

## PACE MAKERS OF DEVELOPMENT WOMEN IN INDIAN HISTORY: PAST-PRESENT— A CRITICAL REVIEW

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### ABSTRAK

*Perempuan memiliki tempat yang penting dalam sejarah dan peranan perempuan telah mengalami berbagai perubahan. Dalam beberapa dekade yang lalu, perempuan dianggap sebagai bagian dari kekayaan; perempuan diperjualbelikan seperti barang. Kemudian, perempuan diperlakukan pada kedudukan yang berbeda; “merampas” hak-hak mereka, namun “mengingat” pada kewajiban-kewajiban mereka sebagai perempuan. Seiring bertambahnya waktu, peran perempuan di India berubah dari penghasil keturunan menjadi pencari nafkah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menerangkan status perempuan India dari masa lalu ke masa sekarang. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk menjelaskan posisi perempuan berdasarkan pemberdayaan secara sosial-ekonomi-politik. Sejarah India menunjukkan bukti standar ganda status perempuan. Dalam sastra dan agama di India, perempuan ditempatkan pada posisi yang tinggi. Namun, dalam skenario domestik, politik, dan ekonomi, perempuan mengemban status rendah dan menjadi subjek diskriminasi dan eksploitasi. Peran perempuan India telah berubah dari kukungan nilai-nilai tradisional menuju era baru kebebasan dan sering kali disebut “fenomenal”. Nasib perempuan India dari masa lalu hingga masa sekarang penting untuk diikuti. Perempuan India yang pernah dianggap sebagai ahli dalam seni rumah tangga kini menjadi “kekuatan yang membentuk negara” yang luasnya sebanding dengan sebuah benua.*

**Kata Kunci:** *mayoritas yang diam, pembuka jalan bagi pembangunan, peran perempuan dalam sejarah India, perjuangan untuk otonomi, stereotipe*

### ABSTRACT

No matter how the world changes, no matter what country and social system people are in, no one can deny women's importance in history. But it does not mean that women are always treated well and fairly, and the women's role in history has undergone numerous changes. In the past few decades women were considered to be a part of wealth and property. She used to be sold and purchased like any property or cattle. Till recently women were treated on different footing/pedestal, 'depriving' them of their rights but 'reminding' them of their duties. But with the changing times, the role of women in India has changed from child bearing to rearing to bread earner. Thus the new cultural milieu is making it inevitable for them to face the emerging reality in contemporary Indian society. This article is an attempt to throw light on the status of women in India from past to the present. It also tries to explain the position of women on the basis of socio-economic-political empowerment. Throughout the Indian history the double standard regarding the status of women is evident. In Literature and Religion of India, women are highly placed. But in the domestic, political and economic scenario, women occupy a lower status and are subjected to discrimination and exploitation. Women's role in India has been changing over the years and women are now emerging

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from the past traditional set-up to a new era of freedom and rights. Role of women in modern India can be called as 'phenomenal'. The fortunes of Indian women from the past to the present, is worth following. Indian women who were once considered to be the masters in the art of home making are now considered to be the 'forces that shape the country', which is the size of a continent.

**Keywords:** better half of society, embodiment of virtues, pacemakers of development, silent majority, stereotypes, struggle for autonomy, women's role in Indian History,

## INTRODUCTION

"O Lord why have you not given women the right to conquer her destiny- why does she have to wait, head bowed by the road side, waiting with tired patience, hoping for a miracle on the morrow?"

The great Poet-Nobel Laureate from India, Rabindranath Tagore said this at the beginning of the millennium. The millennium has drawn to a close. Today we are not waiting for a miracle, the miracle is within us.

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 medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India, has been eventful. But the history (her story) has been theoretically high, but practically low. A nation's progress and prosperity can be judged by way it treats its women folk.

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women."-  
Jawaharlal Nehru

Till recently, women were treated on a different footing/ pedestal, 'depriving' them of rights but 'reminding' them of their duties. But with the changing times, the role of women has changed from child bearing and rearing to bread earner. Thus the new cultural milieu is making it inevitable for them to face the emerging reality in the contemporary Indian society.

Women are called "silent majority", "pace-makers of development", 'better half of the society' and sometimes 'fairer sex' and 'weaker sex', etc.

Women are producers, farmers, workers in the households and beyond. They are low paid and need better price for their produce. They are active participants in development but they are illiterate, poor, ignorant, superstitious, subjugated and lack technical skills due to lack of access to science and technology, information and knowledge, proper training, new employment avenues, income generation assets, information on rights, leadership positions, political power.etc Traditional social values and patriarchal authority discourage and hinder many women from having interaction with outside world to organize themselves (Kumar & Jaya Kumar, 1994:51).

Throughout the history of India the double standard regarding the status of women is evident. In literature and religion of India, women are highly placed. "But in domestic, political and economic scenario women occupy a lower status and are subject to discrimination and exploitation. The stereo type of Indian women is depicted as the embodiment of beauty, wealth, wisdom, virtues" (Kumar & Jaimon Varghese, 2005:35-36). Love, peace, patience and what not are taken to be her positive attributes. Her portrait vividly depicted as an ideal character beyond the reach of any ordinary woman. Therefore, it is not surprising to read about empowered women of the past in the recorded history. However, the life of ordinary women has been confined to the four walls of her household, overburdened with domestic works, controlled of her mobility and personal freedoms by the men of the household since time immemorial. The real story of the women is not recorded in any of the past literature. Still it is worthwhile to mention about the great Indian women of the past as a background story for the

continuing struggle for autonomy, equality, and empowerment.

## **RELIGIOUS SPACE**

The evolution of the status of women in India has been a continuous process of ups and downs throughout history. Considering the vast body of empirical research available on the topic, two approaches seem valid: one is classical text view; and the other, empirical view. The recorded history of India began with the arrival of Aryans in the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. When Vedic era began; the patriarchal culture superseded the matriarchal culture. It could be considered the beginning of gender discrimination of religious concern over the civil life. A survey of 'Vedas'<sup>1</sup>, 'Puranas'<sup>2</sup>, 'Upanishads'<sup>3</sup> and 'Epics'<sup>4</sup> reveal the status of women and their struggle for power in ancient India (1500 B.C. - A.D. 1200). Women enjoyed a position of respect and stature in ancient Vedic India. Women of the Vedic period were epitomes of intellectual and spiritual attainment. The 'Vedas' have lots to say about these women, who both complemented and supplemented their male partners. When it comes to talking about significant female figures of the Vedic period, four names - Ghosha, Lopamudra, Sulabha Maitreyi, and Gargi - come to mind. The ideals of Indian womanhood are also embodied in the tales of the ancient 'Puranas' such as the 'Srimad Bhagavadgeetam'<sup>5</sup>. During the early Vedic Era, there is evidence to show that women were respected and provided opportunities in domestic life. She was considered the creator, protector and educator of her children.

'Upanishads' had an important role in framing a pretty stereotype for Indian woman. For a woman, her husband should be everything. Through devotion and love for him, she fulfils her duty and develops her highest personality. The noblest duty of a woman is the arduous task of motherhood. According to Manu<sup>6</sup> "A woman should be protected and honored at all stages of her life, She is never fit for living independently". He says the creator implanted in them carnal

passions, love for ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct (Pachauri, 1999:78-79).

'Ramayana' & 'Mahabharata' are the great Epics of India. The social life presented by Ramayana and Mahabharata may be the first written record of Hindu way of living. The popular form of marriage seen in the epics is, 'Swayamvara'<sup>7</sup>. In this ancient form of marriage, women were said to have exercised the freedom and autonomy to select their life partner. 'Swayamvara' does not give freedom of choice to the bride in the modern sense because often her freedom to choose her husband is limited. The epics present a galaxy of the so called 'Great Indian Women.' Sita, Kausalya, Draupadi, Savitri and Kunti are some of the noblest figures who are 'perfect embodiments of Indian womanhood.'

Gandhari is the noblest of the women characters in Mahabharata. Kunti is the embodiment of patience, perseverance and self-sacrifice. Draupadi, the central figure of the great epic, was a woman who possessed courage, sense of dignity and justice. Bhagwadgeetam, the most sacred book of the Hindus, places Women, Vaisyas (traders) and Shudras (low caste) in the same category and describes them all as being of sinful birth. Women had to play always a subordinate role in the society. Her nurturing and caring roles were always highlighted and her need for effective participation in political, economic and social living was always neglected.

Education of women was an accepted norm during the Vedic period, slowly to be neglected and later on girls were totally denied any access to education as child marriage was accepted as a means to protect ritual purity of the caste ridden communities. By 8<sup>th</sup> century, the marriageable age for girls was lowered to 9 to 10 years, which not only gave a final blow to any effort at educating women but also encouraged the sinister practice of pre-puberty marriages (Pachauri, 1999:136). The situation of widows was very pathetic in the later Vedic Era. Al-Beruni, the historian has observed that the re-marriage of widows was prohibited by custom.

## **HIS-STORY, HER-STORY, INDIAN HISTORY**

Medieval Indian history spreads over 500 years (A.D. 1200 to A.D. 1700). It is predominantly the history of Muslim rulers. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) had profound respect for women. Muslims, the followers of Islam, appeared in India as a warrior class. The only woman who had ever occupied the throne of Delhi was Raziya Sultana who was not only a wise ruler but also a woman of dauntless courage. She set the role model for politically empowered women in India. The role that Muslim women have played in the medieval period of Indian history since then has been very significant.

Qutluq Nigar, Babur's<sup>8</sup> mother gave wise counsel to her son Babur during his arduous campaigns for the recovery of his father's heritage. Nur Jahan<sup>9</sup> and Jahanara<sup>10</sup> took active part in the state affairs. Gulbadan<sup>11</sup> Begum was a woman of exceptional poetic talent. She wrote 'Humayun-namah', a work, which has been recognized as the most valuable contemporary record of Humayun's (Mughal Emperor) reign. The greatest Muslim queen of India was no doubt NurJahan who was the very embodiment of beauty and military valor. Chand Bibi<sup>12</sup> who lived in the sixteenth century was decidedly the greatest of heroic Muslim woman in Indian history.

During the Mughal rule the social life of Hindu women underwent great changes. Purdah (veil) became strict so much so that Hindu women under Muslim rule preferred death by 'Sati'(self immolation). Women during the medieval age led secluded life. Only an elite group of royal women had access to education and political life. Another prominent group of women were Devdasi's<sup>13</sup>, who were educated and trained in arts and literature. They were trained in entertaining the royal guests and nobles. 'Bhakti'<sup>14</sup> movement which flourished during the medieval age gave rise to a new class of men and women who cared little for gender bias. The movement gave rise to saints like Mira<sup>15</sup>. Women participated in the movement regardless of their caste and creed. However, the movement did not basically challenge the unequal

social structure and limited it only to individual salvation. Another prominent Indian religion, Sikh religion is the invention of medieval age, but there too women had similar problems and faced suffering (Kumar & Jason Vargheese, 2005:44).

Colonialization 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. The British Government took bold steps to reform the caste ridden Indian social order. 'Sati'(self immolation) was abolished by law on humanitarian grounds. Reform Movements (Brahmo Samaj of 1825, Prarthana Samaj of 1867, and Arya Samaj of 1875) led by male reformers set the limit of the freedom and development of women. Widow re-marriage was recognized by law in 1856. Women education was a wonderful achievement of the reformation. Girls were at last brought out from the four walls of the household for the cause of education.

The ideal of women according to Swami Vivekananda<sup>16</sup> is the mother first and the mother last. The word 'woman' calls up to the mind of Hindu that 'Motherhood, and God is called Mother'. He felt that India's downfall was due to the position of subjugation in which Indian women were kept. Mahatma Gandhi<sup>17</sup> championed the cause of women. He considered women as the incarnation of 'Ahimsa', the infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. 'Who but woman, the mother of man, shows the capacity in the largest measure? Let her not forget, she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar' (Pachuari S.K. 1999:110). Gandhi considered woman as the personification of self-sacrifice.

The Indian National Congress, founded by A.O. Hume<sup>18</sup> in 1885, had taken steps to uplift women's status in India. Improving upon the task of the founders, in 1931 Jawaharlal Nehru<sup>19</sup> accepted political and legal rights of woman and introduced the concept of equal obligations

along with equal rights in the fundamental rights resolution passed by the Congress that year. Indian National Movement gave ample opportunity for women for participation in social and political activities. The period from 1857-1947 was an era of enlightenment and empowerment as far as woman are concerned. Many woman rose to prominence in the independent India too. These women laid foundation for women's struggle for empowerment in the twentieth century.

Sarojini Naidu, was a born orator and poet, sang melody of India's glory through her writings, speeches and poetry. Kamala Devi, an exemplary youth was the first woman to join the Civil Disobedience Movement of Gandhi. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of Nehru was known for her versatile statesmanship. She was the leader of Indian delegation to the United Nations, (1946-48); India's High Commissioner to UK (1956-62). She was the first woman who held the highest post of President of the United Nations General Assembly (1953-54). She was also the Governor of Maharashtra State (1962-64) a financial and commercial hub in Western India.

Mother Teresa is described as the 'Angel of Mercy'. Mother Teresa in her acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, told, 'It is not enough for us to say; I love God, but I do not love my neighbor. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch and with whom you live' (Times of India, 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2003). She opened various homes for the destitute, most famous of which is 'Nirmal Hriday'(compassionate heart). It is open to everyone irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The status of Indian women has considerably improved after the independence. The heroines of Independent India have definitely inspired and encouraged other women to actively participate in social and political life of the nation.

The Government of India instituted the Department of Women and Child Development that coordinate and monitor all the women's development programmes of the Government. National Commission was established for women

more than a decade ago. The year 2001 was observed as Women's Empowerment Year. In spite of significant progress in the status of women for the past decades, it is not comparable to other countries in the world, and India stands far below. Status of women in India, especially in rural areas need much more to be looked into, to improve their lot. Patriarchal symbolism, ritualism, dualism, marital traditions and caste systems are some of the historical factors that prescribe the status of Indian women.

Middle class educated women, particularly in large urban agglomerations, who are working and moving freely, generate an impression that Indian women's status has substantially improved. Moreover there is evidence of capable, efficient and powerful women at times with political clout, which reinforces this impression. But in small towns or rural areas or in city slums, women still suffer social and economic oppression. Women in India are beginning to follow the direction that the women of the Western world took more than eighty years ago; demanding treatment as human equals. However, it has become more and more evident as the revolution ages that Indian women may have to adapt the Western feminist method to their very traditional and religious culture. India has different complications that put the development of women in a completely altered context than their Western counterparts. Although the key targets remain similar: improvement of health care, education and job opportunities in order to gain equality between men and women in the various settings of public society, the workplace, the school yard and – possibly the most fundamental setting of all – the home.

Women are striving to be independent on the equal level of men. The additional complexities that the women of India must also challenge are the caste system, the heavy religious customs, older and more traditional roles of the sexes, as well as the even stronger power that men hold in India. The status was at one time accepted, but with the Western women's revolution and perception, the role is slowly succeeding in its development through both independent groups of

women and national and worldwide organizations based on the goal of gaining equality. They have all accomplished much, but have yet to overthrow the male dominated society. The women of India Inc. have proved in more ways than one that their sensibilities and leadership acumen are here to stay and pave the way for more women to make it to the top of the corporate ladder. As people management practices in corporate India come of age, organizations, today, are displaying a propensity towards employing more women in their HR departments as compared to men.

### **TRACING THE GENDER FOOTSTEPS OF TIME: FROM KITCHEN TO COSMOS**

The emerging role of women in Indian society has been a meandering journey from 'Kitchen to Cosmos'. Women's roles in India have been changing and women are now emerging from the past traditions into a new era of freedom and rights. Women have always been looked at as the caregiver and as the home keeper. Being the symbol of the family, women have always been the home and have not been out in the other arenas of life. Women have played different roles in the family depending on their age and place in the household. When there is a sudden change in the society, women have stood up to assist and these moments have been recorded in history.

After the Second World War, there were important developments in education. The raising of the minimum school-leaving age to 14 (1962), the entry of increasing numbers of girls and women into secondary and higher education. When women entered the work force, they then had a rallying point. When women started to be independent they wanted to wait and gain economic independence before getting married.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy<sup>20</sup> started a movement against the deprivation of women rights, inequality and subjugation. The contact of the Indian culture with that of the British also brought improvement in the status of women. Another factor in the revival of women's position was the influence of Mahatma Gandhi who induced women to

participate in the Freedom Movement. But in spite of this amelioration in the status of women, the evils of illiteracy, dowry, ignorance, and economic slavery would have to be fully removed in order to give them their rightful place in Indian society. Women continue to play a marginal role in the overall national context despite constituting almost half the population with a critical role in production and social process.

Mahatma Gandhi stressed, "*Subjugation and exploitation of women was a product of man's vested teachings and women's acceptance of them.*" There is also a compelling need to resolve certain basic issues about the socialization process like 'E'-components-education, employment, earnings, empowerment, entitlement to property and effects of violence. Reservation of women at the village level and their situational analysis reveal that majority of positions are acted upon by men. Constitutional Amendment Bill seeks to reserve 33 percent seats for women in national and state legislature's restricted political participation of women in decision-making process.

Women still face enormous pressure to conform to social mores, conforming to traditional roles within families' poses as much of a barrier to businesswomen in India as the still-too-thick glass ceiling at companies. Though women have made great strides in the corporate world in the last three decades, women from all income classes are still too often discouraged by family members from having careers that infringe too much on family life. The country's long history of valuing education has started seeing women who achieve academically as smart and savvy. We can quote, Martina Navratilova, the Famous American Tennis player, who prophesied:

"I think the key is for women not to set any limits."

Women today are more practical and rational than earlier. Indian woman have never been as expressive and independent as she is today. Women today, consider themselves as the true 'ardhangini'(better half) of their husbands. She is more cognizant of his world today and she

understands his work pressures. There is an attitudinal shift now. She is now projecting herself from being a care-taker/nurturer to a friend in the role of a Mother. It is widely felt that earning power allows them to voice their opinions on bigger decisions. Today's women no more feel that a career would be at the cost of neglecting the family and children. She has been successful in striking a fine balance between the work space and home front. The Indian woman is also spending a lot more money on her personal appearance. Even Jane Adams felt that:

“Civilization is a method of living and an attitude of equal respect for all people”.

Reformers began their work in the direction of women's emancipation in the late nineteenth century. This work was continued in the twentieth century. In spite of great zeal and enthusiasm, the reformers achieved little success in breaking the strong notions of women's inferior status. However, the process of awakening to reality was initiated and India passed into an era in which myth around women began to be seriously questioned in terms of realities of human existence. Women started regaining their freedom of will and intellect. Still with the majority of women a major problem remained. “They had for long believed that they were emotionally, morally, biologically and intellectually inferior to men and so were unable to contemplate their equal status with men. They failed to realize their full potential and high abilities. To alter this situation it was required that not only women, but the whole society should undergo a transition in its outlook towards them” (Khureshi, 2003:01).

Women, a majority of the world's population receive only a small share of developmental opportunities. As Margaret E. Cousins remarked, “Perhaps in those early days women went to Congress sessions more as the helpmates of their husbands, to see after their food and creature comforts” (Pujari, Premlata and Kaushik, 1994:09). Where as at present the role played by women Parliamentarians underwent a qualitative change from the third Lok-Sabha (elected

representative in Indian Parliament-Lower House) onwards, largely perhaps because of Indira Gandhi becoming India's first Woman Prime Minister. Her efforts at ushering in social, economic and political reforms during this period are indeed worth emulating. Her special achievements include abolition of privy purses, nationalization of banks, and atomic test in Pokhran (State of Rajasthan) which was a milestone in the field of science and technology. In the international arena, she organized a convention of about 100 Non-Aligned countries to give practical shape to the principles of ‘Panchasheel’<sup>21</sup> propounded by Jawaharlal Nehru, as a result of which she became one of the most influential leaders of the world.

## **REDEFINING WOMEN'S PRESENT**

At present, with the advent of persons like Uma Bharati, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Sushma Swaraj, Sonia Gandhi and others, it seems that women's representation in Parliament is better organized. “The reasons perhaps are that the present women members reflect the ferment within their communities and social groups.” (Sinha, 1993:151). They are raising their voice in Parliament and State Assemblies for protecting the interests of the women and also creating social awareness among them. They resist with all the force at their command all attempts at the exploitation of women and atrocities being committed against them and demand all protection for them.

Women in India are passing through the twilight zone of tradition and modernity. The growth of education, the extension of vocational and professional opportunities, and to some extent, the scarcity of financial resources for a large number of people is factors which are opening the gates of change for women. To say that women place a greater priority on home and family life than they do on professional life is not to say that women do not have ambition or that they do not desire power and independent decision-making authority. Caught between the home and the office, such women in India are engaged in

a tough struggle for a viable position. Many of them have succumbed to the pressures of family and home and try to be content with a mediocre service record (Swarup & Niroj Sinha, 1991:29).

Women are equally capable of occupying the top most services of the nation. It is just that women need to come out of the age old traditions and clutches of customs, prove their talents and get into administrative services, make a change in the society and lead the nation towards development. It removes misconception regarding All India Service and suggests measures to increase the entry of women into administrative services. It also provides suggestions regarding women administrators balancing work at home and office.

The role of Indian women has undergone dramatic and drastic changes from era to era, while within the eras themselves there have existed simultaneous contradictions. This in itself has created problems for contemporary women in experiencing a continuity of their identity with the society. What a woman growing up in Indian society interjects is perhaps a collage and a flux of attitudes, perceptions, roles and locations of identity. The twentieth century has brought a sea change in the life of women all over the world, influencing their attitudes, values, feelings, & participation in all walks of life. In the mid twentieth century women started stepping out of the four walls of their homes and started going to schools, colleges, clubs and then offices gradually.

With this advent of opening a haven of permissiveness, women took a big leap. They were not to be satiated only by studying now, in the first quarter of the twenty first century; their desire to enter into nation building grow vigorously day by day. Now they have started entering into all educational institutions, offices, hotels, hospitals, etc. They left no arena untapped and it is this situation where we stand now at the beginning of the twenty first century. This entry of women into the main stream of nation building is undoubtedly very encouraging for women who are on the threshold of dreams and achievement.

Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Before the

rise of novels, several women writers composed songs, short stories and small plays. It is believed that women are the upholders of the rich Indian tradition of fables, storytelling and more. In the twentieth century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that she is not helpless and is not dependent. They feel that a woman is equally competent just like a man. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence.

“Women's limited world of experience can also become a means of greater and more intense self-analysis. Writing about women, they insist upon women's experience as an important subject.” (Gupta, 1998:81). Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the main theme of their books. Nayantara Sahgal, Kamla Das, Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Ruth Jhabvala, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shobha De are some of the most popular women writers. Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai are the two who have bagged the Booker Prize for their novels. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way.

Indian women have achieved great laurels for the nation in every sport. Whether it is cricket or hockey India have national women team for every game. Indian women cricket team has won Asia Cup of 2004 and 2005 and made country proud. Some women sports icons of India are P.T. Usha (Athletics), Kunjarani Devi (Weight lifting), Diana Edulji (Cricket), Sania Mirza (Tennis) and Karnam Malleshwari (Weight lifting).

Music is the blood and soul of Indian culture. This arena is full of Indian women. We have many names to boast of like M.S. Subbulakshmi, Indian Nightingale Lata Mangeshkar, and Asha Bhosle are all famous singers. Madhu Bala, Rekha, Aishwarya Rai as Bollywood queens. Sushmita Sen was crowned *Miss Universe 1994*.



She was the first Indian woman to win this beauty pageant.. Aishwarya Rai won Miss World in 1994. Lara Dutta too was crowned as Miss Universe in 2000. Today Indian woman is a painter, an actor, a singer, and a beauty queen. Kiran Majumdar Shaw is the undisputed corporate queen of India. She is the MD of Biocon India. She is the wealthiest entrepreneur of India. Kiran wanted to become a doctor but could not get admission in medical colleges but even then she did not lose courage and went on to become India's first woman 'Brew Master' and subsequently corporate queen. Another name in this list includes Vidya Mohan Chhabaria, Chairperson of Jumbo Group, Naina Lal Kidwai, Vice Chairperson and Managing Director of HSBC Securities and Capital Market, Sullaijja Firodia Motwani and Mallika Srinivasan.

## **CONCLUSION**

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. Every Indian woman may not know how to operate super computers, every woman may not be able to drive a vehicle, many Indian women may be ignorant of the modern inventions and post modern facilities; but every Indian woman has a unique quality still within them, the perfect womanhood.

Womanhood is not just appearing in female apparels and mating with man. But the essence of womanhood is to be a perfect companion of man to make this world a beautiful place to live in. Womanhood is being a loving mother to the future generations and above all it is to celebrate ones womanliness and also enjoy equal status with everyone in the society. Meira Kumar is the first Dalit (backward class) Speaker in Indian Parliament. India, the largest Democratic

Republic was lead by a woman, Pratibha Singh Patil, who was the President of India. There have been several woman Chief Ministers to rule over different Indian states. And in fields like education, career opportunities too, women have shown their mettle (Saneesh Michael, 2007:01).

Western countries have living facilities three hundred years ahead of India. But it never means that Indians live still in the Stone Age. Indian women are always one step ahead of women from most of the developed countries. When there are examples like Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams, it is not at all needed to launch campaigns to proclaim that Indian women are equal or ahead to the other civilized and modern women around this globe. It is not some length of fabrics that make Indian women modern and they do not believe that few pieces of clothing could make anyone civilized or modern. Nevertheless one must remember that a woman is not required to do any so called 'masculine' task in order to establish her equality with men. Both enjoy different domain of workspace. Her traditional tasks are also enough to let her enjoy equal status with men, and this has been the USP of Indian Womanhood.

Indian women have travelled with the time for centuries and have proved to the world that 'the hand that rocks the cradle can rule the world'. To make a success of defeat is the most interesting project in the world. Indian women have that kind of resilience to turn the tide in their favor. The status of women in a society is the true index of its cultural, social, religious and spiritual levels. It is one of the most important criteria for estimating with precision the degree of civilization attained by a particular society in various periods of its history (Anita Sharma, 1990:84).

Today India is the most sought after outsourcing destination for any country or business firms. It is not just because the costs are low in India, but the world has also realized the reliability and skills of Indians particularly the positive work climate prevailing in India. The most comforting and encouraging factor is that

the 'New India' has 26% of her women workforce in the new millennium work culture adding that extra shine to civilization by bringing in two most sought after 'Work-Ethics'- Compassion and Tolerance'.

"Honor the women!

They're roses celestial Twining and  
weaving in lives terrestrial,

Weaving the bond of the most blessed love,  
"Veiled in the Graces" most modest attire".

----Friedrich Schiller.

Notes:

1. The large body of the texts constituting the oldest body of Sanskrit Literature and the oldest scripture of Hinduism. The 'Vedas' are 'apauruseya' (not of human agency). They are supposed to have been directly revealed and thus are called 'Shruti'(what is heard), distinguishing them from other religious texts, which are called 'Smriti'(what is remembered).
2. 'Puranas' literally mean, 'of ancient times', are a genre of important Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist religious texts, consisting of narratives of the history of the universe from creation to destruction, description of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography.
3. 'Upanishads' are the philosophical texts, an early source of Hindu religion. They are called 'Vedanta', the end of Vedas. They explain the essence of Vedas. All Upanishads have been passed down in oral tradition.
4. The two epics from India-'Ramayana' an ancient Sanskrit epic ascribed to the Hindu sage Valmiki and form an important part of the Hindu canon. It depicts the duties of relationships, portraying ideal characters. The name 'Ramayana' is a 'tatpurush' compound of 'Rama' and 'Yana' (going/advancing) translating to 'Rama's Journey'. Thematically the Ramayana explores human values and the concept of 'Dharma'.  
The 'Mahabharata' is one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India. This contains
5. much of philosophical and devotional materials such as the discussion of the 'four goals' in life or 'Purusharthas'. Traditionally the authorship of the 'Mahabharata' is attributed to Vyasa. 2,00,000 individual verse lines about 1.8 million words, the 'Mahabharata' is roughly ten times as the length of the 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' combined.
5. The Srimad Bhagavadgeetam is one of the 'mahapuranic' text of Hindu Literature, with primary focus on 'Bhakti' (devotion). This Sanskrit text comprises of 12 skandas (cantos or books) and some 18,000 verses.
6. Manu is the title accorded to the 'progenitor of mankind', and also the first king to rule this earth, who saved mankind from universal flood. He was absolutely honest, which was why he was initially known as 'Satyavrata' (one with the oath of truth).
7. In ancient India there was a practice of choosing a husband from a list of suitors by a girl of marriage-able age. 'Swayam' in Sanskrit means 'self' and 'Vara' means 'choice' or 'desire' (which is also synonymous with bridegroom).
8. Zahir-ud-din-Muhhammad Babur sometimes also spelt Baber or Babar was a conqueror from Central Asia, who following a series of set-backs, finally succeeded in laying the basis for the Mughal Dynasty in Indian sub continent and became the first Mughal Emperor.
9. Nur Jehan Begum was also known as Mehr-un-nissa was an Empress of the Mughal Dynasty that ruled much of the Indian sub continent. She ruled India through her husband Jehangir was the ruler. She wielded the true 'power behind the throne', known also as 'Mallika-e-Hind'-The Queen of India.
10. Jehanara was the Imperial Princess, the eldest daughter of Shah Jehan and Mumtaz Mahal. She was entrusted with the imperial seal by Shah Jehan, who had tremendous faith in her matured handling of the state affairs. She continued to impress upon the intellectuals of the day.

11. Her name literally means 'with a body like the rose flower' in Persian. She was Babar's daughter and of highest Central Asian aristocracy. She was the writer of many biographies of the Mughal Dynasty.
12. (1550-1599) was also known as 'Chand Khatoun', 'Chand Sultan', was an Indian Muslim woman warrior. She is known to have defended her sultanate against the Mughal power of Akbar-The Great.
13. In Hinduism, the 'Devdasi' (the Servant of God) tradition was a religious sanction in which the girls were married off and dedicated to the deity (deva or devi) or to a temple. They were the custodians of the southern classical dance form 'Bharatnatyam' in South India. But they fell upon bad days during the British Rule and had to get into prostitution to keep their body and soul together. In 1988, the 'Devdasi' system was outlawed by the Indian Government in all of India.
14. (914-17thc) A religious movement in Hinduism, originating in southern India and spread to the Northern part of the country, which was under the Islamic rule. It had its own importance to save Hinduism. The movement was spontaneous and the mystics had their own ways of devotional expressions.
15. (1498-1547) was an aristocratic Hindu mystical singer and a devotee of Lord Krishna and one of the significant figure of the 'Bhakti' movement. Some 1,200-1,300 prayerful songs or Bhajans are attributed to her popularity throughout India and they have been translated in several languages world-wide.
16. (1863-1902) born Narendrnath Dutta, was a 19<sup>th</sup> century saint and founder of the great spiritual centers in India and abroad known as 'The Ramakrishna Mission and Math'. He is considered to be the key figure in the introduction of Indian philosophies of 'Vedanta', and 'Yoga' to the Western world, bringing Hinduism to the status of major religion during the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is the major force in the revival of Hinduism in modern India. He is perhaps best known for his inspiring speech which began 'Sisters and Brothers of America' through which he introduced Hinduism at the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago in 1893.
17. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), was the preeminent leader of Indian Nationalism in British ruled India. Employing Non Violent Civil Disobediences, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for Non-Violent Civil Rights and freedom across the world.
18. Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912), was a civil servant, political reformer, and ornithologist in British India. He was one of the founders of the 'Indian National Congress'- a political party that was later to lead the Indian Independence Movement. He was called 'The Father of Indian Ornithologist', also 'Pope of Indian Ornithologist'.
19. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), was an Indian Lawyer, politician, statesman, who became the first Prime Minister of Independent India in 1947-1964, one of the principal leaders of India's Independence Movement in 1930s and 1940s. He contributed to the establishment of a Parliamentary Democracy in India and one of the founders of the International Non-Aligned Movement.
20. (1772-1833) an Indian religious, social and educational reformer who challenged traditional Hindu culture and indicated the lines for progress of the Indian society under the British Rule, sometimes called as 'The Father of Modern India'. And 'Father of Indian Nationalism', along with Dwarkanath Tagore he founded the Brahmo Samaj, in 1828. He is known for his efforts to abolish the practice of 'Sati', the Hindu funeral practice in which the widow immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre.
21. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, known in India as the 'Panchasheel'(from Sanskrit- Panch-Five; Sheel-Virtue) are a set of principles to govern relations between

states. The first formal codification was in an agreement between China and India in 1954. The Five Principles formed the basis of the Non-Alignment Movement established in Belgrade in 1961.

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