

Indian Woman Past and Present

Ms.Sunil Kumari Assistant Professor
B.M. College of Education Jagdishpur Sonipat Hr. India.

Abstract

This paper presents the role of Indian woman played during pre-independence and post independence. It also mentions about why some anti female practices came into existence and what measures steps were taken in past and present to curb these practices. Finally it takes a look on success of Indian Woman both in Govt. and private sector and compares to the success rate in USA.

Introduction:

Women's participation in India's freedom struggle began over a century before country became independent at the time when conservative traditions and social customs had derived them their rightful place in the society. Among earlier women fighters to raise banner of revolt were Lakshmi Bai, Rani Jhansi, Rani of Ramgarh , Rani of Taci and Begum Hazart of Lucknow..After attaining independence in 1947, India had huge task of social reconstruction, economic development and political awakening to be able to ensure justice and equality to all its citizens. The framers of Indian constitution, which amongst others had prominent women like Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Durgabai, Renuka Roy and Malti Chowdhary as its members. The participation of women in Indian freedom struggle are landmarks in the history.

Description

Women in ancient India occupied a dignified place. They participated in outdoor life as circumstances and situations demanded and there were hardly any prescribed positions exclusively earmarked for men. All the high avenues of learning were open to women who excelled in learning and their hymns were included in vedas. Women continued enjoying the same position more or less until **Muslim** invasions took place from. North West A slow and steady decline in the position of women had begun. With coming of

invaders this process accelerated and decline was marked . The political instability, consequent migration of population and economic depression extending over period of about three centuries affected the women adversely..

Infanticide, Child marriage, Sati, Purdah system and prejudice against women's education were some of the measures adopted by Hindu society to save the honour of their women against invaders and foreign rulers. To explain further , foreign invaders and rulers would abduct, be cruel and abuse Indian girls. In an attempt to save them from such atrocities Hindu's were forced to perform infanticide marry them when they were only children .Perform Sati or Widow burning was also done to save women's respect and torture by Muslim rulers. All these customs hampered the progress of women, yet there appeared throughout the ages some women who excelled as administrators and reformers. The names of Padmini, Razia Begum, Durgawati, who defended the Ahmed Nagar fort., represent the warriors and administrators against women. Mughal princess like Nur Jahan, Jahan Ara and Zebunnin and prominent women of mediavel India. Among the Maratha rulers Tara Bai , who was instrumental in putting up a powerful resistance against the onslaught of Aurangzeb, and Ahalya Bai Holkar whose administration won admiration of English men were famous women of this time. Punjab had a courageous and good stateswoman Sada Kaur who helped Ranjit Sigh in conquering

Lahore and conquering Lahore and consolidating the Sikh empire.

The part played by women in the great outbreak of 1857-58 invited admiration even from English. It was Rani of Jhansi about whom Sir High Rose observed, "She was the bravest and best military leader of rebels. The Rani of Ramgarh met her death in the battle field while Begum Hazart Mahal had to escape to Nepal and died there as an exile. The birth of Indian National congress in 1885 furnished a political platform to women. It was in the year 1900 that Swarn kumari and J Gangoli attended the congress session held in Calcutta as delegates from Bengal. Smt. Gangoli was first woman to speak from congress platform. This was perhaps a beginning of new era and then onwards the women took an increasingly active part in political activities of the country.

The first decade of the 20th century witnessed the revolutionary activities in political field. Sarla Devi and Bhikaji Rustom and K.R. Cama openly supported the cause of revolutionaries and rank amongst the outstanding leaders of period. Then came the home rule movement of Annie Besant between the year 1916 and 1918. She had adopted India as her home and it was their work that threatened the roots of the British Rule in India.. As a result Annie Besant was imprisoned. Later on release she enjoyed the highest honour by being elected President of Indian National congress. Thousands of women joined the Satyagraha army of the Gandhiji. They raised their voices against the Rowlatt Bill, Salt Laws, Forest Laws and went to jail as a consequence of their defiance.

During the civil Disobedience movement women like Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Lado Rani Zutshi, Durga Bai and many others became war dictators, Sarojini Nadu was not only the first Indian Woman to become the President of Indian National Congress in 1925 but was also the first woman to lead the

biggest salt raid in Bombay.

While men were in prison it was left to the women of India to guide and lead the people during the critical periods. In a bid to achieve their aim they had to face Lathi (Wooden Stick) blows and bullets, but once they had decided to come out and work for freedom, there was no going back from it. Swaroop Rani Nehru, wife of Motilal Nehru, was one of many who received lathi blows.

The demand for independence brought in other concession's for Indians for in the form of Govt of India Act, 1935. By virtue of this ministries were formed in provinces after general elections. Women contested the seats and were elected. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit became first woman minister while Ansuyabai Kale and Sipi Milani became the deputy speakers of central province and sindh assemblies respectively.

The women of India stepped forward to carry on the movement for independence. In places like Assam, Bombay it was the woman who were responsible for the fight for the freedom. They took out processions, held demonstrations and organised camps for women to give them required training. Women like Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani and Usha Kriplani and Usha Mehta worked underground during this period. It was during the Quit India movement that Indra Gandhi became actively involved in the freedom struggle. She defied the law by taking out processions. Indian Women outside India also took up the cause of their motherland and joined the ranks of Indian National army. Lakshmi colonel of Rani Jhansi Regiment was another person who was also a member of Azad Hind Government. The post independence period, particularly in case of women has been a continuation of era of social reforms, economic uplift and political recognition. Struggle for equity justice and parity between two human beings continues. It may be mentioned that there has been a woman Prime-Minister, Mrs Indra Gandhi. She

led the country for many years as its Prime Minister. There have been other women who have honoured the chair of Chief Ministers, Governors, educationist and legal experts. But to say that they have been completely free from social bondage and that their status on par with men would be far from truth. Efforts are however on to right the wrong through social legislation education, and increase in economic and political opportunities.

Anti female Practices and corrections thereafter

In spite of the liberal provisions made to ensure equality to all citizens and thereby to women as well, the women continue to suffer from oppression. In pre-independence era, woman had no property right she was not legally authorised to adopt a child. Efforts to reduce and remove the disabilities were made by enacting acts of Parliament. The Hindu succession Act of 1956 empowered the Hindu women to inherit property. In addition to these acts, a number of other laws have been passed to eliminate undesirable practices and protect, promote and safeguard the interest of women. Some of these were Dowry act, suppression of prostitution and immoral traffic act of 1958. It may be explained here system of Dowry was actually introduced with lot of good intentions. The primary purpose of providing dowry was to provide Bride as a security in case her husband dies or she gets divorce. But unfortunately society later used as business transactions. More dowry became one of the essential qualifications for girls to get married to prospective boys.

The year 1976 witnessed passing of Bill for equal remuneration to men and women for same type of work. Another progressive step was taken by amending the factories act which made it obligatory on employer to provide creches for children of working in factories. At about the same time maternity benefit was extended to those women who hitherto were not covered under the act of 1958. The laws relating to dowry, rape and

violence against women were amended to make them more stringent to ensure that culprit is punished. For instance, in case of violence against women, the criminal law amendment act of 1983 recognised for the first time domestic violence inflicted by husband or any of his relations and such a violence became an offence under the act. Prevention of Sati or widow burning was passed in 1987 which was preceded by amendments to Dowry act of 1961 in 1984 and 1986. The offence has been made cognisable and non bailable. It also provided for Dowry Prohibition officers at state level. The other progressive amendments related to abortion, marriage, divorce, right to children and right to property. It appears that women had to ask for, agitate, demand and advocate legal remarks to reduce and or eliminate the hardships inflicted on them. It has also to be understood that there is still a need for “stringent laws”, sensitive judiciary and effective enforcement. The Indian women has come long ways in making progress both in education, holding Govt and private job. The concept of ideal Indian woman is the mother first, but in west (USA) the woman is wife. The idea of woman hood is concentrated there as a wife.

Vivekananda's disciple, sister Nivedita writes “The samaj (Society) is the strength of family, the home is behind the civic life and civic life sustains nationality. This is the formula. of human construction.” She called upon every Indian woman to incarnate the whole spirit of mother, culture and protection of homeland. Gandhi located the strength of women in her ability to suffer with such high expectations from Indian culture. Indian women are probably only women in the world who has to play active and responsible role of a mother, wife, sister and a daughter. She is tough and resilient. She can withstand economic upswings, catastrophes in the family, would stand by her man fully committed and help him shoulder to shoulder in difficult times, unlike western culture where there is promiscuity and distrust in marriage. Western

women would rather find a new husband who is richer and younger if her husband lost health or job. Indian women has the biggest gift of sharing and caring unlike western women who would typically look for her own selfish interest. Indian women derives strength from the happiness of family and would almost do any sacrifice for their children. On the contrary if women in USA has marital problems , she would most likely get divorce and would hardly care if children are left fatherless and also saving marriage for the sake of family respect has almost no significance. **This philosophy of being sensitive to children's welfare and family image motivates Indian women** to get higher and even professional education like in fields of Science and Technology, Medicine, Business and Law. Higher education enables her to obtain lucrative jobs. India has more lady doctors than USA. Currently women are taking increasing part in Govt. and running. Their own private business. Few examples are Shahnaz Hussain and Rita Singh. Shanaz started with a modest capital investment of 100 dollars in dairy farm and rose to become founder of thousand Crore Rupee company approximately 28 billion dollar company. While earlier women preferred to stick to traditional fields of enterprise like handlooms, handicrafts and food products, today they have gained confidence and expertise to venture into lucrative fields like herbal medicine and cosmetics, biotechnology, extraction of vegetable die and natural essence, right up to highly technical fields of computer software. The other wonder woman is Rita Singh founder of Mesco group which itself sets target of four billion

References:

- 1- Women in India's Freedom struggle by Manmohan Kaur ISBN 81207 13990.
- 2- Indian Women's Movement by Maitree Chauduri ISBN-81-7027-163-2
- 3- Hindustan Times December 4th , 5th, 1996
- 4- Kurchhetra, March 2005 number-5
- 5- Women Education in india by Dr.Savita Singh- Agarwal Publication Agra-2

dollars by the turn of century. This group diversifies into mining, steel and shipping.

Govt support is quite encouraging for women entrepreneurs. Hundred thousand women will be trained in trade related activities. Through constructive interaction with various R&D organisations like national research and development co-operation and department of science and technology and others, women can today develop new project ideas.

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) plans to reserve 9 billion dollars of marketing development assistance for project promoted by women. There are also schemes to assist them to export by providing packaging facilities. Economic liberalisation has thrown open a new world of market opportunities and time is ripe for women to put their talent to good use. Finally greater role of women in governance is emphasised. An UN-ESCAP regional conference held at Allahabad(INDIA) has endorsed the concept of provisions for representation of women in all tiers of Govt. One of the first workshop of its kind, the Allahabad meet brought together elected woman mayors,councilors, women's organisations from seven Asian countries. The workshop recognised the impact of recent constitutional amendments in India for participation of large number of women in executive and representational positions. The identified areas of action included creation of joint forums of elected women representative and community based organisations working in local governance, women's bodies and media for sharing experiences.