



FEMALE SOCIAL REFORMERS OF INDIA: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PRE- INDEPENDENCE

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This movement emerged during the 19th century and raised the question of the equal status of women. Social reformers showed concern regarding problems of sati, prohibition on re-marriage, denial of the right to property, child marriage, and education to women. The reformers believed that by giving women access to education and introducing progressive legislation, social reforms in respect of women could be achieved. Swami Vivekanand, Dayanand Saraswati, and Annie Besant thought that the old Vedic period should be revived which was ideal for women's status. The female social reformers strongly criticized the system of child marriage, sati, prohibition of widow's re-marriage and Devadasi system, which were

1. Fatima Sheikh

Among the female social reformers of India, Fatima Begum Sheikh is little known in our history books. Sheikh was a Pune native, born on 9 January 1831. She was instrumental in Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule's success as social reformers. When the Phule couple was asked to leave home Fatima and her husband Usman gave shelter to them. The house that the Phule couple was provided as shelter became the first school for girls in India. In 1848, Fatima Sheikh co-founded India's first girls' school with the Phules. By breaking the barriers of gender, Fatima Sheikh became the first Muslim woman who taught in India. She is a role model for women who broke through social barriers and challenged prejudice. Sheikh was also a leader of India's feminist movement. Her work for access to quality education for women with Sheikh's contribution to the development of India's society. Fatima was a colleague of the social reformers Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule. They worked tirelessly to provide education for the lower castes.

2. Tarabai Shinde

Born in 1850, Tarabai challenged Hindu belief systems in her writings and disproved the notion that women are immoral or controlled only by men. She exposed the destructive effects of patriarchal values, deeply rooted in Hindu culture. Tarabai was one of the first feminists that addressed gender and caste inequality against women. She was instrumental in many changes in Indian society and continues to influence the world. Tarabai's most important book, Sri Purush Tulana (1882), was her most important work. It raised awareness about and criticized the patriarchal views and social barriers of gender. She played a major role in addressing caste oppression, which she believed was a controlling factor in women's lives. She also questioned religion's role in oppression. Her writings were used to define caste oppression in modern India and gender inequality. While fighting for women's rights, Taraba Shinde co-founded the Satyashodhak Samaj along with Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule. Tarabai Shinde also worked with upper-caste widows for their rehabilitation.

3. Swarnakumari Devi

Swarnakumari Devi is a Bengali author, poet, social worker, and founder of the Sakhi Samiti. She was born on 28th August 1855. She started the Sakhi Samiti in 1896. The organization worked to assist underprivileged women. The Sakhi Samiti took full responsibility for the widows and the upbringing of the orphans. It took care of educating them and making them self-sufficient and financially stable by teaching them the required skills. The Samiti used to organize exhibitions to raise funds for the institution. She participated in the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress. In 1929, she was elected to the office of president of Vangiya Sahitya Sammelan. Her works faded into infamy despite her popularity as a writer. She was the first Bengali woman author to receive the Jagattarini Gold Medal from Calcutta University. In a country proud of its heritage, Swarnakumari Devi's contributions to social reforms were not reflected in the nationalist movement. The first female representatives of the Indian National Congress were Swarnakumari and Kadambini Ganguly. She has received recognition from the Indian History Congress for her efforts to promote scientific education, particularly among women, as well as for being one of the first women from Bengal to find success as a writer.

4. Pandita Ramabai

Born in present-day Karnataka, Pandita Ramabai became the first woman to be awarded the title of Pandita as a Sanskrit scholar. She was born on 23rd April 1858. Her progressive parents defied traditional social norms that restricted education for girls. Pandita Ramabai was born to a wealthy and privileged family. Ramabai spent her entire life as an educator and social reformer. She learned Sanskrit through her father. She later travelled throughout India and was conferred her title of Pandita and Sarasvati by the University of Calcutta. Ramabai is today remembered as a social reformer who inspired many distressed women to pursue education. She established the Arya Mahila Samaj to promote women's education work against child marriage and rescue victims of it.

The Brahmo Samaj, Hindu reformers, and Jesus Christ all had an impact on society's goals. She is regarded as an instrumental figure who took up the cause of women's education and medical education for women to become doctors. Her effect was such that her voice reached Queen Victoria and the Women's Medical Movement was initiated by Lady Dufferin. By giving

speeches and building a large network of followers, Ramabai was able to gather approximately 60,000 rupees to start an Indian school for child widows. She established the Sharada Sadan school for child widows in Pune in 1889 with the help of numerous Hindu reformers, together with M.G. Ranade. The Mukti Mission was the name she later gave it. In 1896 amid a severe famine, she saved and helped thousands of needy ones. She translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into the Marathi language. She was a well-educated woman who spoke seven languages.

5. Chandramukhi Basu

Along with Kadiambini Ganguly, Chandramukhi Basu is remembered in history as the first female graduate in British India. She was one of the first two female graduates during British rule. She was born in Dehradun in 1860. It was a huge move at the time because gender discrimination was at its peak and girls being educated was still a distant possibility. For her higher education, she had also fought a rigorous battle with college administration. She also got her MA degree from the University of Calcutta, and after that, she was the only one to get it in that period. She began teaching at Bethune College in 1886, and when she rose to the position of the college president, she once again established herself as a prominent figure by becoming the first woman to lead a college. In 1891 she got retired from the principal post due to her health issue. Her academic journey has inspired other female students to complete their education.

6. Ramabai Ranade

Ramabai, a social activist, established a girls' high school in Pune, India, in the middle of the 19th century. Ramabai, who was born on 25th January 1862, spent her childhood in the Sangli district, of Maharashtra. Her father wasn't interested in her education as it was taboo for girls to be educated at the time. However, her husband, Mahadev Govind Ranade, devoted much of his time to teaching her. Ramabai has many achievements in the social realm despite having a modest background. She started the first Bharat Mahila Parishad and chaired the first session of the India Women's Conference. However, she got tremendous support and encouragement from Justice Ranade. She gave her life to the cause of women.

She used to visit women's cells in prisons to instill self-esteem among the inmates. She organized relief for famine-stricken people and took care of them and helped them. She was also made the president of Seva Sadan. The institution intended to teach various life skills to women. Under Seva Sadan, a women's training college and three hostels were developed. Here Ramabai Ranade helped poor women and widows and trained them to be financially stable. Her efforts led to the institution's spread to eight branches in Maharashtra.

7. Sister Nivedita

Sister Nivedita was an Indian social reformer and woman political activist. Born on 28th October 1867, a Christian woman Margaret Elizabeth Noble, embraced the name "Nivedita", which was given by Swami Vivekanand. She was a vocal opponent of British rule and supported Indian public resistance. She started a school for educationally deprived women. She used to go from door to door to educate women and girls about the importance of education. She not only had girls as her students but also adult women and widows. She spent all that she earned on her writing and lectures. She worked for the upliftment of all women regardless of their caste. She worked relentlessly for the patients during the plague epidemic.

Sister Nivedita even cleaned the rubbish and encouraged the youth to be volunteers. She also raised awareness for preventive measures among people. She helped to design a version of the Indian flag and introduced Vande Mataram as a national prayer in her school. She supported social reform, advocated for national arts and culture, and promoted it. Sister Nivedita was widely known as a feminist. She stood for equality for women, regardless of their castes. She was also a strong advocate for India's independence. She was a powerful woman, who was active in the Nationalist movement and worked with many prominent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi.

8. Kadambini Ganguly

The first Indian woman to practice medicine in India was Kadambini Bose Ganguly. She was the first female student to get admission into Calcutta Medical College in 1884. She later completed her training in Scotland and started a medical practice in India. She also served as the Indian National Congress's first female speaker. Born on 18 July 1861, in Bhagalpur, Her childhood was strongly influenced by the Bengal Renaissance. Her father, Braja Kishore Basu, was a well-known activist of Brahma Samaj. In 1863 as a headmaster, he co-founded Bhagalpur Mahila Samiti, the first organization responsible for the emancipation of women.

A young Kadambini completed her formal education at Banga Mahila Vidyalaya, later called Bethune School. She was the first candidate from the Bethune School to appear for the University of Calcutta entrance exam and created history by becoming the first woman to pass the test as early as 1878. Young Kadambini finished her secondary education at Bethune School. She made history by becoming the first woman to pass the University of Calcutta entrance exam as early as 1878. She was the first candidate from the Bethune School to appear for the exam. Apart from education, she always questioned what society judged right. She married Dwarakanath Ganguly, a famous Brahma Samaj leader from the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya, who was 20 years older than her. She also made an effort to improve the working conditions for women coal workers in Eastern India.

She was also a member of the Indian National Congress's first female delegation at its fifth session. Kadambini convened the Women's Conference in Calcutta in 1906 to show unity during the Partition of Bengal and presided over it in 1908. She actively promoted Satyagraha and organized individuals to generate money for the workers' support throughout the same year. She also worked relentlessly on behalf of Indians in South Africa as the president of the Transvaal Indian Association, which was established after Mahatma Gandhi was imprisoned in that country. She was the first female doctor in India to exhibit the uncommon talent of earning numerous medical degrees from other countries. Google honored India's first female physician with a doodle in honor of Kadambini Ganguly's 160th birthday.

9. Usha Mehta

Usha Mehta, who was born on March 25, 1920, was an Indian freedom fighter and supporter of Gandhi. Usha, at 8 years old, took part in a Simon Commission protest march in 1928. She first saw Mahatma Gandhi when she was a young girl, and he was inspired by him to live a long-time wearing khadi. She started studying for a law degree, but she quit in 1942 so that she could join the Quit India Movement. The police detained Usha Mehta for linkages with secret Congress Radio, which was assisted by veteran leader Ram Manohar Lohia, and imprisoned her at Yeravda Jail. Morarji Desai, the interim government's home minister at the time, gave the order for her freedom, making her the first political prisoner to be released in Bombay. She promoted Gandhi's principles post-independence and was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1998. Mehta resumed her studies upon

independence and graduated with a Ph.D. from Bombay University. She grew to be a specialist in Gandhi's ideology and thought. On August 11, 2000, she died, At the age of 80.

Conclusion

The position of women was different in different Pre-Independence periods. Initially, women were given respect and recognition within society, but over time, their position suffered degradation. However, today, women are also contributing to the nation's prosperity and growth. With the help of the legal system, women have become independent socially and politically.

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Abstract

In the pre-independence period, the status of women within the country was in a deprived state. The major cause of this was, there was prevalence of male dominance. Due to this, the position of women was undermined. The major responsibilities of the women were dedicated towards the implementation of household responsibilities and they were not allowed to participate in the implementation of other tasks and activities, nor were they allowed to express their ideas and viewpoints. In addition, they were overwhelmed by the practices of polygamy, sati, child marriage, and female infanticide. Improvements came about in their conditions with the advent of Islam and they were given rights. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, status of women in the medieval period, position of women before the advent of Islam, human rights of women in Islam, position of women during the Mughal period, and position of women during the East India Company.

