



Women's Education: Pre and Post Independent India

Susanta Sarkar

Research Scholar, OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

Email-susantasarkar26454@gmail.com

Abstract: *India, violence against women is a common evil. It is not only prevalent in rural and remote parts but in cities also, women bear the brunt. They are subjected to physical and mental violence. They are the ones who work most but are not given their due. Women are not safe anywhere, neither at home nor at workplace. Every hour a woman is raped in India and every 93 minutes a woman is burnt to death due to dowry harassment. John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune established the Bethune School in 1849 in Mirzapur, Kolkata, which developed into the Bethune College in 1879, thus becoming the first women's college in India. First Indian-born woman to enter space in 1997, Kalpana Chawla's life ended tragically when while returning from her second mission for 16-days, her space shuttle Columbia disintegrated and killed the 41 year old astronaut.*

Key Words: *Violence, Women, Harassment, Pre And Post Independence, Astronaut.*

01. Introduction:

The Education of Women as Women-General education for interesting and intelligent living and for citizenship in large part can be the same for men and women. In India, violence against women is a common evil. It is not only prevalent in rural and remote parts but in cities also, women bear the brunt. They are subjected to physical and mental violence. They are the ones who work most but are not given their due. Women are not safe anywhere, neither at home nor at workplace. Every hour a woman is raped in India and every 93 minutes a woman is burnt to death due to dowry harassment. There are many laws such as the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937, and the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, to protect women. Punishment is severe but the conviction rate of crime against women is very low in India.

02. Ancient Indian Women:

"The worth of civilization can be judged by the place given to women in the society. One of the several factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture is the honorable place granted to women. Why only do we talk of equal status, when our scriptures have already gone ahead by recognizing the women as the sacred JANANI (The mother). Manu, the great law-maker, said long ago, "where women are honoured, there resides the Gods". Quoting a proverb from the Old Testament, we are told, "She looketh well to the

ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness". Similarly Guru Nanak has warned those who assign a second place to the women. "It is she who gives birth to the kings." In the Hindu scriptures, she is looked upon or considered as DEVI and SHAKTI, the most cherished symbol of love and creation. She is said to be the power, behind the plough, the force behind the machine and the creative inspiration for the poet and the artist. No religious rite can be performed with perfection by a man without the participation of his wife. Wife's participation is essential to any religious rite. Married men along with their wives are allowed to perform sacred rites on the occasion of various important festivals. Wives are thus befittingly called 'Ardhangani' (better half).

03. Indian Women: Medieval:

"Medieval India was not the women's age but was supposed to be the 'dark age' for them. Medieval India saw many foreign conquests, which resulted in the decline of women's status. In the later period the position of women went on deteriorating due to the influence of the Muslim culture. During the Muslim period of history, they were deprived of their rights of equality with men. They were compelled to stay indoors, within the four walls of their houses with a long veil on their face. This was definitely due to Islamic influence. Even today, in some Islamic countries women are not allowed to go.. out freely. The conservative regimes of Iran and Pakistan for example, have withdrawn the liberties which were given to women folk by the previous liberal governments. Even in India, the Muslim women are far more backward than their Hindu, Christian and Sikh counterparts. The sight of Muslim women walking with long 'burkas' (veils) is not very rare. The women are, as a matter of fact, regarded as captive and saleable commodities in Muslim families. One man is allowed to have so many wives with the easiest provision of divorce. The husband can divorce a wife just by saying "talak" 'I divorce you' three times under the provision of Muslim laws. All this gave rise to some new social evils such as Child Marriage, Sati, Jauhar and restriction on girls education.

04. Women Achievers of Pre-Independence India:

1879: John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune established the Bethune School in 1849 in Mirzapur, Kolkata, which developed into the Bethune College in 1879, thus becoming the first women's college in India.

1883: Chandramukhi Basu and Kadambini Ganguly became the first Indian female graduates of India and the British Empire.

1886: Kadambini Ganguly and Anandi Gopal Joshi became the first Indian women to be trained in western medicine.

1905: Suzanne RD Tata became the first Indian woman to drive a car.

1916: The first Women's University, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, Maharashtra was founded on June 2, 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: Pandita Ramabai became the first Indian woman to be awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind by the British Raj for her distinguished social service.

1925: Sarojini Naidu became the first Indian born female president of the Indian National Congress.

1927: The All India Women's Conference was founded.

1944: Asima Chatterjee became the first Indian woman to be conferred the Doctorate of Science by an Indian university

05. Women Achievers of Pre-Independence India

5.1. Durga Khote:

Indian cinema entered a new phase with the entry of this fiery young actress in 1931 when she made her debut in a silent film. The first woman from a 'good' family who entered films, Durga Khote broke the notion that movies were a taboo profession for Indian women. A leading Indian magazine, rated her among 100 people who shaped India, as it noted that "Durga Khote marks the pioneering phase for woman in Indian cinema"

5.2. Homai Vyarawalla:

India's first woman photojournalist, Homai Vyarawalla took the first picture of her career at the age of 26 in 1938. She has worked for the Illustrated Weekly of India and by clicking some historical pictures herself became a historical figure.

5.3. Sarojini Naidu:

The governor of erstwhile United Provinces, Sarojini Naidu became the first Indian woman to be made the Governor of a state when India attained independence from the British rule on August 15, 1947. Sadly she breathed her last barely two years after that. She was also the first Indian woman to become the president of the Indian National Congress in pre-independent India.

5.4. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit:

She was not only the first Indian but also the first woman president of the United Nations General Assembly in 1953. Besides, Pandit had served as envoy to the USSR before her appointment to this coveted post. Vijay Lakshmi was the younger sister of ex-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

5.5. I B Joshi:

The first woman IAS officer of independent India, Isha Basant Joshi was posted as Magistrate and then as Assistant Commissioner in Delhi, followed by her appointment as Commissioner-cum-State Editor of District Gazette. She retired in 1966. The sad part of her life is that at the ripe age of 96, the lady was spending her last days in the dingy servant quarter of her already sold out ancestral house.

5.6. Sucheta Kriplani:

First woman Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in independent India in 1963, Sucheta was a freedom fighter and also one of the few women who was elected in the Constituent Assembly and was a part of the subcommittee that drafted the Constitution of free India.

5.7. Reita Faria:

The first Indian woman to win the Miss World title in 1966, she serves as a role model for women who aspire for glamour. Reita Faria gave up modeling after her tenure as Miss World ended. She took up medical studies after that and became a doctor.

5.8. Indira Gandhi :

First woman Prime Minister of independent India in 1966, Indira was the daughter of the country's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. She was PM for three consecutive terms from 1966 to 1977.

5.9. Maharani Gayatri Devi:

The Rajmata of Jaipur was born as Princess Gayatri Devi of Cooch Behar. She was the third Maharani of Jaipur from 1939 to 1970 through her marriage to Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II. Following India's

independence, she became an extremely successful politician and was a 15-time MP. Known for her beauty, she championed the cause of women's education and upliftment. She was also the first to step out of Purdah in her state, paving the way for other women's freedom.

5.10. Kiran Bedi:

Breaking the shackles of the male-dominated Indian Police Service, Kiran Bedi became the first woman IPS officer of India in the year 1972. She has worked with the United Nations as the Police Advisor to the Secretary General.

5.11. Bachendri Pal:

This bold Indian from the North-East, braved the onslaught of an injury to become famous as the first Indian woman who successfully surmounted the highest mountain peak Mt Everest in 1984. She was also the fifth woman of the world to have achieved this remarkable feat.

5.12. Kalpana Chawla:

First Indian-born woman to enter space in 1997, Kalpana Chawla's life ended tragically when while returning from her second mission for 16-days, her space shuttle Columbia disintegrated and killed the 41 year old astronaut.

5.13. Mary Kom:

Our-time world champion M C Mary Kom is the first woman boxer to be honoured with the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award. She is also the first boxer along with Vijender Singh to be awarded the same. The Manipuri girl also won the Arjuna award in 2004 before being conferred with the Padma Shri a couple of years later in 2006.

5.14. Sania Mirza:

She became the first Indian to have won a Grand Slam title when she triumphed in the girl's doubles event at Wimbledon in 2003. She is also the country's highest ranked WTA player.

5.15. Fathima Beevi:

The first woman judge of the Supreme Court, Fathima Beevi was also the first one to be appointed as a judge of the apex court in the whole of Asia. It is an achievement for an Indian woman and a feat indeed for a Muslim woman during 1989. Her accomplishment lay in the fact that she facilitated the entry of other women in the apex court.

5.16. Priya Jhingan:

Erstwhile male bastion the Indian Army was broken by Priya Jhingan-Army's first woman. In fact she even wrote to the then Chief of Army Staff, General Sunith Francis Rodrigues requesting him to open doors of the Army to the Indian woman.

5.17. Padmavathy Bandopadhyay:

With a list of accomplishments to her credit, Padma Bandopadhyay- an IAF officer who rose to be India's first woman Air Vice Marshal in 2002, Bandopadhyay also served as the first woman fellow of the Aerospace Medical Society of India and the first Indian woman to have conducted scientific research at the North Pole as also the first woman officer to have completed the Defence Service Staff College course - in 1978 and to command the IAF's Central Medical Establishment (CME).

5.18. Pratibha Patil:

In 2007, Pratibha Patil became the country's first woman president. Prior to this, she was also the first woman governor of Rajasthan from 2004-2007. What is noteworthy is that she has never lost an election that she has contested.

5.19. Meira Kumar:

In 2009, Meira Kumar became the country's first woman as a Dalit Speaker of the Lok Sabha and was elected unopposed. An IFS officer by profession, Meira was a Cabinet Minister in the Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment in 2004-2009. Meira is a five-time Lok Sabha MP.

5.20. Sushmita Sen:

In 1994, for the first time, an Indian beauty won the Miss Universe crown. The answer to the question of the final round made her immensely popular among people. When asked "What was the essence of being a woman?" the charming 18-year-old replied, "The origin of a child was a woman.... a woman teaches a man whatcaring.....is all about...". This won her the much sought after crown.

5.21. Naina Lal Kidwai:

The first Indian woman to graduate from the Harvard Business School, Naina Lal Kidwai was appointed as the country head of HSBC (India) this year. Kidwai was bestowed with the Padma Shri in 2007 and was also in WSJ's list of world's top 50 businesswomen. Not only this, the woman was listed as one of the 15 global influential of 2002 by Time magazine. "

06. Politics:

"Women of India are highly active today in this area. Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylakshami Pandit, Sucheta Kriplani were the torch bearers for the women of India. Mrs. Vijay Lkshami Pandit was the first Indian woman to hold a post in the cabinet thus paving the way for other women. The most important name in the category of women politicians of recent times is Mrs Indira Gandhi. She was the one who made world stop and notice the talent and potential of Indian women. She was the first woman Prime Minister of Independent India. Today her daughter-in law Mrs. Sonia Gandhi is following her footsteps and leading the Indian National Congress. Other women who have made their name in politics of India are Shiela Dixit, Uma Bharti, Jayalalitha, Vasundhra Raje and Mamata Banerjee.

07. Sports:

Indian women have achieved great laurels for the nation in every sport. Whether it is cricket or hockey, India has national women team for every game. Indian women cricket team has won Asia Cup of 2004 and 2005 and made own country proud.

08. Art and Entertainment:

This arena is full of Indian women. We have many names to boast of like M.S. Subbulakshmi, Indian Nightingale Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosle as famous singers. Madhu Bala, Rekha, Aishwarya Rai as Bollywood queens. Today an Indian woman is a painter, an actor, a singer and a beauty queen.

09. Literature:

In the past, women of India used to write, but their work did not get the recognition. Today they are getting their dues. Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shobhaa De, Jhumpa Lahiri are famous names in Indian literature. Not just in India now these women are recognized all over the world. Arundhati Roy has been awarded with the Booker Prize of 1997 for her work "God of Small Things". Kiran Desai has been given Booker Prize of 2006 and Jhumpa Lahiri got recognition in the form of Pulitzer prize.

10. Conclusion:

From the above discussion, we can say that, Indian women have not just made their mark on earth but they have engraved their name in the whole universe by flying to space. Kalpana Chawla, who was the member of Colombia Space Shuttle, which exploded on its way back, was the first Indian woman astronaut who visited space station. And now following on her footsteps, another woman of Indian origin Sunita Williams has become the second one to be the member of International Space Station crew. Here is the list of some of the most powerful Indian women of our country, India. These Indian women are the physical manifest alien of power, dedication towards work, will, grace and have shown extra ordinary brilliance in their respective fields.

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