
WOMEN WARRIORS IN THE BATTLE FIELD OF MOTHER LAND –INDIA

J.NAGAMADHURI

Abstract:Our Indian sub-continent is gradually emerging as a powerful land since women began playing significant role for the development of the nation. Role of woman in modern India can be called as phenomenal. The transition of woman from the past to present is worth mentioning. Woman who once considered being the masters in the art of home making are now considered to be the forces that shape a country. The status of **women in India** has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia.

From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful.

In modern India, women have adorned high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition.

However, women in India generally are still exposed to numerous social issues. According to a global study conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women.

"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." -Albert Einstein

Introduction:

Practical Status Of Indian Woman: There was a time when women were just kitchen keepers and house keepers in the Indian society. Gradually women began to get educated, even highly educated and a stage came when some of them came out on the social and political field to rub shoulder with the men folk in these fields. The freedom struggle of India was the opening up of the new horizon for womanhood in India. In modern India, women have adorned high offices including that of the President, Prime minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, etc.

"LET THE WOMEN REACH THE SKY WHICH IS THE LIMIT!"

Ancient India: The position of women in ancient India was vital. They used to take important decisions and were also allowed to choose their own husbands through the ancient system of "*Swayamvara*".

A woman in the ancient society in India was respected and was given due importance in the society. The Vedas finds importance of the women philosophers and intellectuals of the Vedic Period. In the Vedic period, Women Education in Ancient India was prevalent.

Indian Women during the ancient times was said to be superior to men. The women in ancient India were given significance and they held a prominent position in the Indian society during that time.

Access to education was easy for the women in ancient times. Through the massive Women Education in Ancient India several women seers and thinkers originated in ancient times such as Gargi and Maitreyi. Women enjoyed the tremendous right to education and teaching. The women intellectuals in ancient India gathered eminence by participating in educational debates and discussions in the assemblies of erudite persons

Gargi was a prominent participant in the ancient society beside men such as Uddalaka Arni.

In Vedic period, educational system was very developed and the main subject taught was the Veda. The Veda or the six Vedangas were taught including the performance of sacrifice, correct pronunciation, knowledge of prosody, etymology, grammar, and jyotisha or the science of calendar. Women Education in Ancient India produced women with significant authority. Ancient Indian texts describe the influence of the women in the society.

Mahabharata by Veda Vyasa sketch the persuasion of Draupadi on the husbands to overthrow the Kauravas. Valmiki's Ramayana also depict the influence of Sita that resulted in the wiping away of Ravana.

Medival Period: The Indian woman's position in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period when Sati among some communities, Child Marriages and a ban on widow remarriages became part of social life among some communities in India.

The Muslim conquest in the Indian sub-continent brought the Purdah practice in the Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Jauhar was practised.

In some parts of India, the Devadasis or the temple women were sexually exploited. Polygamy was widely practised especially among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas.

In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi.

The Bhakti movements tried to restore women's status and questioned some of the forms of oppression. Mirabai, a female saint-poet, was one of the most important Bhakti movement figures. Bhakti sects within Hinduism such as the Mahanubhav, Varkari and many others were principle movements

within the Hindu fold to openly advocate social justice and equality between men and women.

Shortly after the Bhakti movement, Guru Nanak, the first Guru of Sikhs also preached the message of equality between men and women

Pre Independent India:Peary CharanSarkar, a former student of Hindu College, Calcutta and a member of "Young Bengal" set up the first free school for girls in India in 1847 in Barasat, a suburb of Calcutta (later the school was named Kalikrishna Girls' High School).

While this list might suggest that there was no positive British contribution during the Raj era, that is not entirely so, since missionaries' wives like Martha Mault née Mead and her daughter Eliza Caldwell née Mault are rightly remembered for pioneering the education and training of girls in south India - a practise that initially met with local resistance, as it flew in the face of tradition.

Raja Rammohan Roy's efforts led to the abolition of the Sati practice under Governor-General William Cavendish-Bentinck in 1829.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's crusade for the improvement in condition of widows led to the Widow Re-marriage Act of 1856.

Rani Lakshmi Bai the Queen of Jhansi, led the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the British. She is now widely considered as a nationalist hero.

In 1917, the first women's delegation met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights, supported by the Indian National Congress. The All India Women's Education Conference was held in Pune in 1927.

In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed, stipulating fourteen as the minimum age of marriage for a girl through the efforts of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Though Mahatma Gandhi himself married at the age of thirteen, he later urged people to boycott child marriages and called upon the young men to marry the child widows.

Women played an important part in India's independence struggle. Some of the famous freedom fighters include Bhikaji Cama. Dr. Annie Besant, PritilataWaddedar, VijayalakshmiPandit, RajkumariA mritKaur, ArunaAsafAli, SuchetaKriplani and Kasturba Gandhi.

SarojiniNaidu, was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the governor of a state in India.

Independent India:

Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.

Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister.

The Constitution of India guarantees
**-to all Indian women equality (Article 14),
 -no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)),
 -equality of opportunity (Article 16),
 -equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)).**

In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

The Changing Scenario:In those days women faced many Social Problems like Dowry, Child Marriages, Death during Childbirth, Sati and many social problems but nowadays the status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. The year 1995, was declared as the International Year for Women throughout the world. The women were made aware of their status and place in society. Women are now no longer in slumber. They are awake and moving fast.

"The extension of women's rights is the basic principle of all social progress."-- Charles Fourier

Performance Of Women:There is no arena, which remained unconquered by Indian women. The most important name in the category of women politicians of recent times is Mrs. Indira Gandhi. KiranMajumdar Shaw is the richest Indian woman. Some of the notable and outstanding women who set examples for others are Mother Teresa, KalpanaChawla, KiranBedi, Sarojini Naidu, etc. Indian women have mastered anything and everything which a woman can dream of. But she still has to go a long way to achieve equal status in the minds of Indian men.

"History looks different when the contributions of women are included."

~ National Women's History Project

Role Of Women In Modern India:The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. The modern Indian women have honed their skills and jumped into a battlefield of life fighting against social restrictions, emotional ties, religious boundaries and cultural clutches. She can now be seen working on par with men in every field. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armored with their talent. They must avail themselves of the educational opportunities provided and learn to empower themselves.

"Educate a man and you educate an individual.

Educate a woman and you educate a family."

-- A.Cripps

Gender Inequality:Gender inequality is a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of

economic and social inequalities and stems from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions. Gender inequity has adverse impact on development goals as it reduces economic growth. It hampers the overall wellbeing because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society. Many developing countries including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment and health. It is common to find girls and women suffering from high mortality rates and vast differences in education level.

Gender Bias Health Concerns in India: Government of India's National Rural Health Mission aims at correcting rural inequities in the matter of health. It seeks to integrate health with sanitation, hygiene, safe drinking water and nutrition. Like most of the schemes and programmes initiated by Government, even the NRHM also has failed to achieve the goals at the implementation level, with the primary health centres and sub-centres crumbling. Women from infant stage to their old age women get an unfair deal in the matter of health. Their health concerns receive a low priority resulting in women bearing pain and discomfort in silence for long periods of time without seeking relief. The sex ratio in India speaks volumes about the neglect. It is not just the poor who for want of resources and with the inherent preference for a boy are guilty of bias. Even in well-to-do families parents tend to spend more on the health-care of boys than on girls.

Reproductive Health Status Of Women: An estimated 1,36,000 women die in India every year due to pregnancy related setbacks. However the measures taken by the government have not proved effective despite the fact that high fatalities occur among women every year due to poor reproductive health practices.

One of the reasons why women succumb to reproduction related complications is the absence of timely transportation to the nearest hospital.

Experts estimate that 70% of the maternal-related deaths are preventable. Good sanitation and nutrition and avoiding overwork and stress will improve the health of Indian women.

The need is to shift focus from the medical to the social, beginning with healthy antenatal care. But cultural, social and economic barriers delay or prevent women from seeking reproductive health care at any state-antenatal, delivery or post nature.

Social attitude to the role of women lags much behind the law. The attitude which considers women fit for certain jobs and not others, causes prejudice in those who recruit employees. Thus women find employment easily as nurses, doctors, teachers, secretaries or on the assembly line.

Even when well qualified women are available, preference is given to a male candidate of equal qualifications. A gender bias creates an obstacle at the recruitment stage itself. When it comes to remuneration, though the law proclaims equality, it is not always practiced.

The inbuilt conviction that women are incapable of handling arduous jobs and are less efficient than men influences the payment of unequal salaries and wages for the same job.

A woman could still bear with these problems if she has control over the money she earns. But in most families her salary is handed over to the father, husband or in-laws.

Working women are often subject to sexual harassment even while going to work in the overcrowded public transport system. At the work-place, a working woman experiences sexual harassment from colleagues and her higher officers. When a woman is praised for her work or promoted on merit, her advancement is often attributed to sexual favours. Most of the problems that beset working women are rooted in the social perspective; that men are the bread winners and women are seen as the housekeepers and child bearers. This typecast role model continues to put obstacles for the working women.

A fundamental change is required in the attitudes of the employers, policy makers, family members, and public at large.

Education: The female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. Compared to boys, far fewer girls are enrolled in the schools and many of them drop out

Under Non-Formal Education Programme (NFE), about 40% of the centres in States and 10% of centres in Uts are exclusively reserved for females. In urban India, girls are at par with the boys in term of education. However, in rural India girls continue to be less educated than boys.

According to the report by U.S. Department of Commerce, the chief barrier to female education in India are inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities), shortage of female teachers and gender bias in curriculum (majority of female characters being depicted as weak and helpless) The Ministry of Education clubs girls with Scheduled Castes and Tribes as the three most backward groups in education.

The educational, economic, political and social backwardness of women makes them the largest group hindering the process of social change.

It is inevitable that when this 'backward' group has the major responsibility of bringing up future generations the advancement of society cannot be rapid or take any significant form of development. The differences between the positions of men and women in the society will not lessen as long as there

are differences between the education levels of men and women.

The low literacy among women brings down the national literacy.

This gap which exists between the literacy rates of the two sexes also exists between the enrolment of girls and boys at all levels of education. Right from the primary school to the university, we find that the number of girl students is considerably lower than boys.

According to *Article 45 of the Constitution, universal compulsory and free education until the age of 14 was to be achieved by the year 1960*. Looking at the present condition of primary education in villages, it is doubtful whether we can achieve 100% enrolment of girls.

Violence- Which is not under survey lense: Lack of education and awareness, Socio-economic status, alcohol abuse. Sometimes children who witness one parent abusing the other tend to abuse later in life.

End for violence:

Education of the girl child is the first step towards a better society with fewer incidents of violence.

Campaigns aimed at men and boys to increase awareness and change attitudes about gender inequality are also effective tools.

As individuals and responsible citizens, we need to spread awareness and report any act of violence against women around us.

Female Foeticide: Studies show a sharp drop in the sex ratio after the introduction of ultrasound machines, used for determining the sex of foetuses, resulting in selective abortion of female foetuses.

Estimates for the total number of "missing girls" since 1980 range between 10 million to 44 million, depending on assumptions. The results of the 1991 Census came as the first major shock, with the child sex ratio crashing from 962 girls per 1000 boys to 945 in just 10 years.

The Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act came into effect in 1996 and it outlawed the disclosure of the sex of the foetus. The act has not been able to arrest the continuous decline of India's child sex ratio.

In 2001, it fell further to 927 girls per 1000 boys, and in 2011, it crashed to 914. In just thirty years, there are now 48 fewer girls per 1000 boys.

Violations of the PNDT Act are rampant, and campaigners accuse the government of not being proactive in clamping down on clinics offering sex determination tests.

And here comes in the truly shameful part — it is not the poorest and least literate areas and communities that are killing off their infant girls; in fact the reverse is true.

The 2011 numbers show that the states with the worst child sex ratio (CSR) are not the most backward: the prosperous agrarian states of Haryana and Punjab

bear that shame with the neighbouring industrial hubs of Delhi and Chandigarh just slightly better.

KhapPanchayat: Power Or Honour: Khap is a cluster of villages united by caste and geography. It was started in the 14th century by upper caste Jats to consolidate their power and position.

The main rule is that all boys and girls within a Khap are considered siblings. KhapPanchayat governs the Khap formed by same gotra (clan) families from several neighbouring villages.

KhapPanchayats are prevalent in Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and parts of Rajasthan. Love marriages are considered taboo in areas governed by KhapPanchayat.

Those living in a *Khap are not allowed to marry within the same gotra or even in any gotra from the same village. Many young couples have been killed in the past for defying Khap rules. KhapPanchayat imposes its writ through social boycotts and fines and in most cases end up either killing or forcing the victims to commit suicide.* All this is done in the name of honour and brotherhood.

In some Haryana villages, young girls are routinely threatened, abused and killed all under *Khap verdicts. The onus of maintaining siblinghood rests on the girl. She is the keeper of village honour.*

Sometimes rules are bent for the boys but never in the case of a girl.

In keeping with the *Khap rules, older villagers try to keep the young people apart.* Some schools are also forced to have separate timings for boys and girls. Fearing their daughters would go astray, many parents marry them off at an early age.

Girls And Women Trafficking: Trafficking in women and children is the most abominable violation of human rights.

It is an obscene affront to their dignity and rights, including the very right to life, liberty, human dignity and security of person, the right to freedom from torture or cruelty, inhumane or degrading treatment, the right to a home and family, the right to education and proper employment, the right to health care and everything that makes for a life with dignity.

Trafficking in its widest sense include the exploitation girls by pushing them into prostitution, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery and the trade in human organs.

Women and children are trafficked and exploited, and forced to lead a life of indignity, social stigma, debt bondage and a host of ailments including HIV/AIDS.

Acute poverty and lack of employment opportunities has been abetting an increased voluntary entry of women into sex work. Trafficking is a complex challenge as it is an organized criminal activity.

Sexual Harassment: On September 2012, Indian Parliament passed legislation protecting women from sexual harassment at work. The legislation, which

must still be passed by the Upper House before becoming law, specifically includes protection for female domestic staff.

Dowry System: Dowry, traditionally an upper caste Hindu practice of the bride's family offering wedding gifts to the bride-groom's family, is now widely practiced by all religious communities across the country, despite the law that prohibited dowry way back in 1967. The Dowry Prohibition Rules, 1985: A signed list of presents given at the time of the marriage to the bride and the bridegroom should be maintained. The list should contain a brief description of each present, its approximate value, the name of whoever has given the present and his/her relationship to the person. Women's Rights Activists have been complaining that the police inaction and low rate of conviction make this social evil an acceptable practice in the country. According to statistics released by the National Crime Records Bureau, 8391 dowry death cases were reported in the year 2011 while the conviction rate was just 34%.

Save Childhood: Child Marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India and continues to this day. Although Child Marriage was outlawed in 1860, it is still a common practice. According to UN Agencies, more than 40% of the world's child

marriages happen in India. In eight states of the country, more than half of young girls are married before the age of 18; which was now changed to 21. The UN Women will conduct a program to promote women's political leadership and governance in 16 districts in five states of India- Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Odessa. Prevention of Child Marriage would be the part of the program. In India, roughly 47.6% of girls are married by the age of eighteen. The practice is particularly rampant in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. **Factors:** Traditional Gender Norms, the value of virginity, and parental concerns surrounding pre-marital sex, pressure of marriage transactions, and poverty.

Conclusion: Development of our country depends on the empowerment of women. A man and a woman are like two wheels of a cart. The cart can move fast and safely too, when both of them pull it in the same direction and with equal strength. Hence no developing country or society can afford to ignore the role of women, if they are to progress.

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women"

-Jawaherlal Nehru.

J.NagaMadhuri/Ph.D Scholar/Dept.of.English/ANU/
madhulitt@gmail.com