainment, reflecting the traditional interests of its readership. Accompanying these are articles focused on beauty, fashion, and lifestyle—subjects that have long been staples of women’s magazines. In many ways, *Pakeeza Anchal* serves as a literary sanctuary for women who still cherish the experience of reading, offering them a world of stories and reflection that resonate with their everyday lives.

What struck me most was a small but significant detail on the first page of the magazine: “Publisher, Printer, Editor, Owner: Ghazala Siddique.” Seeing a woman at the helm of one of the last surviving Urdu women’s magazines was a moment of quiet triumph. Historically, as mentioned above and as Sadaf Jawed notes in an article for *Enroute*, the earliest Urdu women’s magazines were founded by men. Even when women did enter the field, it was often alongside their husbands.



Figure 13 Muhammadi Begum (Image from Heritage Times)

The first Urdu women’s magazine to achieve lasting success was *Tahzeeb-e-Niswan*, which was established by Sayyid Mumtaz Ali, with his wife Muhammadi Begum as the editor.

After reading several issues of *Tahzeeb-e-Niswan*, I found that it championed women’s education, featured critical articles on marriage, and celebrated women’s achievements—be it earning degrees or contributing to intellectual discourse. The magazine also engaged in debates with other scholarly publications and, in the context of colonialism and global conflicts, featured geopolitical commentary. Strongly critical of British habits, it urged women to preserve their cultural identity.

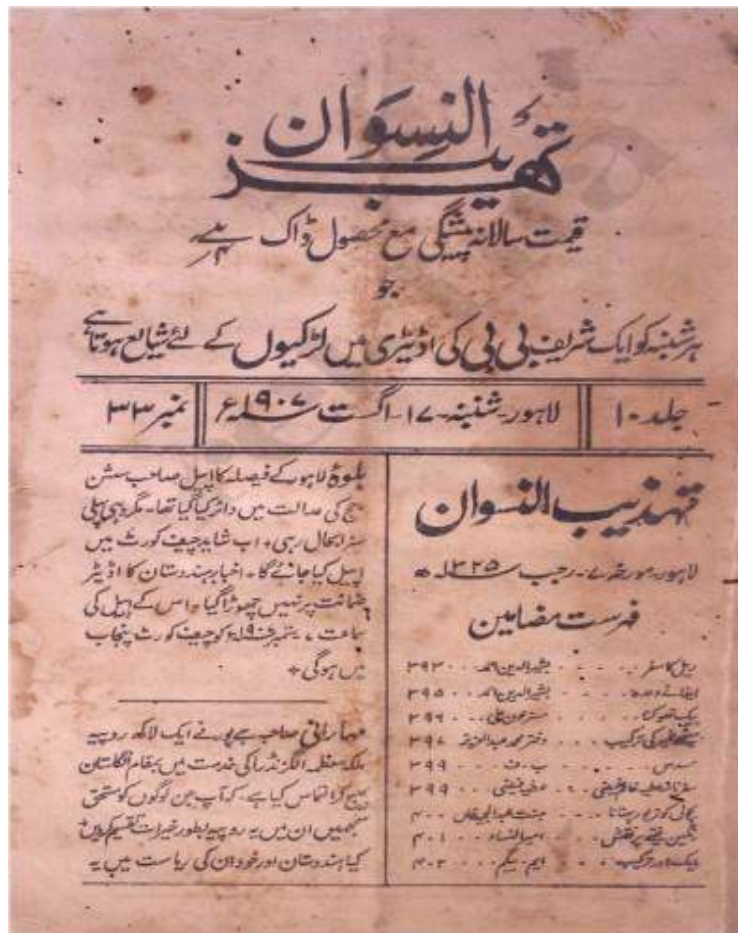


Figure 14 *Tahzeeb-e-Niswaan* 1907 cover (Image from Rekhta)

Urdu women's journals played an essential role in socio-religious reform movements, challenging patriarchal norms and stimulating intellectual discourse. They provided a space for middle-class Muslim women to express their ideas, exchange perspectives, and engage with issues beyond their immediate surroundings. They became lifelines for women behind veils, offering awareness, education, and a sense of community.

Going through *Pakeeza Anchal* made me realize that contemporary Urdu magazines still retain the format of their predecessors. The graphic art and images are, of course, modern additions. However, while older magazines balanced entertainment with political and intellectual discourse, today's Urdu magazines have largely shed their revolutionary edge, focusing primarily on leisure and lifestyle. Another crucial shift is the subtle inclusion of English. While older Urdu magazines were written purely in Urdu, contemporary ones occasionally incorporate English words and phrases—though sparingly. It is a noticeable change that reflects the evolving linguistic landscape.

Chapter VI- A Diminishing Readership, An Unwavering Editor- A

Conversation with Ghazala Siddiqui

After days of relentless efforts—calling, waiting, and following up—I finally got through to Ghazala Siddiqui, the chief editor of *Pakeeza Anchal*, *Mehakta Anchal* and *Huma Digest*.

The moment she picked up, her voice carried the warmth of someone deeply invested in their work. When I asked her why she started the magazine, her response was simple: “*Shuru isiliye ki thi ki Urdu ko farogh miley,*” meaning, “*I started this magazine to promote Urdu.*” Her passion for the language was unmistakable. She spoke at length about her love for Urdu, how it has been her life’s mission to preserve its beauty, and the immense effort it takes to keep the magazine running. “*Yeh hamesha shauq ka kaam raha hai, kabhi paison ke liye nahi tha,*” she added. This was never about earning profits—it was about keeping a language alive.

But keeping it alive, she admitted, has become increasingly difficult. There was a time when *Pakeeza Anchal* printed copies in the lakhs. Now, the numbers barely reach the hundreds. The decline had been gradual, but the real blow came with the COVID-19 pandemic. “*It could be due to reduced purchasing power, or maybe because people have simply lost interest,*” she mused. “*Aaj kal sab kuch phone pe hai. Kitabon aur risalon ka waqt kahan?*”—Nowadays, everything is on phones. Who has time for books and magazines anymore?

Despite dwindling readership, *Pakeeza Anchal* persists. However, it does so at a cost—one that is shouldered personally by Siddiqui. The magazine’s circulation is financed largely out of her pocket. . An unfortunate consequence of the lack of readership is that it gets no external sponsors for ads and, therefore, no significant advertising revenue to sustain it. “*Jo thoda bohot paisa aata*

hai, woh mulazimon walon ko dete hain,” she said. The small revenue that does trickle in is used to pay the writers and contributors. *“Log Urdu se pyaar karte hain, magar koi bina paison ke kaam nahi kar sakta.”*—People love Urdu, but no one can work for free. However, these magazines face financial hurdles as well, and in an era where digital access is dominant, they deliberately avoid going online for publicity. Making their content freely available online would further diminish their already limited revenue.

When I asked why she had chosen to start a women’s magazine specifically, like *Pakeeza Anchal* and *Huma Digest*, she started by clearing out that *only Pakeeza Anchal* is a women’s magazine, not *Humah Digest*. Moving on to the actual question, her answer was both practical and ideological. *“Bohot si cheezein jo auratein nahi jaanti thi, jo unse chhupaayi jaati thi, un tak woh pahunchaana zaroori tha,”* she said. There was so much that women were kept unaware of, so much that was hidden from them. The idea was to create a space for Urdu-speaking women to access both information and entertainment. *“Yeh sirf ek tafreeh ka zariya nahi tha. Iska maqsad yeh bhi tha ki auratein behtar zindagi jeeyein, behtar soch sakein.”*—It wasn’t just meant for leisure; it was meant to help women lead better lives and think critically.

The magazine, she explained, was conceived as a *“Darasgah”*—a place of learning. Like a traditional *madrassa* where holistic education is imparted, *Pakeeza Anchal* was envisioned as a place that would touch upon every aspect of a woman’s life. It wasn’t just about fashion and romance; it was about refining the way women spoke, thought, and carried themselves in society.

When I asked about the contributors, she revealed that the magazine receives submissions from a diverse group of writers, ranging from young, aspiring authors to seasoned ones. *“Hamari purani likhne wali khwateen ab nahi rahi,”* she said wistfully. Many of the magazine’s veteran

writers had passed away, leaving behind a void that was becoming increasingly difficult to fill. But *Pakeeza Anchal* continues to welcome fresh voices, nurturing the next generation of Urdu writers.

Speaking of the changing landscape of Urdu women's magazines, she reflected on how drastically the world has transformed in just a few decades. Naturally, the content of these magazines has evolved as well. However, one shift, in particular, stands out to her. "*Zabaan aur tahzeeb par bohot asar padha hai,*" she observed. The way Urdu is written and spoken has changed significantly. Certain words and expressions that were once commonplace have now faded away. "*Naya daur hai, naye tareeqay hain. Magar Urdu ka asli husn kahin kho raha hai.*"—It's a new era, with new ways, but somewhere along the way, the essence of Urdu is being lost.

This conversation with Ghazala Siddiqui reminded me of a time when Urdu enjoyed the status of a lingua franca in India. According to the British Linguistic Survey of India, Urdu was recognised as a prominent language in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in North India, where the British administration chose it as the official language due to its widespread use and Persian-influenced script. It replaced Persian as the primary language of government communication. From holding such a prestigious position to now facing the risk of extinction, the transformation is both striking and disheartening. It was baffling to me how time can change everything.

As the conversation drew to a close, I was left with a mix of admiration and sadness. On one hand, there was the resilience of people like Ghazala Siddiqui, who continue to fight for Urdu's survival against all odds. On the other, there was the undeniable reality of its decline. The passion of a few individuals is keeping the language alive, but for how long? The survival of Urdu,

especially in the form of women's magazines, now rests precariously on the shoulders of a diminishing readership.

This history of Urdu magazines in Delhi provides essential context to understanding the decline of publications like *Pakeeza Anchal*, which once thrived alongside these popular periodicals but now struggles with diminishing readership. While Urdu women's magazines were specifically designed to educate and engage women, the broader landscape of Urdu periodicals in Delhi has faced similar challenges in maintaining relevance in a changing linguistic and cultural environment. This shift in Urdu's presence in Delhi mirrors the transformation of Urdu women's magazines like *Pakeeza Anchal*, which have had to navigate changing readership patterns while striving to keep the language alive. Though Urdu may no longer hold the same dominance in Delhi's linguistic landscape, its resilience continues to shine through the efforts of writers, publishers, and literary festivals committed to its survival.

The struggle of Urdu women's magazines is not just a struggle for a publication or a literary form; it is a fight for a language, a culture, and a way of life that once thrived but is now slowly fading.

Chapter VII- A Collective Responsibility

Moving further into my research, I turned my attention to *Khwateen Duniya*, a magazine launched in 2017 by the National Council for the Promotion of the Urdu Language. Unlike traditional Urdu periodicals, *Khwateen Duniya* has a distinct modern aesthetic, closely resembling contemporary English-language magazines in layout and presentation. A particularly striking feature is its theme-based approach—each month's issue revolves around a specific topic, and every article aligns with that central theme.



Figure 15 *Khwateen Duniya*, Feb 2025 cover (Image from www.urducouncil.nic.in)

Another significant difference is the absence of commercial advertisements. Unlike

Pakeeza Anchal, where the lack of advertisements often signals financial struggle, "Khwateen Duniya" does not rely on commercial funding, as it is a government-supported initiative. The only advertisements found in its pages are those promoting other Urdu-language publications backed by the council. This financial security allows the magazine to focus purely on content rather than sponsorship concerns.

To further encourage readership, the magazine is priced at a nominal rate of just 15 rupees per issue. Additionally, it is made easily accessible online through the council's official website, ensuring that digital audiences can engage with it without barriers. This government-led effort, in many ways, exemplifies a conscious push to keep Urdu relevant and widely read, adapting to modern formats while preserving the language's literary and journalistic traditions.

The decline of Urdu women's magazines in Delhi cannot be understood in isolation from broader linguistic and socio-political shifts. The post-independence period saw a steady decline of Urdu as the primary administrative and literary language of North India. The association of Urdu with a particular religious identity further marginalized its status, leading to its gradual displacement by Hindi and English. Consequently, as linguistic preferences changed, the readership of Urdu periodicals also dwindled, leading to the commercial decline of these publications.

This linguistic shift had a disproportionate impact on women's participation in literary and cultural spheres. The decline of Urdu-language education, coupled with a growing preference for English and Hindi in mainstream publishing meant that new generations of women were no longer accessing the rich intellectual traditions of Urdu literature. As a result, the cultural memory reserved in these magazines began to fade, leaving behind a void in women's literary engagement.

Furthermore, the disappearance of Urdu women's magazines represents a loss of linguistic diversity in women's narratives. While contemporary feminist discourse in India is often articulated through English and Hindi, the nuanced perspectives and distinct literary aesthetics of Urdu feminist writing have largely been overlooked. The exclusion of these voices from instream literary and feminist studies further exacerbates the invisibilisation of Urdu-speaking women's contributions to Indian intellectual and cultural history.

A place's cultural heritage includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and knowledge systems that are transmitted across generations. Urdu women's magazines fall within this definition as they embody literary traditions, gendered knowledge production, and socio-cultural memory.

The stories, poetry, and essays published in these magazines were often inspired by oral traditions, drawing from folklore, familial narratives, and intergenerational wisdom. Many women who wrote for these magazines were first introduced to storytelling through oral traditions within their households, where grandmothers and mothers passed down narratives that were later adapted into literary forms. This interplay between oral and written traditions makes Urdu women's magazines an invaluable cultural resource, preserving narratives that might otherwise have been lost.

The loss of these magazines, therefore, signifies the erosion of an intangible heritage that was deeply embedded in the everyday lives of women in Delhi. The disappearance of such publications not only affects the literary domain but also disrupts the continuity of cultural transmission, leading to a generational disconnect in the understanding of Urdu literary heritage and feminist discourse.

Towards the end of our conversation, Ghazala Siddiqui, after enquiring about my research, asked me to write a message for all the readers who might read this report and to anyone who speaks Urdu. She passionately articulated:

“Urdu is a language full of eloquence and depth. It is not the job of people like me or those who start these magazines to keep the language alive. I can only do so much. Every day, I sit in this office and work on editing these magazines—what more can I do? It is the job of people like you, all Urdu speakers, Urdu lovers, to keep your language alive. Languages don’t have a religion or identity; it is we who link them to these things. These magazines were started with a purpose: keeping Urdu alive as it used to be and empowering women. In order to fulfil that purpose, hume qadam milke uthaney hongey (we must walk together).”

Her words encapsulate the essence of this study. The responsibility of keeping Urdu vibrant cannot rest solely on the shoulders of a few editors, writers, and activists. It is a collective endeavour that requires recognition of its literary richness, acknowledgment of its historical contributions, and active engagement with its contemporary presence.

And so, we end with a poem by Iqbal Asshar that echoes the sentiments of this journey—a tribute to the language that refuses to be silenced, that has cradled the words of poets and revolutionaries, that remains an undying testament to the spirit of its people:

urdu hai mirā naam maiñ 'khusrav' kī pahelī

maiñ 'mīr' kī hamrāz huuñ 'ghālib' kī sahelī

dakkan ke 'valī' ne mujhe godī meñ khelāyā 'saudā' ke qasīdoñ ne mirā husn baḌhāyā

hai 'mīr' kī azmat ki mujhe chalnā sikhāyā

maiñ daaḡh ke āṅgan meñ khilī ban ke chamelī

urdu hai mirā naam maiñ 'ḡhusrav' kī pahelī

'ḡhālib' ne bulandī kā safar mujh ko sikhāyā

'hālī' ne muravvat kā sabaq yaad dilāyā

'iqbāl' ne ā.īna-e-haq mujh ko dikhāyā 'momin' ne sajā.ī mire ḡhvāboñ kī havelī

urdu hai mirā naam maiñ 'ḡhusrav' kī pahelī

hai 'zauq' kī azmat ki diye mujh ko

sahāre 'chakbast' kī ulfat ne mire ḡhvāb

sañvāre 'fānī' ne sajā.e mirī palkoñ pe

sitāre

'akbar' ne rachā.ī mirī be-raṅg hathelī

urdu hai mirā naam maiñ 'ḡhusrav' kī pahelī

kyuuñ mujh ko banāte ho ta.assub kā nishāna

maiñ ne to kabhī ḡhud ko musalmāñ nahīñ maanā

dekhā thā kabhī maiñ ne bhī khushiyoñ kā

zamāna apne hī vatan meñ huuñ magar aaj akelī

urdu hai mirā naam maiñ 'khusrav' kī pahelī

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