

Women Empowerment: A Historical Study

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The Idea of Empowerment

The notion that a woman is powerful is innate in our culture, that's why we associate Durga, and Kali with power or shakti. The power of creation is only attributed to females. A man cannot do anything without shakti. Therefore, when a man performs a "havan", he needs to have the shakti (whether his mother, daughter, sister or wife) to be seated on his left. A "havan" is incomplete if there is no presence of a woman. While a woman is shakti, the "nature" of shakti is "chanchal".¹ Every God was shown in consort of their wives (Brahma with Saraswati, Vishnu with Lakshmi and Shiva with Parvati) even in the Puranas.

Women in Vedic Age

The women in Vedic age were held in high esteem although their birth was not welcome but they did not face discrimination in education or property share of the parents². Going to the Gurukulas was a normal practice for girls.³ We have examples of Gargi, Maitreyi, Gayatri⁴ etc. who composed hymns in the Rig Veda. We also have seen that women can choose to remain spinsters their whole life. Spinsters had the right over the share of property of her mother as well as father along with her brothers. However, this claim was not supported for the married daughters. The woman, although denied the right to divorce, could remarry her brother-in-law. However, a widow woman was not allowed the right to share her husband's property. There were some instances where the widowed mother had enjoyed the share in property.

¹ "Mystic Mantra: Woman is shakti, but chanchal", Yogi Ashwini, Deccan Chronicle, April 24, 2015; <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/150424/commentary-op-ed/article/mystic-mantra-woman-shakti-chanchal>

² <https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Apastamba>

³ Gouri Srivastava, Women's Higher Education in the 19th Century, Concept Publishing Company, Delhi, pp. 37, ISBN 978-81-7022-823-3.

⁴ H. C. Raychaudhuri, Political History of Ancient India, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1972, p.67–68.

The woman was regarded as an important part of man's life. Both men and women were known as dampati. There were many rituals in which the presence of the wife was utmost necessary. There was no system of dowry. The system of marriage was monogamous.

In the 6th or 5th century BCE, Queen Mṛgāvati⁵ (in Sanskrit), or Migāvati (in Prakrit) of the Vatsa mahajanapada ruled as regent while her son Udayana was either a minor or held captive by a rival king, and she earned "the admiration of even experienced ministers."⁶

In the later Vedic age, the woman was still regarded as respectable, as we have seen in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, where they commanded an honourable place in the society.

During the time of the Mauryan Empire, the women exalted a higher position not only in social life but also politically. Women were hired as the bodyguards of the King and also for espionage. In the society, she was given a place of respect where men were prohibited from remarrying except under some circumstances where the woman was unable to conceive for 5 years after marriage or she was unable to give birth to a boy for 12 years. She was allowed the share of her husband's property as a caretaker for her sons.

With the passage of time, she lost her position. Although she was publicly worshipped, as a goddess, she was not given enough respect in the family. The man became the head of the family and slowly and gradually the laws of Manu came to fore which denied her the right to education and to her father's property. She also lost the right to choose her husband. A system of dowry was started which was named as *stridhan*. This was the woman's property and she could use it in whatever way she desired. Until this time, there was no *purdah* system. She enjoyed autonomy in the role of wives where she was considered to be Ardhagini (better half) and Sahadamini (equal partners). The practice of child marriage was gradually introduced. She was now forced to marry at a very young age.

The Buddhist texts represent the stereotypical understanding of women whose life was supposed to revolve around their husbands. The texts also reflected that women were inferior,

⁵ A.S.Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization: From Prehistoric Times to the Present Day, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1956, p. 187. ISBN 978-81-208-0324-4.

⁶ J.C. Jain, Life in Ancient India: As Depicted in the Jain Canon and Commentaries, 6th Century BC to 17th Century AD, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1984, p. 470.

sinful, and a source of contamination to men⁷. Buddha was not ready to admit women into the Sangha, only after persuasion by his Aunt Mahapajapati Gotami and disciple Ananda, the women were allowed into the Sangha. However harsh conditions were subjected to the nuns.

Like the Buddhist Sangha, the Jaina order also practiced inequality. No matter how senior a nun was, she had to pay respect to a junior monk.⁸ In the debate over salvation, the Digambaras hold that a woman can achieve salvation only if she had been born as a male in one of the births⁹. However, inspite of all such restrictions, there were certain women who were empowered and broke the norms. Women shunned the restrictions imposed on them and openly dominated their world. In the Gupta period instances are not rare of women participating in an administrative job¹⁰. Chandragupta I, founder of the Gupta Empire, ruled the kingdom jointly with his queen Kumara Devi¹¹. Prabhavatigupta¹² was the daughter of Chandra Gupta II of the Gupta Empire and the wife of Rudrasena II of the Vakataka dynasty, and performed administrative duties in her kingdom¹³.

Instances of women of the upper classes extending their phase of activities beyond the domestic circle are provided by the queen and queens regent in Kashmir, Rajasthan, Orissa and Andhra.¹⁴ Institutions were established for co-education. In the work called Amarkosh written in the Gupta era names of the teachers and professors are there and they all were females.

⁷ <https://universalinstitutions.com/women-in-buddhism-and-jainism/>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_women_in_the_Indian_subcontinent

⁹ P Darshini, Reconstructing Gender Assumptions During the Gupta Period: Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 76, 2015, p. 127–136.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/543958892607851/photos/a.614693682201038/1403988849938180/?type=3>

¹¹ A.S.Altekar, p. 186.

¹² <https://imp.center/i/status-women-vedic-age-912/>

¹³ A.S.Altekar, Ibid, 187

¹⁴ <https://imp.center/i/status-women-vedic-age-912/>

In the 2nd century BCE, Queen Nayanika (or Naganika) was the ruler and military commander of the Satavahana Empire of the Deccan region (south-central India)¹⁵. Another early female ruler in South Asia was Queen Anula of Anuradhapura¹⁶ (Sri Lanka, 1st century BCE).

The Queen of Orissa¹⁷ Paramavaishnavi Goswamini Devi or Tribhuvana Mahadevi I was the first female ruler of the Bhaumakara Dynasty in ancient Odisha and the widow of king Santikara I who ascended the throne of Toshali or Utkala between the years 843 A.D to 845 A.D and ruled until 850 A.D after the premature death of her ruling son Subhakara III. During her rule and as evident from her grants and charter issued during her rule, she patronised Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism while the existence of the Jain and Buddhist ideologies in the kingdom remained uninfluenced by any kind of threat. Women in the kingdom were educated and able to exert special powers and administrative rights for issuing land grants and charters.¹⁸ Some historians believe that she might have ruled till 863 A.D abdicating the throne for her grandson Santikara II after he turned older and eligible to run the administration. She was a very powerful female ruler and found appreciating mentions as a beholder of lavish power and prestige by the Arab and Persian geographer Ibn Khordadbeh and explorer Ahmad Ibn Rustah. Queen Kurmadevi of Mevad commanded her armies on the battlefield in the late twelfth century¹⁹. Queen Didda of Kashmir ruled as full sovereign for twenty-two years²⁰ from 979 to 1003 CE, and Queen Jawahirabi fought and died at the head of her army²¹.

In Sri Lanka, Queen Sugula²² led her armies against the southern king, her nephew. When pressed by the royal forces, she guided her forces into the mountains, where she built a number of forts. Sugula held out against the king's army for ten years and is remembered in Sri Lankan history as "Sugula, the rebel queen fearless"

¹⁵ A.S.Altekar, Ibid.

¹⁶ <https://www.ancient-origins.net/history-famous-people/anula-anuradhapura-0013491>

¹⁷ "KINGDOM OF THE BHAUMA-KARAS" (PDF). www.shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in. Retrieved 8 March 2018

¹⁸ Dr. Purnachandra Das, History of Orissa, Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 28–30

¹⁹ <http://positivelearning.in/ccoin-latest-grumfork-news-tothemoon>

²⁰ <https://www.livehistoryindia.com/story/herstory/kashmirs-ruthless-queen-didda/>

²¹ <https://historum.com/threads/did-ancient-india-have-female-as-rulers-female-king-or-femal-regent.33685/>

²² Cūlavamsa. The Mahāvamsa, Part II: Containing Chapters XXXIX. to c. University of California Libraries, 1909

Women in Medieval Times

Women in Medieval India are considered to be the weakest of all where she was subjected to the purdah system. The Muslim ladies started considered purdah as a symbol of becoming the most virtuous and the higher classes brought it in vogue.

The Hindu ladies had no rights to education or property. The Sati system, child marriage and forced widowhood belittled her position in society²³. She became a burden for all and suffered huge hardships. In the South India, a new evil practice crept in known as the devadasi system²⁴. Nevertheless, she remained free from some social evils like purdah, divorce etc. However, Rajputs now started giving importance to their women as their honour. Her treatment with respect and importance may or may not be there but she was treated as an object to be possessed. The reason for the same was the practice of victorious army sharing the 'booty' belongings of the vanquished empires also started plundering, raping and killing. Women were either captivated and enrolled in the victorious King's harem or killed.

To avoid this, the Rajputs came up with the idea of Jauhar. Here, the men before venturing out to war, themselves burnt the women so as to protect her honour from being invaded by the enemy. Slowly, this was made a compulsory practice where women committed suicide to protect her honour just before the defeat of the king.

The position of the Muslim ladies was slightly better than that. Muslim girls were allowed to get education and had the right to property, and were free to remarry. The women were also allowed to lead a mixed gendered congregation in mosques as the Imams²⁵. However, Indian women never played any such role in the past or present.

The practice of polygamy was now rampant among men of both the communities, where the kings took many wives but no such practice was allowed for the women.

²³ Uma Chakraborty, *Gendering caste through a feminist lens*. Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 2003 p. 125. ISBN 978-81-85604-54-1. Retrieved 8 November 2018.

²⁴ ent/social_sciences/home_sc/MHomescience47.pdf

²⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20090130150231/http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Islam/2006/03/Score-One-More-For-Women-Imams.aspx>

In spite of such a depressed condition, there were glaring examples of heroism and leadership among women. Foremost name that comes to our mind is that of Raziya Sultan who succeeded Iltutmish as the Delhi Sultan.²⁶

After becoming the ruler, she shunned the purdah and appeared in front of the public in male attire²⁷. She had female armed bodyguards. However, she was not tolerated by her nobles who belonged to the patriarchal societies and was murdered.²⁸

Queen Rudramadevi (1262-1289), of the Kakatiya dynasty of Warangal, part of modern Andhra Pradesh, changed her name on her inscriptions and pretended she was a man²⁹. She was the daughter of King Ganapathideva who formally designated her as a son through the ancient Putrika ceremony and named her Rudradeva. She succeeded her father when she was only fourteen years old. She was married to Veerabhadra, Eastern Chalukyan prince of Nidadavolu. She completed the Warangal Fort, begun by her father. Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller who paid a visit during her rule writes that she was a lover of justice, of equity and peace.

Rani Durgawati (1524 - 1564 A.D.), in the family of famous Chandel emperor Keerat Rai, ruled over Gondwana from 1548 to 1564 on behalf of her son Bir Narayan after the death of Dalpat Shah, the ruler of Gondwana. Mughal Emperor Akbar attacked Gondwana in 1564. Rani Durgawati³⁰ led the battle against the invading army but ultimately when her defeat became imminent, she killed herself choosing death to dishonour.³¹

Chand Bibi (1550 - 1599 A.D.), also known as Chand Khatun or Chand Sultana. She was the daughter of Hussain Nizam Shah I of Ahmednagar. She was married to Sultan Adil Shah of

²⁶ https://www-thebetterindia-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/www.thebetterindia.com/116257/razia-sultan-first-female-ruler-delhi/amp/?amp_js_v=a6&_gsa=1&usqp=mq331AQKKAFAQrABIACAw%3D%3D#aoh=16407207841950&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&_tf=From%20%251%24s&share=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thebetterindia.com%2F116257%2Frazia-sultan-first-female-ruler-delhi%2F

²⁷ Farhat Jahan: <http://www.sehepunkte.de> > 2017/07 Rezension von: "Women in Delhi Sultanate (1206-1388 AD)"

²⁸ Minhaj-i-Siraj, Abu-'Umar-i-'Usman (1873). *The Tabakat-i-Nasiri*. Translated by Major H. G. Raverty. London: Asiatic Society of Bengal. p. 637.

²⁹ Nivedita Hazra, "Rudrama Devi: The Queen Who Wore A King's Image" | #IndianWomenInHistory, November 8, 2019

³⁰ "Women Freedom Fighter: 5 Brave Queens of India who Fought hard for Freedom", Nav Bharat Times, 20 Aug 2021

³¹ <http://www.rdunijbpin.org/1317/About-Rani-Durgawati>



Bijapur, who was murdered by his own men. She acted as the Regent of Bijapur (1580–90) and Regent of Ahmednagar (1596–99). When Ahmednagar was invaded by the Mughals in 1595, she defended it successfully. In 1599, the forces of Akbar once again laid siege to the Ahmednagar fort. But when she tried to negotiate terms with the Mughals, Chand Bibi was killed by her own troops who misunderstood her³².

Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar (1725 - 1795), was the daughter of Manakoji Shinde. In 1733 she was married to Khande Rao, who died in the battle of Kumbher in 1754. She ruled over Ahmednagar from 1766 to 1795. Her father-in-law Malhar Rao Holkar guided her in ruling the state till his death in 1766.³³

Rani Karnavati (?- 1535) of Mewar has her name inscribed in golden letters in the pages of history.³⁴ Rani Karnavati was the widow of the Raja of Chittor. The queen had two sons, Rana Udai Singh and Rana Vikramaditya. When Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat invaded Chittor in 1533 AD, the Queen Rani Karnavati appealed to the other Rajput rulers to help defend the honour of Chittorgarh. The rulers agreed, but they insisted that the princes be sent to Bundi during the war for their personal safety. Karnavati also sent a rakhi to the Mughal Emperor Humayun, offering him the status of a brother and appealing for help.³⁵ Humayun was then in the process of reducing Bengal; he abandoned the campaign to ride to her rescue. She is thus remembered every Raksha Bandhan.

Karnavati then prepared to face Bahadur Shah. At first, she tried diplomacy, offering him the spoils of Chittorgarh's defeat of Malwa. This worked initially, but Bahadur Shah returned in 1534 determined to take the fort. Realising that defeat was imminent, Karnavati and the other noble ladies of the court immolated themselves in a mass suicide by fire, while the men donned saffron

³² "Women in Power: 1570-1600". Archived from the original on 19 December 2006. Retrieved 24 December 2006

³³ Jaswant Lal Mehta, *Advanced Study in the History of Modern India 1707–1813*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2005, pp. 606

³⁴ <http://www.streeshakti.com/bookK.aspx?author=16>

³⁵ Satish Chandra, *History of Medieval India*, NCERT, New Delhi, 1990, pg. 212.

clothes and went out to fight to the death. All the children were also killed except the princes who were entrusted to Karnavati's maid Panna Dhai, who escaped with them to safety. Humayun arrived too late to save Karnavati, though he did defeat Bahadur Shah.³⁶

The position of women was no different in Mughal society. During this period no female emperor came to the fore. However, there were many influential ladies who shaped history. Foremost among them was Gulbadan Bano Begum.

Gulbadan was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1523.³⁷ Her father Zahiruddin Babar died at a very young age and was adopted by her stepmother, Rani Maham Begum.

Maham Begum was the mother of Emperor Humayun and Gulbadan's childhood passed under the supervision of Emperor Humayun. She was very fond of reading since childhood and also used to write poems in her mother tongue Turkish. She was very close to her nephew, Prince Akbar and used to tell stories to him daily. When Akbar became emperor, he requested his aunt to write a biography of his father, Humayun. In Humayun Nama, Gulbadan Begum not only wrote about Emperor Humayun and his rule, but also depicted the daily life of the Mughal family. She has described in detail the life inside the Mughal janankhana and thus, we read the history of the Mughal Empire from a woman's point of view for the first time.

Jahangir married Noor Jahan in May, 1611 AD, in 1613 AD, Noor Jahan was made Emperor Begum. Apart from being exceptionally beautiful, Nur Jahan was also intelligent, modest and prudent. She had a special interest in literature, poetry and fine arts. Due to all these qualities, she had established complete dominance over her husband. As a result, her influence on the Mughal court increased. Her name started being engraved on the coins too and she started courting in the palace itself. Her father Itmad-ud-Daula and brother Asaf Khan were given high positions in the Mughal court and her niece was married to Shah Jahan, who later became famous as Mumtaz³⁸.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rebecca Ruth Gould "How Gulbadan Remembered: The Book of Humāyūn as an Act of Representation," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 121–127, 2011

³⁸ "Mughal Empire: 5 powerful women of the Mughal Empire, who played an important role in policy making", *Presswire18*, August 20, 2021

When Shah Jahan realized that Noor Jahan was trying to reduce his influence, he disobeyed Jahangir's order to conquer Kandahar fort and killed Khusrau Khan in 1623 AD and rebelled in the Deccan. To suppress his rebellion, Noor Jahan sent Asaf Khan and Mahabat Khan under the leadership of Prince Parvez. Both of them successfully crushed the rebellion of Shah Jahan. Shah Jahan surrendered to his father, Jahangir and was pardoned. During the life of Jahangir, Noor Jahan was full of power, but after the death of Jahangir in 1627 AD, her political sovereignty was destroyed. Noor Jahan died in 1645 AD after spending her life in Lahore.³⁹

Jahanara Begum was the eldest daughter of Emperor Shah Jahan and Empress Mumtaz Mahal, born on 2 April 1614, she was also the successor of her father and the elder sister of the sixth Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. It was she who made the outline of Chandni Chowk.⁴⁰ After Mumtaz Mahal's untimely death in 1631, 17-year-old Jahanara got her mother declared First Lady of the Mughal Empire, despite the fact that her father had three living wives. She was Shah Jahan's favourite daughter and wielded major political influence during her father's reign. She has been described as "the most powerful woman in the empire" at that time.⁴¹

Jahanara adored her brother, Dara Shikoh, during the War of Succession after Shah Jahan's illness in 1657, Jahanara moved in with heir Dara Shikoha and was eventually imprisoned in the Agra Fort with her father. Like a devoted daughter, she looked after Shah Jahan until his death in 1666.

Later, Jahanara reconciled with Aurangzeb, after which she was given the title of Princess Empress. Jahanara remained unmarried during the reign of Aurangzeb.

Dilras Bano Begum was the first and chief wife of Aurangzeb⁴², the last powerful emperor of the Mughal dynasty. She is also known for her posthumous title, Rabia Uddaurani. The Bibi Ka Maqbara in Aurangabad, which was built in the shape of the Taj Mahal, was built on the orders

³⁹ "The Mughal Queen who became a Feminist Icon", Ruby Lal, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-45319055>

⁴⁰ Catherine B Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*. Cambridge University Press, 1992 p. 265.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Satish Chandra, *Parties and politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*. Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 50.

of her husband as her last resting place. Dilras was born in 1662, the daughter of Mirza Badiuddin Safavid and Nauras Bano Begum, as a result she was the princess of the Safavid dynasty. In 1637, she was married to the then Prince Aurangzeb.⁴³ They had five children, including Muhammad Azam Shah, the smart poetess Zebunnisa, the princess Zeenatunissa⁴⁴ and Sultan Muhammad Akbar. She died in the year 1657⁴⁵, possibly due to maternal infection.

Women during the British Rule:

During the British Rule there were some women rulers who fought against the domination of



the foreign rule. To name some we can recall the following:

Rani Velu Nachiyar (3 January 1730 – 25 December 1796) was a queen of Sivaganga estate who ruled between 1780–1790. She was the first Indian queen to wage war with the East India Company in India. She is known by Tamils as Veeramangai ("brave woman").⁴⁶

Queen of Kittur Rani Chennamma, the younger wife of Mallasarja, the Desai of Kittur. Both Mallasarja and his son died. Rani Chennamma, adopted Shivalinga Sarja and started administering

Kittur.⁴⁷

The collector of Dharwad, Thakeray objected to the adoption as improper. He recommended the British Government to take over the administration of Kittur. On hearing this, Chennamma became extremely angry. She opposed the British policy of suppressing Kittur, and decided to fight for the freedom of her land. She led an armed resistance against the British East India Company in 1824 but was defeated and taken prisoner. She died in prison.⁴⁸

⁴³ Sir Jadunath Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzeb, 1618-1707*. Orient Longman, 1979, p. 409.

⁴⁴ Sir Jadunath Sarkar, *Studies in Aurangzib's Reign*, Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1933, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Mānekshāh Sorābshāh Commissariat, *A History of Gujarat: Mughal period, from 1573 to 1758*. Longmans Green, Bombay, 1957, p. 151.

⁴⁶ "Veeramangai Velu Nachiyar", *The Hindu Business Line*. Chennai, 18 January 2019.

⁴⁷ Subramanian Gopalakrishnan (Ed.), *The South Indian Rebellions: Before and After 1800 (1st ed.)*, Palaniappa Brothers, Chennai, 2007, p. 102–103.

⁴⁸ *The Hindu*, 6 November 2012.



Similarly, was Queen Laxmi Bai of Jhansi who fought against the East India Company in the 1857 revolt.⁴⁹ After a few initial successes, the Queen was defeated and killed in action on the field of Kalpi by Hugh Rose.⁵⁰

Begum Hazrat Mahal, or the 'Begum of Awadh', led the battle in the First Indian War of Independence in 1857.⁵¹ The Begums of Bhopal were also considered notable female rulers during this period.⁵² They were trained in martial arts.

During the British Raj, many prominent reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotirao Phule contested for the social upliftment of women. Peary Charan Sarkar, 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).⁵³

The efforts of these reformers were supported by the British officers⁵⁴ and Christian Missionaries Names such as 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. This practice was initially met with local resistance, as it flew in the face of tradition. Chandramukhi Basu⁵⁵, Kadambini Ganguly⁵⁶ and Anandi Gopal Joshi⁵⁷ were some of the earliest Indian women to obtain a degree. Raja Rammohan Roy's efforts led to the abolition of Sati under Governor-

⁴⁹ India Today, New Delhi, August 17, 2018

⁵⁰ Essential Histories, the Indian Mutiny 1857–58, Gregory Fremont-Barnes, Osprey 2007, p. 79

⁵¹ Michael Edwardes, Red Year, Sphere Books, London: 1975, p. 104.

⁵² <https://indianculture.gov.in/stories/begums-bhopal-107-years-golden-reign>

⁵³ <https://hercircle.in/engage/get-inspired/achievers/a-brief-history-of-women-rights-freedom-and-gender-equality-in-india-1071.html>

⁵⁴ Sumit Sarkar; Tanika Sarkar (eds.). Women and social reform in modern India: a reader, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008, pp. 78–80. ISBN 978-0-253-22049-3.

⁵⁵ "Teaching girls to take on an unequal society", The Telegraph, Calcutta, 2 April 2013.

⁵⁶ "Kadambini Ganguly, India's first female doctor who made Calcutta Medical College start admitting women", Roshni Chakrabarty, India Today, Retrieved 26 March 2021.

⁵⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20091007142137/http://www.kiet.edu/horizon/insirations.htm>

General William Cavendish-Bentinck in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's crusade for improvement in the situation of widows led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Many women reformers such as Pandita Ramabai⁵⁸ also helped the cause of women.

The colonial venture into modernity and the rise of nationalism and introspection of discriminatory practices brought about social reform movements related to caste and gender. This first phase of women's freedom and rights in India was initiated by men to uproot the social evils of sati, to allow widow remarriage, to forbid child marriage, and to reduce illiteracy, as well as to regulate the age of consent and to ensure property rights through legal intervention. In addition to this, some upper caste Hindu women rejected constraints they faced under Brahminical traditions.

The struggle for freedom was carried forward in the twentieth century by eminent females such as Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalaxmi Pandit and Annie Besant. Initially the movement was not so strong but gradually women got enlightened about the movement and at Gandhiji's call, not only the urban but women from rural areas also came forward and played a very significant role in it. They were in the forefront in the respect of making contributions and taking interests in the ongoing freedom struggle of the country.⁵⁹ Sarojini Naidu helped to establish the Women's Indian Association (WIA) with other social reformers and travelled the country to encourage women. Her first piece of work was at the age of 12 titled Maher Muneer.⁶⁰ She became the president of the Indian National Congress in 1925, first Indian woman to secure the position. She also served as the Governor of Agra and Awadh from 1947-1949. All of them were important.

Independent India

In independent India, many empowered women can be named. Indira Gandhi, the Iron Lady⁶¹, the charismatic Sushma Swaraj, Jayalalitha, Sheila Dikshit beautiful Maharani Gayatri Devi, Mamta Banerjee, Mayawati, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Ambika Soni, Supriya Sule etc have shown the rise of women in Indian political arena. Many more are in other fields of importance.

⁵⁸ <https://archive.org/details/highcastehinduw00saragoog/page/n11>

⁵⁹ <https://www.rnlkwc.ac.in/pdf/anudhyan/volume4/Role-of-Women-in-Indian-Freedom-Struggle-1905%E2%80%931927-Dr-Rina-Pal.pdf>

⁶⁰ "Remembering Women who fought for Indian Freedom", Deccan Herald, New Delhi, 13 August 2022

⁶¹ "Indira Gandhi, a Goongi Gudiya who went on to become Iron Lady", Prabhaskar K Dutta, India Today, New Delhi, November 19, 2017

Scientists, Doctors, Teachers and Nurses, to Astronaut the women have shown their mark in every field.

To conclude, whichever period, the women have been very successful and were powerful. She has been the synonym of shakti and has played an important role in society at large. Historically, she had been at a place where she could decide not only her fate but farther the fate of a number of people in her empire. Women had always risen and shone the brightest inspite of all odds and hardships. They would continue to do so. In recent years, the role of women in Indian society has expanded enormously. They remain the anchors of home and family while also becoming drivers of domestic wealth creation and national economy. Since the economic liberalisation, several business sectors such as banking and financial services, IT and media have not only seen greater participation of women but also the emergence of several inspirational women leaders.⁶²

⁶² "Fitter women is key to a prosperous, modern India", Aman Dhall, Times of India, New Delhi, 5 August 2020. Also see <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/pull-and-hook/fitter-women-is-key-to-a-prosperous-modern-india/>

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Presented many research papers in national and international Educational Webinars.

New Business

- Recap of Back to School night – September 9
- Parent Education Programs – Counselors
- Teacher Grants Application Process –
School Principal

Committee Reports

- Membership
- Volunteers
- Newsletter
- Computer Support

Announcements

Enter Announcements

Next Meeting

Date | Time, Location

Motion to adjourn was made at 9:00 p.m. and was passed unanimously.