During the two difficult decades immediately following the 1947 Indian Independence Act, a new, commercially successful print culture emerged that articulated alternatives to dominant national narratives. Through what Aakriti Mandhwani defines as middlebrow magazines—like Delhi Press’s Saritā—and the first paperbacks in Hindi—Hind Pocket Books—North Indian middle classes cultivated new reading practices that allowed them to reimagine what it meant to be a citizen. Rather than focusing on individual sacrifices and contributions to national growth, this new print culture promoted personal pleasure and other narratives that enabled readers to carve roles outside of official prescriptions of nationalism, austerity, and religion.

Utilizing a wealth of previously unexamined print-culture materials, as well as paying careful attention to the production of commercial publishing companies and the reception of ordinary reading practices—particularly those of women—Everyday Reading offers fresh perspectives into book history, South Asian literary studies, and South Asian gender studies.

"Everyday Reading is deeply archival, and Mandhwani skillfully negotiates both what the archive presents and what it does not, painstakingly accounting for both the general inclinations and desires of the readers even as she seeks to explain some of the contradictions that are part and parcel of any middle class. This project expands what terms like 'literariness,' 'modernism,' and 'cosmopolitanism' meant in the 1950s and 1960s."

—Sangeeta Ray, author of En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives

"Mandhwani has researched a largely overlooked archive of Hindi middlebrow magazines, popular books, and mail-order book series from the 1950s and 1960s to make a compelling argument about readerly practices."

—Ulka Anjaria, author of Reading India Now: Contemporary Formations in Literature and Popular Culture

Aakriti Mandhwani

A volume in the series
Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book
Everyday Reading
A Volume in the Series
STUDIES IN PRINT CULTURE AND THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK

Edited by
Greg Barnhisel, Joan Shelley Rubin, and Michael Winship
Everyday Reading

Middlebrow Magazines and Book Publishing in Post-Independence India

Aakriti Mandhwani

University of Massachusetts Press
Amherst and Boston
For Madhu, Satya, and Pammi
Contents

List of Figures ix
Acknowledgments xi
Note on Translation and Transliteration xv

INTRODUCTION
Middlebrow
Not only in the Middle 1

CHAPTER ONE
Saritā and the Birth of Middlebrow Publishing 20

CHAPTER TWO
Hind Pocket Books
The House of Exploding Hindi Paperbacks 51

CHAPTER THREE
Dharmyug
From Dharma to Dharmvir Bharti 84

CHAPTER FOUR
Romāñch and the 1950s
The World of Genre Magazines 112

CONCLUSION
Who’s Afraid of Manmath Nath Gupta? 139

Notes 145
Bibliography 165
Index 183
List of Figures

**Figure 1.** Table of Contents, *Saritā*, May 1952, Delhi Press Magazines. 22

**Figure 2.** Cover, *Saritā*, June 1953, Delhi Press Magazines. 35

**Figure 3.** Postcard from Gharelu Library Yojana, Home Library Scheme, Hind Pocket Books. 61

**Figure 4.** First page of poetry from *Divân-e-Ghâlib*, Hind Pocket Books. 80

**Figure 5.** Table of Contents, *Dharmyug*, 21 September 1958, Bennett, Coleman and Company. 85

**Figure 6.** Shiva-Parvati, two-page print. *Dharmyug*, 20 July 1958, Bennett, Coleman and Company. 88

**Figure 7.** “Amrîkî gharō ke ānganō se,” *Dharmyug*, 16 July 1958, Bennett, Coleman and Company. 94

**Figure 8.** Table of Contents, *Manohar Kahâniyā*, March 1959, Maya Press. 117

**Figure 9.** Advertisement for the Calcutta Chemical Co. Ltd., *Māyā*, April 1952, Maya Press. 119

**Figure 10.** “For infertile women—an easy solution for giving birth.” *Māyā*, January 1947, Maya Press. 120

**Figure 11.** “Româñch ki vah ghařī,” *Māyā*, October 1952, Maya Press. 122
This book first took shape as a curiosity. I had just finished writing an MPhil dissertation at the University of Delhi that examined the uncharacteristically good production quality of postmillennial novels of Hindi master crime writer Surendra Mohan Pathak. A series of accidents had led me to this deeply rewarding print historical project. My protagonist Pathak was everywhere, had sold millions of copies, was much beloved by everyday readers, and yet remained critically understudied and persistently misunderstood. After I submitted, I asked the obvious question: What would a study of magazines and books that inhabit every drawing room, and the ones rather pejoratively labeled “lowbrow” and often hidden away, reveal for reading, writing and publishing histories?

This question became a PhD project that found a warm home at SOAS, University of London. I am enormously grateful to Francesca Orsini for her attention to every step of the research process and for her infinite patience with which she helped shape these curiosities into coherent and thoughtful questions.

At SOAS, Eleanor Newbigin sent painstaking comments and always lent me a kind ear, and Rachel Dwyer provided cheerful conversations on film and life. My SOAS cohort, specially Chinmay Sharma, Daniel Luther, David Landau, Guanchen Lai, Maddalena Italia, Paula Manstetten, Poonkulaly Gunaseelan, Radha Kapuria, Sara Marzagora, Simon Leese, Yan Jia, and the South Asia Writing Group at large provided an intellectually stimulating and stable environment in which I could work, breathe, and inhabit these questions. I also had the best time teaching at the Summer School, London School of Rare Books, Senate House. It gave me gumption: I was a proper print historian now, I had arrived.

I am grateful to Vasudha Dalmia, who not only generously gave this PhD project time but also (literally!) helped pen my (then thesis) structure one evening in Delhi. She succinctly summed up my research findings in one line:
“It made commercial sense to publish in the national language.” That is what the book chases and hopes to deliver. Abhijit Gupta, Akshaya Mukul, Alok Rai, Baidik Bhattacharya, C. M. Naim, Douglas Haynes, Graham Shaw, Javed Majeed, Leigh Denault, Nandini Chandra, Padmini Ray Murray, Rashmi Varma, Ravikant Sharma, Rina Ramdev, Subarno Chattarji, Suman Gupta, Tapan Basu and Udaya Kumar, thank you for your warm conversations and interest in my current, past, and future work. Swapan Chakravorty was so attentive to the work and is dearly missed.

This book would not exist without its exciting archives spread across Delhi, London, and Allahabad. I thank Paresh and Anant Nath at Delhi Press, as well as Chandrama Prasad Khare, for their archives and time. The Malhotra family, particularly Priyanka and the late Shekhar Malhotra, so generously opened the archives at Hind Pocket Books to me. Many thanks also to the infinitely patient librarians and karamcharis at the Marwari Library, Delhi, and Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad, who fished out bound copy after copy of the (very) copious archives. These two meticulously preserved archives still stand due to their very diligent efforts (at times despite all odds). Thanks are due also to librarians and staff at Bharati Bhawan, British Library, SOAS Library, and the Nehru Memorial Library.

My colleagues at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shiv Nadar University, especially at the Department of English, have been generous to a fault and have provided me with the stillness and conviviality necessary to complete this book. Dadri life has been infinitely more colorful because of clubhouse dinners, campus walks, and Korean food jaunts to Greater Noida with Atul Mishra, Chinmay Sharma, Diviani Chaudhuri, Gautama Polanki, Hemanth Kadambi, Iman Mitra, Jabin Jacob, Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, Tuhina Ganguly, Subhashim Goswami, Sreejata Paul, Urmila Bhirdikar, Vasundhara Bhojvaid, and Vinayak Dasgupta.

Parts of this book have been both presented at and bettered because of talks and conferences at the Postcolonial Print Cultures Network workshop at Newcastle, Center for South Asia at University of Wisconsin–Madison, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, European Conference on South Asian Studies, Vienna, and IIT Bhilai. Parts of the introduction and first chapter of this book have been published as Aakriti Mandhwani, “Saritā and the 1950s Hindi Middlebrow Reader,” *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 6 (2019): 1797–1815, and Aakriti Mandhwani, “Modernisms in the Magazine: A
At University of Massachusetts Press, I thank the series editors and Brian Halley for giving me full reign to write the book I wanted to. I have benefited enormously from the meticulous notes given me by the two peer reviewers for this book.

For this book to come into being, I needed to make journeys far and near: the PhD project was generously supported by the Felix Trust and the Doctoral Fieldwork Award, SOAS. While at Shiv Nadar University, the faculty development fund provided for subsequent travels to Allahabad that helped me substantially prepare the book as it is today.

Aditya Balasubramanian, Andrew Amstutz, David Landau, Manav Kapur, Paula Manstetten, Priyasha Mukhopadhyay, Radhika Iyengar, and Simon Leese: thank you for reading and writing with me between 2020 and 2022 over stimulating Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, and impromptu WhatsApp sessions. Vaid Rox with David Landau and Rosina Vuille and Hindi Adab Mandal with Fazal Rashid, Zaen Alkazi, Somil Daga, and Melina Gravier: our weekly reading groups these two years sustained and colored my inner life. We were all locked in, but together with such reading magicians as Vaid, Husain, Bhandari, Bhuwaneshwar, and others, we could fly.

This book has received sustenance across many cities and time zones from many friends. London, where it all started: Anjumon Sahin, Anaïs da Fonseca, Jay Sharma, Priyasha Mukhopadhyay (pseudo-London resident), you made the city breathe and come alive. Special thanks to David Landau, Paula Manstetten, and Simon Leese, aka, the NW Hood, for the many impromptu coffees, cakes, neighborhood dinners, and park jaunts. Daniel Luther and Shantanu Singh, thank you for making the gray city come closest to feeling like home.

Each time Allahabad has been a wonder and a delight: Alok and Rajul Rai, your bel sharbats, espressos, and jalebis have sustained me during my Allahabad archival trips more than you know. Coming to the city and its archives for the first time with Francesca Orsini was a revelation. Trisha Das, from El Chico to Netram, thank you so much for always coming through with Allahabad tips and tricks.

In Delhi, I thank Alka Gupta, Aradhana Gupta, Harbans Jolly, Pramode Mishra, Vandana Mishra, and Vatsala Sivasubramanian for your constant
nourishment. Anaïs Da Fonseca, pseudo-Delhi resident: With each of your visits, I have loved Delhi more. Here’s to eating many more dosas together. Ashutosh Bhardwaj, Aradhna Sharma, Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Chitranshu Tewari, Radhika Iyengar, Susan Christi, and Taiyaba Ali: some of you still stay here, some have since moved away. Dilli is always you.

I get my love of literature and history from my father, Suresh Mandhwani. From his father and my dada, C. S. Mandhwani, the family’s most multilingual speaker who quietly practiced his politics of language, I witnessed firsthand that Indian independence also meant loss. A million thanks to my brother, Aashish Mandhwani (my Ocean of Notions, Shah of Blah), for being generous and kind to a fault (though he may vehemently deny it!) and Suhasini Mehta, who has taken more panicked calls and messages and made more on-demand chocolate wah-ve cakes than she should. Also, my little loves Jugmohan and Cattoo, Cheeku and Brownie, Auntie and Uncle, Julie and Jugnu: What would I do without your love.

Dhananjaya Mishra, fellow traveler, mirth-maker, it is a joy to live my everyday with you.

This book is dedicated to three very special readers in my life. To my mother, Madhu Mandhwani, enthusiastic magazine reader turned voracious OTT consumer, who has been the book’s (and my) biggest support; to Satya Jain, her mother and my nani, elegant sari wearer, feisty straight shooter, insatiable reader, from whom I get my love of all things Hindi; and finally, to my father’s mother, my dadi Pammi Mandhwani, who could not read or write a word until she turned sixty and then decided enough was enough and she wanted to learn, who would probably not approve of me reading these magazines and paperbacks, who most definitely did not know what an “academic” book was, but who would have been proudest of this work.
Note on Translation
and Transliteration

All translations from the Hindi are my own unless otherwise indicated in the text.

I have followed the transliteration scheme used by Rupert Snell in *Essential Hindi Dictionary*. The only differences from Snell are that, for readability, I transliterate च as “ch” instead of “c” and छ as “chh” instead of “ch.”

Hindi words that have become part of the English language have been written without diacritical marks. I do not transliterate the names of persons and places.
Everyday Reading
INTRODUCTION

Middlebrow
Not Only in the Middle

READING IN THE 1950S, READING THE 1950S

In 1962, prominent Hindi writer Amarkant published the short story “Hatyāre” (“Murderers”). It focuses on two (extremely) cynical students meandering through the marketplace at evening time. Occasionally, the students stop to smoke a hand-rolled birhi (cigarette). Sometimes, using heavy left-liberal rhetoric, they burst into pseudo-political speeches about the state of the nation. After this, they visit a drinking den and then a prostitute. Here, the story takes a dramatic turn: while fleeing the prostitute’s lodgings to avoid paying for her services, the students unwittingly end up killing a man.

“Hatyāre” evokes the disillusionment of an age, of promises not fulfilled. It provides a scathing critique, both of the contemporary ruling party Congress and the unhappy alternative of an empty Left opposition, whose language the students mockingly deploy. This heavy disillusionment is distributed across several spaces: the drinking hole, the prostitute’s home, and the marketplace. Another such space is the market’s magazine stall, where a young female student goes through the pages of the English-language magazine Eve’s Weekly, “her face reflecting the hope that people would consider her extremely modern and intelligent.” Flipping through a variety of magazines in both Hindi and English, the students nonchalantly harass her: “Coming and standing closer to her, they also began whistling softly, rifling through several magazines at the same time. One by one, they went through Rekhā, Gori, Readers Digest, Illustrated Weekly, Life, Manohar Kahāniyā [Pleasing Stories], Filmfare, Jāsūs Mahal [Detective Palace].” These magazines and the story’s many uncomfortable questions animated the world of the 1950s and 1960s, the two decades immediately following the Independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. These questions, negotiated through a wide range of these ubiquitous archives, are the concerns of this book.
Middlebrow Magazines and Book Publishing in Post-Independence India takes as its focus the world of “middlebrow” publishing and attendant practices of reading of the North Indian middle classes in the 1950s and 1960s. In it I argue that this largely unexamined archive of Hindi magazines and paperbacks, commercially successful as well as desirable literary objects, is vital to understand the emergence, nature, and concerns of the North Indian, Hindi-reading middle classes in the post-independence period.

In and of themselves, the decades following 1947 deserve more scrutiny. After a comprehensive postcolonial scholarly deep dive into nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia, historical, political, social, and anthropological studies have more recently begun to approach the 1950s with a degree of care. Here, too, the immediate post-independence period has predominantly been studied from the perspective of development: of economic planning under the aegis of the Congress government and, in the past two decades, of the failure of that planning. Additionally, scholars have thoroughly studied the framing of, and debates around, the Indian Constitution, ranging from its first amendment over the right to free speech in 1951 to the formulation of the Hindu Code Bill and, most recently, through tracing the afterlife of colonial legal practices in the postcolonial period. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, often presides as a towering figure at the center of these investigations. Nehruvian India is understood through his policymaking processes, both in terms of his internal economic as well as his international diplomatic policies, particularly with respect to India’s relationship with China and its subsequent collapse, which resulted in the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

The period has also been studied from another, equally poignant perspective of the long partition and its consequences for the two new states and its citizens. The violence of the partition was overwhelmingly gendered. A vast body of work focuses on the literature representing and analyzing the silence around it. Finally, scholarship on these years, understood as the golden age of Indian cinema, also attends toward 1950s Hindi films as well as their significance within public discourse.

Among these alternative historiographies of the post-independence Indian state, culture, and society, print culture—specifically commercially successful print culture—has remained a largely uncharted terrain. A study of print culture does not only decode narratives of publishing, reading, and editing. For instance, colonial print culture has many poignant stories to tell us about the formation of public opinion as well as the “recasting” of gender, religious, even
linguistic identities. Popular and nationalist journals show us that the pre-independence rhetoric, of nationalism, collective service, and duty to an ideal beyond the family, continued to hold sway until the 1940s.

In *Everyday Reading*, I suggest that enormously successful Hindi magazines and paperbacks offer an unexpectedly rich entry point to understand and reimagine the middle classes of the 1950s. In many senses, these social constituencies were considered fundamental to the wider dispersion of the Nehruvian vision that insisted on the deferral of pleasure in the service of the nation. This archive, comprising best-selling middlebrow magazines like Delhi Press’s *Saritā* (subject of the first chapter) and Bennett, Coleman and Company’s *Dharmyug* (examined in the third chapter), as well as Hind Pocket Books, the first paperbacks in Hindi (and the focus of chapter two), demonstrates that the pre-independence rhetoric as well as the post-independence Nehruvian tour de force was not able to rationalize, control, or regulate gender roles, relationships, and consumer behavior during the 1950s. The Hindi reading middle classes who eagerly lapped up these exciting materials were everyday active consumers who defied the state’s prescription and imagined themselves outside the ambit of the institutional logic of the austere nation. In other words, the deferral of pleasure that was supposedly a key constituent of the middle classes in Nehruvian India needs to be reexamined and nuanced: through these publications and everyday reading practices, I seek to present an alternative narrative and shed light on the history of consuming classes during this period.

In this book I also engage not only with narratives of nation and nationalism but also those of language and its strong links with nation and nationalism. I examine the history of Hindi and its post-independence trajectory in the commercial publishing sphere. Unfortunately, Hindi has long suffered from the sheer burden of its history: it did much more than simply serve the purposes of nationalist representation, much more than its well-established history as the “national” and simultaneously “nationalist” language of India from the nineteenth century onward. Indeed, this story is predominant for a reason: many literary histories have charted the trajectory of Hindi and its claims and how a variety of Hindi periodicals in the pre-independence period configured Hindi in high literary, prescriptive, and nationalist terms. The magazines and paperbacks that appear in *Everyday Reading* tell us another, equally significant story of how a variety of middlebrow Hindi periodicals of the 1950s also vocally defied such responsibility. I link this
defiance to the concerns of not only the publishers but also, more importantly, the readers.

Given this, I privilege “everyday” over “literary” reading habits for the purposes of my investigation. Everyday reading habits offer clues into both active and nonactive resistance processes of the reading public. Some questions that the book proposes to unravel directly relate to one’s relationship to the magazine. What does it mean to read separately rather than reading the book or magazine object together as a group? What does it mean to insist on possessing one’s own copy of the magazine rather than sharing it with the family? I articulate this shift in post-independence reading through the emergence of what I call the “middlebrow” magazine and paperback, defined in this book as a “wholesome” readable object in the logic of the market that gave rise to individualized acts of and demands for reading. This, I show, took place within the family that had begun to covet the magazine as a material object and, most important, to reference itself in the light of its consumption. A primary attribute of the middlebrow was that such reading refused to fixate only on concerns of the pre-independence period—nationalism, austerity, poverty, and religious belonging.

Women readers are central to the main concerns of this book. *Everyday Reading* joins scholarship on women as agentive co-constitutors of their literary universe.\(^{14}\) The book contextualizes these debates in popular print sphere, where female readers confidently assert themselves. It stresses the importance of female readers as creative actors within the magazine space. Indeed, women were strong, unabashed readers and consumers of material objects such as soaps, creams, shampoos, radios, and film music records, all of which were advertised, coveted, and discussed in the magazines.

Working with materials in a language separate from the language one writes and publishes in presents its own existential questions. The act of history writing then becomes tantamount to thinking about it as an act of translation. Am I just trying to “translate” from Hindi to English a sense, an experience? *Everyday Reading* examines extremely popular archives that, paradoxically, have not been seriously examined in scholarly debates, in either English or Hindi. For instance, this book is the first academic study of Hind Pocket Books, which regularly published half a million first-print runs of its titles.\(^{15}\) Also, while *Dharmyug*, the weekly with more than 110,000 subscribers in the mid-1960s, has been referenced in countless memoirs of writers and readers, in this book I consider its significance beyond just introducing literariness.\(^{16}\)
Even though these publications were read locally, they offer themselves up for inspection to more wide-ranging imaginations: of the world, of the “other,” and, concomitantly, of oneself. For instance, the model of Hind Pocket Books was inspired by the successful Penguin and Book of the Month Club experiments in the United Kingdom and United States, respectively. *Dharmyug* published calendar images of Hindu deities along with existential treatises of Kierkegaard. The lowbrow genre magazines of the period regularly published world literature in its pages. The writers, editors, and publishers of the paperbacks and magazines traveled the world, and as a result, readers, not as well traveled, imagined the world and their place within it. The confident Hindi middlebrow of the 1950s and 1960s, internally diversified, could be intellectual and cosmopolitan as in Dharmvir Bharti’s *Dharmyug*, democratic and modern as in *Saritā*, and eclectic and more Urdu-friendly as in Hind Pocket Books. This book, therefore, actively expands the boundaries of what “literariness,” “modernism,” and “cosmopolitanism” meant in the 1950s and 1960s and shows that middlebrow publishing partly participated in all of them.

**BOOK HISTORY BEYOND THE BOOK**

Methodologically, I situate my project within disciplines of print history and history of the book, which is interested in questions of materiality of books, including texts of any kind that are written or digitized in any form, and the circulation and distribution processes by which books reach their intended—and unintended—audiences. Robert Darnton’s seminal work in this field is enlightening and provides us with three prominent questions when confronted by the book object: “How do books come into being? How do they reach readers? What do readers make of them?” Important volumes on Indian print culture have already widely investigated print cultures across several languages and time periods.

Three out of the four chapters of this book focus on magazines, both middlebrow and lowbrow, as material to conceptualize a history of a middlebrow reading public. This focus on magazines was labored: I studied monthly issues of *Saritā*, *Māyā*, *Rasīlī Kāhāniyā*, and *Manohar Kāhāniyā* and weekly issues of *Dharmyug* spread over more than ten years. Also, by no means is this focus accidental. In the South Asian (and, in our case, a more specific Hindi-Urdu) context, the magazine has been as significant (if not more) as the book, in
terms of its impact and thus as an object of study. Magazines were formative to the development of not only a literary consciousness in Hindi but also, in many senses, a consciousness of Hindi. Scholars have attributed the first journal in Hindi to Bharatendu Harishchandra, commonly referred to as the “Father of Modern Hindi.” The journal Bālabodhini (1874–77) declared itself to be “Strī janō kī pyārī hindi bhāṣā se sudhārī māsik patrikā” (beloved by women, monthly magazine improved by the Hindi language). However, founded a couple of decades later in 1900, Indian Press’s Sarasvatī towers over all other journals in the early twentieth century, literally dictating the terms for the language widely recognized and institutionalized as Hindi, one monthly at a time.

Indeed, Hindi journals of the time articulated reading and writing in terms of sevā (service) to Hindi and to the nation. Francesca Orsini identifies these journals as “animated by the new figure of literary activist” and that sāhitya sevā (service to literature) was the conceptual category created for this purpose. First published in 1922, a hugely successful women’s journal titled Chād (Moon) also epitomized another framework, that of stri-upyogī (useful for women) literature, which, as the name suggests, was highly prescriptive, linking women’s work largely within the home to a broader duty to anti-colonial nationalism. However, journals like Chād also experimented with these frameworks, significantly widening their scope: for one, Chād helped provide legitimacy to women’s activities outside the home. Moreover, the journal invested in legitimizing women’s feelings at large. Orsini shows how “hybrid genres (confessionals, epistolary novels, social novels) mixing reality with fiction, instruction with entertainment” published in Chād ultimately made space for “taboo issues concerning women to be raised, directly and with the heightened impact of a melodramatic narrative.”

Although women’s journals propagated fully formed ideas like sāhitya sevā, strīdharma (women’s duty), and rāstrasevā (service to nation), popular post-1940 magazine archives tell other stories. This book demonstrates that, within post-independence magazines and reading practices, the hugely significant rhetoric of nationalism could no longer serve as a focal point holding everything together or provide the justification for gender roles, relationships, and behavior. Post-independence middlebrow magazines exhibit a notable shift of sevā to new rhetoric such as grāhak sevā (service to the consumer). Additionally, these publications consciously configured themselves as magazines for everyone in the family and for women as an inherent part of
it, fashioned as matter-of-fact readers and producers within the magazine. If the pre-independence period had its own discourse of women as mothers, women as mothers of the nation, and, finally, women as subjects of feeling, post-independence female readers can perhaps be understood more in terms of consumers, arbiters of taste and knowledge, and less in terms of either kinship or those seeking to expose oppressions.

In an entirely different context, that of Victorian women’s magazines, Margaret Beetham writes, “Magazines are . . . deeply involved in capitalist production and consumption as well as circulating in the cultural economy of collective meanings and constructing an identity for the individual reader as a gendered and a sexual being.” Following from this, I critically deploy the term “magazine” to demonstrate the genre’s direct relationship with the questions of consumption of not only the magazine as object but also the commodities advertised within the magazine. Forging close links between “the culture of commerce and advertising,” periodicals are uniquely placed to trace consumption habits of its readers, largely the Indian middle classes. Periodicals held power because of their placement in the public sphere—and also precisely because they were periodical in nature: in other words, serialization and sequentiality in 1950s magazines and paperbacks in themselves play an important role in the creation of the middlebrow reading habit. Serialization creates what I discuss in chapter two as a “repeatable” book-reading habit. This “repeatable” habit results in what Rob Allen and Thija van den Berg term “commodification of leisure.” The “everydayness” of the middlebrow reading habit was born from the pleasure derived from repeatedly owning, reading, and consuming one’s own magazine and paperback.

Therefore, I study the middlebrow magazine also in terms of the reception history of the material object itself. How did Hindi magazines circulate as objects in the life of the family home? Who read these magazines first, and how did they read them? The price of the magazine, too, defines the threshold of access that it can provide and how it mirrors the aspirations of the reading audience. Everyday Reading considers magazines and paperbacks that were cheap at best or affordable at worst, with price points varying between forty naya paisa and one rupee (roughly ranging between one and twenty-five cents) made easily accessible direct to home through postal delivery systems. Technologies of production and government subsidies that aided low pricing are extremely relevant, specifically to a newly minted nation beset by shortages, but have not been considered in much depth within Indian book
scholarship. For instance, Hind Pocket Books discussed in chapter two was aided in its home delivery scheme pricing through a government subsidy as well as the establishment of post offices within the publisher’s compounds, thereby facilitating easy and cheap circulation of the paperbacks.

Apart from mapping readers and reading practices, in this book I engage in a close study of publishers and publishing history. What were the great publishing centers of the 1950s and 1960s? In the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Calcutta, Lucknow, and Allahabad predominantly come to mind. In the immediately post-independence period, the cities of Delhi and Bombay emerged in their own right as strong commercial publishing centers. The locations of the publishing houses under discussion confirms this. Although Saritā was published from Delhi by Delhi Press, the Bennett, Coleman and Company group published its major newspapers and periodicals, including Dharmyug, from Bombay. Hind Pocket Books was also published from Delhi. On the other hand, Mitra Prakashan from Allahabad published the lowbrow genre magazines considered in chapter four. This (partial yet significant) geographic shift and the reasons for it have been noted in passing—and often anecdotally—by writers and historians alike. For instance, Neelabh Ashk’s pioneering oral history of Hindi literature and literary milieu records accounts of a large number of writers who reiterate that, in the 1950s, prominent authors were shifting publishers from those in Allahabad to either Delhi or Bombay. In a collection of writings on Allahabad, the author Gyanranjan writes movingly: “I ran away from Allahabad. I travelled to Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta. Walter Benjamin said that there is no face more real than the face of a city. I am hopeful about cities, but not about Allahabad.” Although writers did not provide precise reasons for why this was happening, throughout the recollections two things remain consistent: this change occurred rapidly, and Allahabad was growing empty. Ravikant Sharma discusses this shift from not just Allahabad but a larger-scale migration from other towns to Delhi and imagines that it occurred because of state requirements for Hindi and bilingual translators: “Poets such as [Harivansh Rai] Bachchan (Uttar Pradesh) and [Ramdhari Singh] Dinkar (Bihar) and [Maithili Sharan] Gupt (Madhya Pradesh) were some of the more illustrious names in a long line of migrant litterateurs who made Delhi their new destination and finally, as the mid-century moved towards the last quarter, a foremost center for Hindi language, journalism, and literature.”
While writers were flocking to Delhi for jobs in Hindi, publishers in the city were also choosing to publish in the language. The caste identities of the publishers under consideration and their decision to publish in Hindi are equally significant. Delhi Press and Hind Pocket Books, published from Delhi, are products of the Punjabi Nath family and the Arya Samaji Malhotra family, respectively. Although Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Hindu nationalist reform organization Arya Samaj, was Gujarati, the state of Punjab was its major area of operation. Arya Samaj’s hold over the region meant also linguistic control: Alok Rai writes, “Dayanand Saraswati was persuaded to adopt Hindi instead of Sanskrit, and the Hindi that developed under this complex of influences grew progressively distant from Urdu, and became more and more sanskritized ‘Hindi.’” Bennett, Coleman and Company Limited was purchased by the prominent Marwari businessman Ram Krishan Dalmia in 1946. Hindi was not the first language for these community groups but historically became the identifying language for them on the national stage. Everyday Reading shows how Hindi was not only a national language but also a commercially viable one, not only for publishing textbooks and other instruments of governance but also for producing books and magazines for leisure and pleasure.

All the publishing houses discussed in this book were family-run businesses. Delhi Press and Hind Pocket Books were family owned, with the former still run and owned by the Nath family today. Hind Pocket Books was family-owned and -run as recently as 2018, when it was sold to Penguin Random House. On the other hand, Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain, Dalmia’s son-in-law, took over Bennett, Coleman and Company in 1948, and the publishing house has remained in the Sahu Jain family since then. Finally, Mitra Prakashan in Allahabad was headed by the Mitra family until its dissolution and is the only non-Punjabi, non-Marwari publishing house under study in this book.

Not only are these publishing houses family-run businesses, but publications of two of the four were also edited by the publisher-proprietors themselves. Delhi Press and Hind Pocket Books were published and edited by Vishwa Nath and D. N. Malhotra respectively. Of the editors on which I focus, only Dharmyug’s editor, Dharmvir Bharti, was well-known before he started editing the magazine. Everyday Reading places Bharti on a uniform stage with Nath and Malhotra. I show that these often cast aside editors-publishers of the commercially successful middlebrow magazines and books were, in fact, towering personalities and entrepreneurs who dramatically widened the scope of the Hindi reading public.
REFRAMING THE MIDDLEBROW—“NOT ONLY IN THE MIDDLE”

The BBC claim to have discovered a new type, the “middlebrow.” It consists of people who are hoping that someday they will get used to the stuff they ought to like.

This epigraph, which appeared in the December 1925 issue of the English satirical magazine *Punch*, is considered one of the first recorded usages of the term “middlebrow.” Clearly, in Eurocentric criticism, it started out as a pejorative category: discursive essays by Virginia Woolf and Q. D. Leavis have viewed the middlebrow as a pretentious, imitative, mediocre category, of both readers as well as literature. Woolf’s 1932 essay “Middlebrow,” penned as an (unsent) letter to the *New Statesman*, is particularly entertaining: in it, she derided the “middle-brow” as a people “betwixt and between,” labeling this class “the bloodless and pernicious pest who comes between” the highbrow and the lowbrow. Her terms of reference are unforgiving: to Woolf, the readers she called the “middle-brow” have nothing original to provide or learn from, since they passively position themselves in the middle of creators of culture, that is, the highbrow, and the lowbrow consumers who, according to her, were necessarily beholden to the highbrow. The highbrows were benevolent benefactors who derived their energies from the lowbrows’ respect for their productions. Woolf wrote, “Lowbrows need highbrows and honour them as much as highbrows need lowbrows and honour them.”

The French theorist Pierre Bourdieu has a more nuanced theoretical formulation of the “middlebrow” than did Woolf. For one, Bourdieu is very conscious of the fact that distinctions take place according to the process of relationality. He notes: “Distinction and pretension, high culture and middle-brow culture, like, elsewhere, high fashion and fashion, haute coiffure and coiffure, and so only exist through each other, and it is the relation, or rather, the objective collaboration of their respective production apparatuses and clients which produces the value of culture and the need to possess it.”

However, Bourdieu uses the French term moyen, which the translated edition renders “middle-brow.” “Moyen,” in its other renditions, reads as “medium, average, common.” Theorist Caroline Pollentier critically reflects on the English translation of this key word in the same way Bourdieu asks us to reflect on the terms in translation: thinking of them as “equivalents.” Pollentier highlights that, in the first preface to the English translation of his
book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu warns his English-language readers against “the dangers of a facile search for partial equivalences which cannot stand for a methodological comparison between systems.” That being the case, Pollentier returns to the French word “moyen” itself: “‘Moyen[,]’ meaning average, does not function on its own as a cultural keyword in French, and rather points to the average standard . . . The concept of culture moyenne therefore retains a semantic fuzziness, all the more so because Bourdieu never reflects on its problematic pejorative connotations.”

In his turn, Bourdieu argues that “the very meaning and value of a cultural object varies according to the system of objects in which it is placed,” so that genres like detective novels or cartoons will be perceived as daring and imaginative within an avant-garde system. However, while he subtly layers the modern processes of cultural production, he writes that if these genres “combine to form a constellation typical of middle-brow taste,” they “appear as what they are, simple substitutes for legitimate assets.” Here, middle-brow or “moyen” is doubly criticized, for working with “substitutes” and for aspiring to the “legitimate” art or culture. Again, here, Bourdieu conceptualizes the “l’Art Moyen” as a position that, according to him, is not “legitimate.” Pollentier writes, “The intermediary position of the *art moyen* is indeed that of a ‘not-yet-legitimate’ art, an art ‘in process of legitimization’—that is, an art falling short of cultural legitimacy, or, at best, constituting a transition towards it.”

Much beyond Woolf and Bourdieu, enjoying well-deserved status of its own, “middlebrow” has lived a long, fruitful, and well-understood life. Two American feminist cultural theorists—Janice Radway and Joan Shelley Rubin—are largely responsible for this reclamation. They delineate the middlebrow as a category separate from either the lowbrow or highbrow, recognizing it as a type of consumption practice rather than a degree within a cultural or taste hierarchy. Rubin highlights the expression “the average intelligent reader” that the successful subscription club in the United States, the Book of the Month Club, called its readers. She argues that the “general reader” or a “generalist” needs to be critically understood in order to make connections to “the current interest in the phenomenon literary scholars call canon formation.” Therefore, Rubin views “generalist” middlebrow readers within the larger history of reading and cultural production, attributing them as major tastemakers with a role in canon formation. She concedes that, although canon formation is a result of market forces, consumers of these
canons play a large role and are discerning in their consumption practices. In other words, “average intelligent reader[s]” produce a literary culture as much as they are produced by it.\textsuperscript{47} Janice Radway also discusses middlebrow publishing practices, again focusing on the popular Book of the Month Club as an example of how the middlebrow readers can (and do) read an eclectic variety of curated genres. She argues that this varied and eclectic habit of reading does not indicate “passive” consumption by a “mediocre” middle class but, in fact, is a highly regenerative practice that is emblematic of middle classes and their interest in carving a different form of reading practice.\textsuperscript{48}

Radway and Rubin have arguably paved the way for a school of enquiry that we can safely call “middlebrow studies” with multiple studies of the middlebrow underway such that, as Cecilia Konchar Farr and Tom Perrin note, “we no longer feel, as we once did, that a gloss on the term middlebrow is a vital component of any piece of writing on it.”\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Everyday Reading}, firmly set in India, situates this conversation in a specific regional context. It takes its cue from this burgeoning field, which not only focuses its attentions on “reclaiming” the “middle” (which holds true specifically for women readers) but also reframes arguments about legitimacy: I understand the middlebrow as an essential category to unsettle or dethrone the very idea of a singular legitimacy, arguing instead for multiple legitimacies in the realm of the modern cultural field. I also see middlebrow publications and middlebrow readers as mutually constitutive. That is, readers not only constitute but are also constituted by the middlebrow publications and also read other kinds of highbrow and lowbrow texts. I also discuss these categories in the plural: there are as many kinds of middlebrow publications as there are middlebrow readers.

Indeed, the magazines and paperbacks I consider were not exclusively women’s magazines and paperbacks. I consciously choose to term these “middlebrow” publications as opposed to the “family” or “women’s” publications to stress overlapping readerships. Although many columns, short stories, and advertisements in the magazines were directed toward women, these magazines and paperbacks were not purely “feminine” texts. In addition to studying the extremely important development of women as unabashed readers, my impulse has been to understand this reading in terms of the family and of the growth of the individual self within the family. For instance, the examples discussed in chapter one show that Saritā often operated as an inclusive space where both male and female readers produced their own discourse. The structure and selection process of the magazines also points
to this. Inclusions in the magazine such as articles on cooking, knitting, and makeup can perhaps be interpreted as a feminine gesture. However, different sections in the magazine are addressed to men, with some others directed to women. The readership of the magazines is the entire family. In turn, the family in question that reads these magazines is the middle-class family.

_Everyday Reading_ foregrounds the importance of theorizing the middlebrow in its own right and showing that it comes into being because of specific historical conditions, tastes, desires, and publishing decisions, which may or may not take their cue from the highbrow. It understands the middlebrow as a multifaceted category with demarcations arising not only through a flattened view of class and legitimacy derived from it but also through such other postulates as reader participation based on political, religious, gender, and caste belonging, in addition to middlebrow views on consumption. In the post-independence context, the middlebrow is a reading practice that accords equal space to male and female readers for creative expression, focuses on nonnationalist subject matter, instead generating interest in consumption, of the magazine as well as the objects and services discussed or advertised within the magazine. In this book, middlebrow reading foregrounds the importance of the individual within the family as well as on the new morality of the nuclear, companionate, and aspirational family. Finally, middlebrow reading also comes into reckoning because of the modern circulation practices that facilitated the penetration of seemingly disparate kinds of reading material straight to readers’ drawing rooms at a reasonable price.

Celebratory as such aspects may be, the study of legitimacy and the middlebrow is a tricky thing. For one, it certainly opens up and builds multiple legitimacies, but crucially, this work is also built on a fundamental notion of exclusion. As generously as they included, middlebrow publications excluded discussions on caste, poverty, minority religious belongings, and especially Muslim belonging, which were markedly absent from their texts in a newly partitioned India. If these themes made an appearance, they presented themselves as redeeming qualities of a championing majority, in the language of social reform discourses, reflected most strongly in the self-construction of Vishwa Nath, Saritā’s publisher-editor.

Middlebrow readers and publications themselves may have enjoyed aspirations similar to Woolf’s in thinking themselves “better” than “others”: the word “conservative,” even “majoritarian,” frequently comes to mind. _Everyday Reading_ is not trying to be a triumphant story about celebration. It seeks to introduce
and complicate. Indeed, books and periodicals were attempting to carve their consumption publics through a politics of distinction and exclusion. At the same time, all sorts of book and magazine objects circulated everywhere. Here, book historian Roger Chartier’s work on “social areas” proves instructive. He critiques what he calls a “cultural separation” of readers by hierarchies based on wealth, status, profession, and class, prioritizing the “social areas where each corpus of texts and each variety of printed materials circulates.”

Chartier’s “social area” becomes more useful from the standpoint of understanding circulation processes, as it allows for class intersections in reading and consumption practices and, therefore, a more complicated understanding of the circulation of texts. I argue that while all middlebrow reading can be understood as a middle-class reading practice, readership intersections and overlaps did occur often. For instance, the advertisements of middlebrow magazines like Dharmyug in lowbrow publications like Māyā show that readers were overlapping, reading beyond the consecrated middlebrow. The fourth chapter of this book delineates how lowbrow magazines, printed on paper of cheap quality, carrying genres such as thrillers, romance, horror, and detective fiction genres that were kept outside the middlebrow publications, instead presented subjects that middlebrow publications deemed taboo.

How can we constitute this broader category of the middle class? Some answers are offered below.

The Middlebrow and Its Middle-Class Readers

The archive of the 1950s and 1960s Hindi magazines offers us abundant clues to access identity construction of the middle classes. The term “middle class” as a category itself is a fairly contested one in Indian historiography. Leela Fernandes traces the history of the middle classes from the colonial to the post-independence period, arguing that “culture” was “defined in relation to socioeconomic location” and was “not simply a homogenized product of middle-class self-identification.” For instance, English language and skills, along with what she calls a “respectable’ socioeconomic and family history,” were some of the primary requirements to enter middle-class positions in the colonial period, where “socioeconomic criteria such as occupation and property ownership were critical in demarcating this upper tier of the colonial middle class.”

Eleanor Newbigin focuses on the Hindu family unit at the cusp of entry into a “legal modernity,” for instance, through the identification of the Hindu
coparcener/joint ownership unit as taxable under the 1886 Income Tax Act along with incumbent questions of how to tax professional salaries received by a member of the Hindu Undivided Family.\textsuperscript{53} Such negotiations, she argues, are fundamental to understanding changes in the Hindu Undivided Family system not only as ones brought by the post-independence state but also as those affected during colonial rule. The focus on the Hindu family is deliberate: Fernandes, like Newbigin, also demarcates the formation of middle classes along the lines of religion, writing that “the formation of the upper tiers of this class was often marked by the exclusion of Muslims.” Finally, the middle class was also framed through the discourses of female chastity and morality.\textsuperscript{54}

This complex history of stratification and regulation in the middle classes continued in the post-independence period. These classes in this period have predominantly been framed in two ways: as the bureaucratic class that cohered to the Nehruvian vision and, later, as the class that thrived on business entrepreneurship during the strict control of the Indian economy pejoratively termed the “License Raj.” Pavan K. Varma writes: “The important thing is that there was an ideology, a vision, a calling which the middle class could owe loyalty to. It was this loyalty to something other than merely its own gratifications that gave it a larger cause and purpose. This is not to state that the middle class had completely transcended its self-interests—in any society, to expect this to happen with respect to any class is utopian—but its natural proclivity, in the absence of a larger ideal, to a cyclical, spiralling materialism was kept in check.”\textsuperscript{55} All the same, middle classes also need to be examined through their own cultural imaginary. For instance, Sanjay Joshi and Haynes et al. argue that consumption in the late colonial period was intrinsically tied up with a deliberate construction of a class identity and that, in many senses, the new middle classes came into being not so much through new income levels but in how they chose to spend their disposable income and, in doing so, differentiate themselves from “aristocratic” groups.\textsuperscript{56}

Returning to the larger socioeconomic history of the middle classes from the colonial to the post-independence period, the book shows that the Hindu salaried professional family with some disposable income is the predominant consumer of middlebrow magazines and paperbacks. However, this family needs to be seen simultaneously through all the lens of “‘respectable’ socioeconomic and family history," property ownership, and political representation. More specifically, I imagine these middle classes as consuming classes, as groups that identify themselves in terms of how they either spend or, indeed,
imagine spending their disposable income. For this, the Hindi middlebrow magazines and paperbacks offer a valuable entry point. Here, I consider how the middle-class family spends its disposable income on consuming the magazine and book objects, which, in turn, manufacture tastes, ideals, class, gender, and caste differentiations and relationships. I focus on the magazine structures and the different objects of consumption scattered within, such as the stories, narratives within the stories, readers’ letters, editorial comments, and their inclusions and exclusions to unearth how the middle classes read and construct themselves. One thing remains certain: the middle classes that emerge from this study are middlebrow consumers who do not wish to contain themselves within the definition of either service or austerity.

While I discuss the middle classes in the context of a cultural imaginary deeply invested in consumption, I do not suggest that they are merely passive consumers. I deploy the term “everyday” particularly from Michel de Certeau’s classic paradigm, which stands out in understanding the value of reading practices: “everyday” reading is not routinized or static but an “art’ which is anything but passive.” In de Certeau’s formulation, the reader “insinuates into another person the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal ramblings of one’s body.”57 The middle classes as middlebrow consumers and readers emerge in my analysis as nonpassive consumers and creators of literature and discourse. The middle classes reading these magazines and paperbacks may or may not have incomes commensurate to the objects advertised or lifestyles depicted within the pages. Nevertheless, in addition to holding opinions on what kind of literature they wished to read and how they sought themselves to be represented, they actively participated and imagined themselves as consumers of these objects and lifestyles.

Here, the middlebrow as a phenomenon connects practices of reading within the middle classes within a specific kind of literature that is central to the fashioning of class identity. Therefore, while I do not conflate all middle-class reading as middlebrow, I investigate Hindi middlebrow reading practices in the 1950s as one of the definitive ways that middle classes visualize as well as articulate themselves. While all middlebrow readers were middle class, all middle-class readers were not necessarily middlebrow and could be reading a variety of other lowbrow and highbrow publications.
STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book begins with what I identify as the first Hindi middlebrow magazine, Saritā (River), which first appeared in 1945, published by Delhi Press, a Delhi-based publishing house. Chapter one argues that, through its structure, stories, readers’ letters, advertisements, fiction, and nonfiction, Saritā promoted consumption as its primary impulse. Saritā packaged what it deemed as wholesome and educational for the family as a unit and promoted segmented consumption, focusing on each member’s reading desires, with something on offer for everyone according to age, gender, and marital status. This magazine increased women’s access to reading: women began to demand the magazine and construct their own creative space within it. The chapter shows women as confident rather than surreptitious consumers of reading material.

Chapter two investigates Hind Pocket Books, the first Hindi paperback established in 1957. Here I argue that we need to read the commercial book market in India as part of the global commercial publishing landscape, demonstrated through Hind Pocket Books’s relationships with foreign publishers. Hind Pocket Books was influenced by, and partially implemented, the business models of Penguin and the Book of the Month Club from the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively. Inspired by the Book of the Month Club’s success in America, the Hind Pocket Book paperback was available at a low price not only at such commercially viable points of distribution as railway stations and roadside pavement stores but also adopted a third distribution model, that of the Home Library Scheme, where books in a range of fiction and nonfiction genres were directly—and periodically—delivered to readers’ homes, creating a “repeatable” book-reading habit that included a variety of genres. This book is the first academic study of the organization that regularly published half a million first-print runs of its titles. At the peak of the Home Library Scheme, Hind Pocket Books counted around 600,000 subscribers, and forty thousand packets were delivered monthly out of the publisher’s own premises through a post office set up in the compound because of the sheer bulk of the orders. The books themselves were printed by different companies spread across Old Delhi as the print runs were much larger than what Hind Pocket Books’s own printing machines could produce. Because the books that were delivered home in sets of six were nonnegotiable in terms of titles—according to the company’s policy, readers could only refuse or return titles but not choose or recommend
them—readers at home expected books to be chosen for them. This created reader dependability on the “list,” which was not only aspirational but also standardized diverse reading as an everyday practice. This chapter specifically foregrounds D. N. Malhotra, Hind Pocket Books’s enterprising editor-publisher, and his self-fashioning efforts as traveler, publishing entrepreneur, and tastemaker.

Chapter three focuses on Dharmyug (The Age of Dharma), a weekly magazine published from Bombay by the Bennett, Coleman and Company group, which also published the hugely successful Illustrated Weekly of India in English. Published in broad A3 format on glossy gravure paper, Dharmyug started as a weekly magazine that provided readers with full-page illustrations of Hindu gods as well as religious and moral stories. The chapter demonstrates the changes that the magazine went through after an editorial change in 1959, when the company invited the prominent modernist Hindi poet Dharmvir Bharti to take over as editor of the magazine, leading to a steep rise in subscribers from around 60,000 in 1958 to more than 110,000 subscribers in the mid-1960s. With Dharmvir Bharti, the magazine changed visibly, and Dharmyug came to include more “high” literary content, with articles as varied as reportage on beatniks in America and a literary analysis of Albert Camus’s fiction, albeit in an engaging and accessible style. Dharmyug provided wide-ranging and boundary-challenging literary content and articles that were mediated by two middlebrow attributes: ease of accessibility as well as emphasis on emotion. The shift in Dharmyug’s content also allows me to trace the trajectory of the “middlebrow” from Saritā onward. Middlebrow magazines need to be studied not only in terms of shifting ideologies but also through the lens of the commercialist logic of profit making. The success and centrality of Hindi middlebrow publishing is supported by the fact that it made commercial sense for the Times of India group to alter the magazine. I trace how the largest selling Hindi magazine of the period incorporated “high literary” articles on Kierkegaard, Camus, and the Beat Generation, situating its readers within the global cultural discourse of cosmopolitanism, opening up questions about perceived distinctions between the “popular” and the “literary.”

The contours of Hindi middlebrow publishing are sharpened through a comparison with lowbrow magazines of the time, which are the focus of the book’s final chapter. I examine three successful magazines from Allahabad: Māyā (“Magic”), Rasīlī Kahāniyā (“Delicious Stories”), and Manohar
Kabāniyā (“Beautiful Stories”), published by Mitra Prakashan. While I elaborate on the term “lowbrow” in greater detail, I use the word primarily to denote publishing practices—low-quality paper, lower price—rather than a particular type of textual production or a segment of readership in a qualitative or derogatory manner. In addition, I discuss the differences in articulation between middlebrow and lowbrow magazines, particularly with respect to the differences in the genres and content of the magazines. Significantly, these lowbrow magazines raised questions of livelihood, living spaces, troublesome neighbors and the lack of privacy, as well as post-partition Hindu-Muslim mistrust, that were kept out of the purview of the middlebrow magazines. Using fear and uncertainty on which to base their stories, I argue that the lowbrow magazines unsettled readers’ expectations and, wittingly or unwittingly, unraveled the aspirational narratives of the middlebrow magazines. In a way, the lowbrow magazines carried short stories that provided alternative moral universes to the reader, challenging the middlebrow aesthetic that focused on consumption.