

A Historical Study of Women In India

Ugresh Kumar

M.A History, UGC-NET

Abstract

Every human society is invariably characterised by social differentiations. Gender based differentiation is one. Men had the role of earning and women had the role of reproduction of heirs and home making. A historical understanding of status of women in early Indian society shows a declining trend in the position of women. The historical analysis of the position of women in ancient India shows that women did not share an equal position with men. Women were recognised only as wives and mothers. Their position was as subordinate to men. The Indian patriarchal society that dominates the social, political and economic life of people in the country has never encouraged its women in any field, except kitchen! Indian women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy lower status than that of men from times immemorial. The root to the participation of women in politics can be traced back to 19th century reform movement. Social reformers thought that social change could be initiated by educating women and bringing progressive legislation. Social evils can be eradicated by raising consciousness and making people sensitive to injustice done to women. Historical data signified that women have many role in civilisation since ancient time and these roles are changing over the period. In a society, status of people can be assessed by importance of women in that culture. Many factors that rationalise the

magnitude of India's ancient culture is the respectable place granted to women. Several research studies have demonstrated that women have raised their position and made a place in different sectors which has led to liberation and to live better life.

Keywords: Women, India, Independent India, Modern India, Indian Society, Medieval India, Ancient India, Women in Vedic.

Introduction

The present paper looks at the historical background of the rise of feminism and women's movement and doing gender in India. Not only in India but all over the world there has been a close link between feminism and the women's movement, each inspiring and enriching the other. In the Indian context, while the women's movement is a much earlier phenomenon, the term

Feminism is a modern one. Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. In the pre-independence era, the women's movement began as a social reform movement in the 19th century. At this time, the western idea of liberty, equality and fraternity was being imbibed by our educated elite through the study of English and the contact with west. This western liberalism was extended to the women's question and was translated into a social reform movement. In the post-Independence period during the first few decades, the major concern was for overall economic growth. This was immediately followed by another decade, which witnessed an increased concern for equity and poverty alleviation. Gender issues were subsumed in poverty related concerns and there were no such specific programs, which aimed at women. In the post-independence period, the women's movement has concerned itself with a large number of issues such as dowry, women's work, price rise, land rights, political participation of women, Dalit women and marginalized women's right, growing fundamentalism, women's representation in the media etc.

Review of Literature

- Achi Reddy (1990) discussed the socio-economic factors on working conditions of women construction labourers in Hyderabad. Wage discriminations and sexual exploitation are said to be the constant cry of these women. They are placed lowest in the construction activities.
- Manpower Journal (1990) discusses the development of women as human resource under various heads; they are the indicators of women's equality, women's economic position, economic growth, economic rights, economic participation, occupational distribution, women's social status and observations on economic participation.
- Sangwan (1990) based on a study in rural Haryana found that cooking, fetching water, washing, house maintenance and child care were the major concerns of almost all families in all the selected 35 districts which accounted for about 8 1/4 hours per day. About 4 hours for cooking and meal services, 1 hour for fetching water, 1 1/4 hours for washing, 1 hour for house maintenance and child care and 1 hour for personal care, 3 hours for care of animals were spent in a day. The remaining time was spent on sleep and leisure activities.
- Rita Sood (1991), women who belong to lower middle income and lower income families are normally taking up job essentially due to economic necessity. Some of the women employees expressed the view that they are working for their emotional satisfaction rather than due to economic necessity.

Women of Independent India

The status of women in India has been subject to many changes over the span of recorded Indian history. Their position in society deteriorated early in India's ancient period, especially in the Indo-Aryan speaking regions, and their subordination continued to be reified well into India's early modern period. Practices such as female infanticide, dowry, child marriage and the taboo on widow remarriage, have had a long duration in India, and have proved difficult to root out, especially in caste Hindu society in northern India. Women in India now participate fully in areas 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)) and Article 42. 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)

Status of Women down the Ages

Women in Ancient India

In the ancient Indus valley civilisation of India, evidences show the worship of the mother goddess. Hence, the veneration for the mother is evident during that period. During the Rig Vedic period, it is believed that the position of wife was honoured and women's position was acknowledged, especially in the performance of religious ceremonies. Education of young girls was considered as an important qualification for marriage. There are references in Vedic literature that in the Kshatriya society, brides had exclusive right of selecting their own consorts, which was known as 'Swayamvara'. In Rig Vedic society, dowry system was unknown. However, the concept of marriage as a dan or gift was prevalent. Monogamy was the general practice though Bigamy was also in practice, but it was limited to the aristocratic classes. The wife was respected in her new house. The wife participated in the sacrificial offerings of her husband.

However, being a patriarchal system, the women were expected to bear sons since the son performed the last rites and continued the lineage. Remarriage of widows was permitted under certain conditions. Female morality maintained a high standard although the same degree of

fidelity was not expected from the husband. In this age there was no practice of divorce. The Rig Veda states that the widow had the right to marry again with her husband's brother. Rig Veda recognised the right of inheritance of unmarried daughters on the property of her father but married daughters were exempted. Gradually, religious ceremonies were increasingly conducted by the priests resulting in weakening of the women's eminent position in the household. Later, in the Age of the Upanishads, the 'anuloma' system of marriage, i.e., between the male of a higher caste and female of a lower caste prevailed during this period. There was a growing tendency to lower the marriageable age of girls with girls being married before or after puberty. Marriage within the same caste was preferred but prohibited within certain degrees of relationship. Girls of high families had adequate opportunities for acquiring proficiency in higher learning. In Vatsyayan's Kamasutra, instances of princesses are mentioned whose intellect was sharpened by knowledge of the Sastras. The literary evidence of the Gupta age proves that girls of high families as also those living in hermitages read works on ancient history and legend. Girls living in royal courts were trained in singing and dancing too. Vatsyana draws a picture of a good wife which may be taken as a reflection of the real life during that period. Sati was extolled by some but strongly disapproved by others.

The only direction in which the position of women improved was in the sphere of proprietary rights. As society began to discourage widow remarriages, there began to arise a class of childless widows who needed money to maintain themselves. Due to a lowering of the age of marriage, girls were not educated as before. This reduced the position and status of women. Brides being too young had no say in choosing their partners. Love marriages were a thing of the past. During this period, marriage became an irrevocable union, but it was one sided in favour of the husband. Since women were not as educated as before, they did not know what their rights were. Among the most striking changes may be the increased recognition in Katyayana of the women's right to property and a remarkable rule in Atri that allowed women molested by robbers to regain her social status.

Pre-Vedic Period

The recorded history of India began with the arrival of Aryans in the 15th Century B.C. When Vedic Era began, the patriarchal culture has eliminated the matriarchal culture. It could be considered the beginning of gender discrimination in India. The historical period marked by Rigveda reveals the predominance of religious concern over the civil life. Vedic culture was widespread until the arrival of the Muslims in the 8th Century. The period that followed the Muslim invasion is considered the medieval history in India which also witnessed the predominance of patriarchal culture. With regard to patriarchal ordering of the social life, Islamic

era did not differ much from that of the Vedic era. What followed the Muslim era is the British Raj in the 18th Century. It was also predominantly patriarchal. Throughout the past centuries, the patriarchy and the patriarchal social organization prevailed – so too the gender discrimination. A survey of Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads and Epics reveals the status of women and their struggle for power in ancient India. There are reasons to believe that in pre-historic India, gender discrimination was non-existent. Polyandry was common in matriarchal communities of pre-historic India. The role of father in child birth was not known and women were believed to be the masters of home commanding the respect of children and the youth. Many old civilizations of the world were matriarchal for the same reason. Pre-historic communities were not settled permanently at a site and were moving around in search of food which consumed most of their waking hours. Both men and women were engaged in food gathering which was the only economic activity. Therefore, there are reasons to believe that both men and women had equal participation in the economic life.

Women in Vedic Literature

Vedic period witnessed the historical development of human civilization from nomadic style to settled style. During the early Vedic era, there is evidence to show that woman was given some respect and opportunities in domestic life. She was considered the creator, protector, and educator of her children. Women were given opportunities to offer sacrifices along with their husbands. A man could not become a spiritual whole unless he was accompanied by his wife. The gods were thought not to accept the materials offered by a bachelor. Sati did not exist in this period. Widowed mothers were protected by their sons. Rigveda the first Vedic script brings to light the culture and civilization of early invaders to India who were predominantly nomadic. The society had not yet settled down with farming. They were mainly food gatherers. Society in the Rig-Vedic period was prominently pastoral and it did not produce surplus to allow any section to be completely subordinated or withdrawn from the process of production. Both the men and women were engaged in food gathering and partook equally the struggle for survival.

Upanishads had an important role in framing a pretty stereotype of Indian woman. In Brhadarranyaka Upanishad, Yajnavalkya says that women should be honoured with ornaments, clothes and food by their husbands, brother-in-law and maternal relations. For a woman, her husband should be everything. Through devotion and love for him, she fulfills her duty and develops her highest personality. The noblest duty of a woman is the arduous task of motherhood. Brahmanas and Upanishads were annexures to Vedas and reflect the life of later Vedic age. Brahmanas reflect a transitional development in the status of woman limiting her role in the social life except in the performance of religious sacrifices. Her social and political freedom was curtailed. The lives of women began to be confined to the four walls of their household. We find passages in AitereyaBrahmana and MaitrayaniSamhita which show that

women were forbidden to go to the assemblies. Sati was known during Vedic period. Sati became popular during the later Vedic period where the widows either chose for themselves or were forced to jump into the pyre of their husbands so that they may not be spoiled afterward by others.

Women during Later Vedic Age

Ramayana and Mahabharata are the great epics of India. The lifestyle presented in these epics reflects the contemporary socioeconomic reality. Mahabharata, which is written presumably later, presents a story prior to that of Ramayana. The social life presented by Ramayana and Mahabharata may be the first written record of Hindu way of living. The popular form of marriage as seen in the epics is Swayamvara. Swayamvara is the institution of marriage especially among the higher castes. In this ancient form of marriage, women were said to have exercised the freedom and autonomy to select their life partner. Sita of Ramayana and Draupati of Mahabharat married by way of Swayamvara. Swayamvara does not give the freedom of choice to the bride in the modern sense, because often her freedom to choose her husband is limited. In the institution of 'Swayamvara' she is compelled to marry the winner of a competition, conducted to prove the martial excellence of her prospective bridegrooms. Gandhari is the noblest of the women characters in the Mahabharata. She set an example of true *sahadharmini* who dared to bandage her own eyes for the sake of her blind husband Dhrutarashtra. Debate continues whether Gandhari was doing the right thing by willfully impairing her eyesight.

Women in Medieval India

Medieval Indian history spreads over 500 years. It is predominantly the history of Muslim rulers. Muslims appeared in India as a warrior class. Their rule in India is divided into two Eras; The Era of Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Era. The only woman who had ever occupied the throne of Delhi was Razia Sultan. Gulbadan Begum was a woman of exceptional poetic talent who wrote *Humayun-namah*.

NurJahan and JahanAra took an active part in the state affairs. NurJahan was the greatest Muslim queen of India. She was the very embodiment of beauty and military valour. MumtajMahal a princess of a rare beauty combined with superb intellectual talents and aesthetic tastes. India has also produced heroic women such as Chandbibi, who appeared on the ramparts of the fort of Ahmednagar dressed in male attire; Tara Bai, the Maharata heroine who was the life and soul of Maharata resistance during the last determined onslaught of Aurangzeb; Mangammal, whose benign rule is still a green memory in the South, and AhalyaBaiHolkar, to whose administrative

genius Sir John Malcolm has paid a magnificent tribute. The Moghul princesses of course played a notable part in the court life of Agra and Delhi. Jehanara, the partisan of Dara Shikoh, Roshanara, the partisan of Aurangzeb, Zebunnissa, the daughter of Aurangzeb, whose poems (under the pen name of Makhfi) have come down to us, and others represented the culture of the court.

Status of Women in Modern India

Indian Women during the 19th Century:

Modern India refers to the period from A.D.1700 to A.D. 1947. In the background of the intellectual upheaval of the 18th and 19th century there was a worldwide demand for establishment of independent and egalitarian nationalist societies which invariably emphasized the equality of women with men. In India, the caste order of the society was challenged. Colonization disrupted Indian economy and displaced the whole section of artisans who started migrating to the new found towns and cities seeking employment in the modern factories. New land revenue system deprived the rural and tribal women of their customary rights to the forests, community property and resources.

The ownership laws made the traditional agriculture land a commodity which can be sold, transferred and alienated from the cultivators creating a new wealthy middle class of zamindars who joined hands with the colonial powers to impoverish the peasants. British established their rule in India, Modernization begun in the 19th century in India. At the advent of the British rule, the position of women in India was at its lowest ebb. Sati was evidently prevalent. Purdah was strictly enforced on Muslim women. Dancing girls had lucrative professions. Almost all the Hindu temples openly harboured devadasis. The British rule, no doubt, tried to check all these evils. The British lifestyle began to impress Indians. The British government took bold steps to reform the caste ridden Indian social order. There were some enlightened Indians who supported the British attempt to reform the oppressive social order of India.

The first was the abolition of sati by law, on humanitarian grounds. It was on the 4th December 1892 that the British government in India passed the famous resolution by which sati was made a crime of culpable homicide punishable with fine, imprisonment or both. Raja Ram Mohan Roy represented the opinion of the enlightened Indian who argued that sati practice had no religious sanction. The natural consequence of the abolition of sati was the recognition of the right of the widow to remarriage. Most of the reform movements (Brahma Samaj of 1825, Prarthana Samaj of 1897 and Arya Samaj of 1875) were led by male reformers who set the limit of the freedom and development of women. These reformers attacked only those practices that were extremely

cruel or visibly violent (of course affecting only high caste Indian women). Seldom had they challenged the kinship structures of women subordination, sanctity of marriage and family, sexual division of labour, and caste hierarchies which perpetuated inequalities. Women reformers like Pandita Ramabai, Rukhmabai and Tarabai Shinde pointed out the biases of their contemporary male reformers. Theosophical society was established at Chennai and Dr. Annie Besant who came from Europe and joined it. It also developed general social reform programme and did not have any particularly gender friendly attitude. Abolition of Sati (widow immolation) of 1829 is considered a great achievement of the reformist movement. There is an economic reason for the prevalence of widow immolation. In Dayabagh system a widow could inherit property of the deceased if she has a child.

Sati effectively prevents the inheritance by widows. The act regulated the 'illegal' sati and permitted legal sati (sati practiced voluntarily). This regulation became a sign of government approval of widow immolation leading to actual increase of this practice. Widow Remarriage was recognized by law in 1856. Widow's remarriage restriction was among high caste and high class families. Widow Remarriage was a high caste issue, as it was widely in practice among many low caste groups. Widow's remarriage in levirate form was commonly accepted among the Jats of Haryana. In such customary marriages, women seldom exercised any decision-making power. The men of the family took such decisions often against the will of the women. The new act in practice minimized the occurrence of widow marriage due to an inherent limitation of the act which deprived widows any right to maintenance or inheritance from her husband's property and the children were to be handed over to the relatives of her deceased husband. She is put in a dilemma of either keeping her children or remarrying. Even the lower caste women had to face the new problem which deprived the widows who were remarried of the property inherited from their husbands. Therefore, after the act was passed fewer remarriages took place. Those married widows were 'virgin' widows who had no children to part with. Widows who were not virgin widows did not and could not remarry.

Position of Women in Twenty-First Century India

Second decades of twenty-first century till now the women have not own their own fate till now they remain other from the society. Living in a same country, same society, same culture today they are tortured by the men, they are deprived from their own rights as a human being, they are insulted by the patriarchy society till now they have not acquire their own position. They have not out from the four walls after the sunset, today also in a narrow lane, in open field, at empty field, noon at summer, night in storm, in deep forest they have been assaulting by the male member of the society. Because they belong to female gender, they are inferior from the male,

they have not the male gender, they are women; the “other”. As the women have not gotten their own real position from the society even in the second decades of twenty-first century, the question of gender equity is raised again and this will raise again and again until the gender equity will have not practically established. The great philosopher of India, Swami Vivekananda has said like a bird can fly in the sky by its two feathers, the society also run by the same participation of both the male and female.

Women in Modern India

Modern India refers to the period from 1700 A.D. to 1947 A.D. In the background of the intellectual upheaval of the 18th and 19th century, there was a worldwide demand for establishing of independent and egalitarian nationalist societies which invariably emphasised the equality of women with men. Women in modern India have largely been influenced by the programs of reform and upliftment largely influenced by the western democratic and liberal ideology. Before the advent of the British in India, the life of women was rather oppressive, and they were subject to a constant process of subjugation and social oppression. During the British rule, a number of changes were made in the economic and social structures of Indian society, and some substantial progress was achieved in elimination of inequalities between men and women, in education, employment, social rights, etc.

After the Bhakti Movement, the Christian Missionaries took interest in the education of the girls. The Hunter Commission too emphasised on the need for female education in 1882. The Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras (now Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai) institutions did not permit the admission of girls till 1875. It was only after 1882 that girls were allowed to go for higher education. Since then, there has been a continuous progress in the area of education among females. Though the number of girls studying at various levels was low, yet there has been a marked increase in the number of female students at every level from 1941 onwards. During the 19th century, women in India suffered from disabilities like child-marriage, practice of polygamy, sale of girls for marriage purposes, severe restrictions on widows, non-access to education, and restricting oneself to domestic and child-bearing functions. The Indian National Conference started in 1885 by Justice Ranade contained these disabilities. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who played an important role in getting the Sati system abolished raised voices against the child-marriage and fought for the right of inheritance for women. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar launched a movement for the right of widows to remarry and also pleaded for educating women. Maharaja S. Rao, ruler of Baroda State worked for prevention of child-marriages, Polygamy, and getting the rights of education to women, and the right of remarriage to widows.

Swami Vivekananda, Annie Besant, Mahatma Gandhi, and Swami DayanandSaraswati also took interest in the social and political rights of women. Some women organisations like the BangaMahilaSamaj, and the Ladies Theosophical Society functioned at local levels to promote modern ideas for women. The Widow Remarriage Act came into force in 1856. The practice of Child Marriage was another social stigma for the women. In November 1870, the Indian Reforms Association was started with the efforts of Keshav Chandra Sen. In 1846, the minimum marriageable age for a girl was only 10 years. In 1891, through the enactment of the Age of Consent Act, this was raised to 12 years. In 1930, through the Sharda Act, the minimum age was raised to 14 years. After independence, the limit was raised to 18 years in 1978. Voices were raised against the practice of Purdah during the 19th and 20th century. In Southern India and among the peasantry, Purdah was not prevalent. Through the large scale participation of women in the national freedom movement, the system disappeared without any specific legislative measure taken against it.

The Present Position of Women in Indian Society

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Unfortunately, the liberty and equality enjoyed by Indian women today have not reached the vast majority of women citizens in India. When a brief study was comprehensively done through facts escalation and consequences of sex-selection of boy child over girl child are quite shocking and very disturbing and very much widely practiced even today in almost all parts and all sections of people in India. The question arises here – are we a Nation of Mass Murders? Does a Girl not have a right to born peacefully and with the same respect like a boy child in our so called cultural and spiritual enriched land?

As a nation, we are proud on our strong family values but in the real sense most of us are still dwelling with ‘Artificial Balance’ family to have a son by killing preceding daughters? Ultimately the way we treat any one relationship in the family will eventually affect every other relationship in the family. Marriage is one of the key institutions of civilization. The family unit created in the society is a fundamental building block of the Nation Building. Unstable, unhappy family and children will create an unstable and chaotic society. Whereas happy family with strong family values will produce children with high self-esteem children who will enrich the world around them and become catalysts of positive Change. As we try to increase our wealth and status by having sons at the expense of daughters and by taking dowry and hosting lavish weddings. Are we not compromising on our principles in the process?

Can a life built on another’s suffering ever bring us happiness? Are we comfortable with the choices we are making as an individual, as families, as a society? Indifference is also an action –

Silence is also a choice. If each one of us does not do something to stem this crisis, we will definitely have to face the consequences of both Indifference and Silence in some point of our respective lives. In our country, there is tremendous pressure on women to bear sons to such an extent that they are made to feel like failures if they do not. Some women also get threatened for her own life, abandonment, forced abortions and even divorced in some cases. A childless woman is tagged as 'Banj' which means her married life is total 'incomplete' one who only has daughters are also regarded as partially incomplete. Most married women feels secured and enjoy the status of sorts only after giving birth to a boy child.

Timeline of women's achievements in India



SarlaThakral became the first Indian woman to fly an aircraft in 1936.

The steady change in the position of women can be highlighted by looking at what has been achieved by women in the country:

- 1848: SavitribaiPhule, along with her husband JyotiraoPhule, opened a school for girls in Pune, India. SavitribaiPhule became the first woman teacher in India.
- 1879: John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune established the Bethune School in 1849, which developed into the Bethune College in 1879, thus becoming the first women's college in India.
- 1883: ChandramukhiBasu and KadambiniGanguly became the first female graduates of India and the British Empire.
- 1886: KadambiniGanguly and AnandiGopal Joshi became the first women from India to be trained in Western medicine.
- 1898: Sister Nivedita Girls' School was inaugurated
- 1905: Suzanne RD Tata becomes the first Indian woman to drive a car.

- 1916: The first women's university, SNDT Women's University, was founded on 2 June 1916 by the social reformer Dhondo Keshav Karve with just five students.
- 1917: Annie Besant became the first female president of the Indian National Congress.
- 1919: For her distinguished social service, Pandita Ramabai became the first Indian woman to be awarded the Kaisar-i-Hind Medal by the British Raj.
- 1925: Sarojini Naidu became the first Indian born female president of the Indian National Congress.
- 1927: The All India Women's Conference was founded.
- 1936: Sarla Thakral became the first Indian woman to fly an aircraft
- 1944: Asima Chatterjee became the first Indian woman to be conferred the Doctorate of Science by an Indian university.
- 1947: On 15 August 1947, following independence, Sarojini Naidu became the governor of the United Provinces, and in the process became India's first woman governor. On the same day, Amrit Kaur assumed office as the first female Cabinet minister of India in the country's first cabinet.
- Post independence: Rukmini Devi Arundale was the first ever woman in Indian History to be nominated a Rajya Sabha member. She is considered the most important revivalist in the Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam from its original 'sadhira' style, prevalent amongst the temple dancers, Devadasis. She also worked for the re-establishment of traditional Indian arts and crafts.
- 1951: Prem Mathur of the Deccan Airways becomes the first Indian woman commercial pilot.



Indira Gandhi became the first female Prime Minister of India in 1966.

- 1953: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit became the first woman (and first Indian) president of the United Nations General Assembly
- 1959: Anna Chandy becomes the first Indian woman judge of a High Court (Kerala High Court)
- 1963: SuchetaKriplani became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the first woman to hold that position in any Indian state.
- 1966: Captain Durga Banerjee becomes the first Indian woman pilot of the state airline, Indian Airlines.
- 1966: KamaladeviChattopadhyay wins Ramon Magsaysay award for community leadership.
- 1966: Indira Gandhi becomes the first woman Prime Minister of India
- 1970: Kamaljit Sandhu becomes the first Indian woman to win a Gold in the Asian Games
- 1972: KiranBedi becomes the first female recruit to join the Indian Police Service.
- 1978: Sheila Sri Prakash becomes the first female entrepreneur to independently start an architecture firm
- 1979: Mother Teresa wins the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the first Indian female citizen to do so.
- 1984: On 23 May, Bachendri Pal became the first Indian woman to climb Mount Everest.
- 1986: SurekhaYadav became the first Asian woman loco-pilot or railway driver.
- 1989: Justice M. FathimaBeevi becomes the first woman judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- 1991: Mumtaz M. Kazi became the first Asian woman to drive a diesel locomotive in September.¹
- 1992: Asha Sinha becomes the First Woman Commandant in the Paramilitary forces of India when she was appointed Commandant, Central Industrial Security Force in Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited.
- 1992: PriyaJhingan becomes the first lady cadet to join the Indian Army (later commissioned on 6 March 1993)
- 1999: On 31 October, Sonia Gandhi became the first female Leader of the Opposition (India).
- The first Indian woman to win an Olympic Medal, KarnamMalleswari, a bronze medal at the Sydney Olympics in the 69 kg weight category in Weightlifting event.
- 2007: On 25 July, PratibhaPatil became the first female President of India.
- 2009: On 4 June, Meira Kumar became the first female Speaker of Lok Sabha.
- 2011: On 20 October, Priyanka N. drove the inaugural train of the Namma Metro becoming the first female Indian metro pilot.
- 2011:Mitali Madhumita made history by becoming the first woman officer to win a Sena Medal for gallantry.
- 2014: A record 7 female ministers are appointed in the Modi ministry, of whom 6 hold Cabinet rank, the highest number of female Cabinet ministers in any Indian government in history. Prestigious Ministries such as Defence and External Affairs are being held by Women Ministers.

- 2015: Sumita Bose the first author and first woman to write the autism book in India. <http://indiabookofrecords.in/first-book-on-autism/>
- 2016: J. Jayalalithaa, became the first woman chief minister in India to rule the state consecutively 2 times by winning legislative assembly election.
- 2016: J. Jayalalithaa, became the first woman chief minister in India to die in office on 5 December 2016.
- 2017: On 25 March, Tanushree Pareek became the first female combat officer commissioned by the Border Security Force.
- 2018: Archana Ramasundaram of 1980 Batch became the first Woman to become the Director General of Police of a Paramilitary Force as DG, Sashastra Seema Bal.
- 2018: In February, 24 year old Flying Officer Avani Chaturvedi of the Indian Air Force became the first Indian female fighter pilot to fly solo. She flew a MiG-21 Bison, a jet aircraft with the highest recorded landing and take-off speed in the world
- 2019: On 2 December 2019, sub-lieutenant Shivangi became the first woman pilot in the Indian Navy

Conclusion

The degree to which women participate in public life, that is being outside the home, varies by region and background. For example, the Rajputs, a patrilineal clan inhabiting parts of India, especially the north-western area, have traditionally practiced ghunghat, and many still do to this day. In recent years however, more women have started to challenge such social norms: for instance women in rural Haryana are increasingly rejecting the ghunghat. In India, most population (about two thirds) is rural, and, as such, lives in tight-knit communities where it is very easy for a woman to ruin her family's 'honor' through her behavior. The concept of family honor is especially prevalent in northern India. Izzat is a concept of honor prevalent in the culture of North India and Pakistan. Izzat applies to both sexes, but in different ways. Women must uphold the 'family honor' by being chaste, passive and submissive, while men must be strong, brave, and be willing and able to control the women of their families. The rural areas surrounding Delhi are among the most conservative in India: it has been estimated that 30% of all honor killings of India take place in Western Uttar Pradesh,¹ while Haryana has been described as "one of India's most conservative when it comes to caste, marriage and the role of women. Deeply patriarchal, caste purity is paramount and marriages are arranged to sustain the status quo." In 2018 the Supreme Court of India lifted a centuries-old ban prohibiting women between the ages of 10 and 50 from entering Sabarimala temple in Kerala. In 2019 two women entered the temple under police protection. Hindu nationalists protested the women's entry and Sreedharan Pillai, State President of the Kerala branch of the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (of which Indian prime minister Narendra Modi is a member) described the women's entry into the temple as "a conspiracy by the atheist rulers to destroy the Hindu temples." Prime Minister Modi said, "We knew that the communists do not respect Indian history, culture and spirituality but nobody imagined they will have such hatred," The shrine is dedicated to the worship of Lord Ayyappa, a celibate deity, and adherents believe the presence of women would "pollute" the site

and go against the wishes of the patron deity. The two women had to go into hiding after entering the temple and were granted 24 hour police protection. One of the women was locked out of her home by her husband and had to move in to a shelter. Dozens of women seeking entry to temple have since been turned back by demonstrators

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