

**STATUS OF WOMEN IN BRITISH RAJ**

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**Abstract**

Recently, a revitalised interest in India while it was under British administration has been brought to light in the popular media. The representation of Indian freedom battles in two of the most serious expositions, namely The Jewel in the Crown and Gandhi, is the topic of discussion in this article. The political ramifications of this image are being called into doubt. It demonstrates that both of them fail to acknowledge the significant part that women played in the establishment and fall of the Raj. We contend that the contribution made by women was of such a magnitude that its absence from the historical record constituted a distortion of history that is, by definition, revisionist. We propose that the reason for this process of mystification lies in the relevance of India's fight for national liberation and sexual equality in the early twentieth century, to present day struggles against imperialism and male domination, which are two of the most explosive issues affecting the modern Western world. This fight took place in India during the early twentieth century.

**keywords:** *Women ,British Raj***INTRODUCTION**

The only and most reliable method for analysing and evaluating a country is to examine and evaluate the position of its women. Because the position of a woman is not reducible to a simple numerical value for anyone. It embodies any and all cultures throughout time. It is very vital to investigate the standing of women from the point of view of history in order to arrive at any kind of conclusion regarding the position of women in society. Throughout history, there have been several eras, each of which indicates a different position for women. According to A.S. Altekar, "The challenge arises in the fact that the documented evidence obtained at the same era in the same area have expressed conflicting opinions about the worth, character, and importance of woman." [Citation needed] While one school believes that women are the greatest blessing that God has given to men, the other school maintains that staying away from women is the surest path to achieving salvation.

According to Sage Agastya,

"Women have the capriciousness of lightning, the incisiveness of a sword, and the swiftness of an eagle all rolled into one. According to Altekar, in order to get an accurate picture of the position of women in Hindu culture, one has to investigate their status in a variety of settings, including normal, or during times of peace, and abnormal, or during times of conflict. Because views towards women in society were quite callous during times of war, particularly if the ladies had the misfortune of falling into the clutches of the opposing forces. They were unable to be readmitted back into their family and society due to the circumstances.

(A.S. Altekar, "The Position of women in Hindu civilisation", Pg 319)

For the purpose of depicting a brief history of the changing position and role of women in India, six broad categories are considered.

- (a) 2500 B.C. to 1500 B.C. – Vedic Period
- (b) 1500 B.C. to 500 B.C. – Post Vedic Period
- (c) 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. – Samriti Period
- (d) 500 A.D. to 1800 A.D. – Muslim Period
- (e) 1880 A.D. to 1947 A.D. – British period
- (f) 1947 A.D. onward – Contemporary Period

The history of India is replete of paradoxical and conflicting perspectives on the role of women throughout the country's history. It is very necessary, in order to have an understanding of the position of women, that it should be evaluated within the context of the sociocultural state of the society that is very much relevant. In this piece of writing, I will be concentrating mostly on describing the position of women throughout the British period. When the British first arrived in India in the second part of the 18th century, the position and prestige of women had already dropped to a very low level. The practise of underage marriage and the Sati system contributed to this time in the nation's history being the darkest in its entirety. According to A.L. DeSouza, "Women were denied equal rights in marital, family, social, educational, economic, and political areas." [Citation needed] They were placed in a subordinate position as a result. They have very little in the way of a personal identity and very little rights.

#### **According to Cousin,**

"The condition of woman was at its lowest point of literacy of individuality, of hearth, of social status, of freedom of movement, or initiative of economic status of power." "The condition of woman was at its lowest point of literacy of individuality, of hearth, of social status, of freedom The British were the first rulers to unify the country as a whole, and they did it in a manner that was consistent with liberal thought. They held the belief that all traditions and institutions had to have a logical thought process as their foundation, and that any traditions and institutions that were not so rationally grounded ought to be eliminated. As a result, throughout the time of British rule, Indian society saw significant shifts and alterations. Those individuals who want to see a shift in society were provided with every opportunity that was open to them by the British government. During the time of the British, the standing of girls and women was elevated. In order to overcome the primary barrier, which was the custom of child marriage, they offered education for girls. To begin, in 1929, the government of the United Kingdom approved a law that placed restrictions on the marriage of minors. The statute not only forbade the solemnization of weddings between minors, but it also lowered the minimum age for females to marry to 14, while it raised the minimum age for boys to marry to 18 years. This law is also known as the Sarda Act in some circles. During the British era, advancements were also made in the social and family position of women, particularly that of wives. It was because of the growth in the age of marriage as well as the rise in the education level of women. The Hindu Woman's Right of Separate Residence and Support Act, which was passed in 1946, made it possible for Hindu wives to file maintenance claims even in the absence of a judicial separation in certain situations. As a result of a piece of social law passed in 1872 called the Civil Indian Marriage Act, women were given a new social standing. The barbaric practise of "Sati," which was

at its height during the 17th and 18th centuries, drew the attention of a significant number of educated Indians as well as the British, who were led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord William Bentinck. They worked together to put an end to the practise. On December 14, 1829, a historical resolution of significant importance was approved, which declared Sati a crime. This was accomplished in spite of tremendous resistance from many parties. However, the widow was treated poorly by her in-laws and other relatives since they believed she was responsible for her husband's death. The tragedy struck closer to home when it was revealed that the kid had been the widow. This revelation added a new layer of depth to the tragedy. As a result, in 1856, the British government enacted a law known as the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act. This Act was created in order to remove any and all legal obstacles that stood in the way of Hindu widows remarrying. After some time, the British administration came to the conclusion that organising the remarriage of Hindu widows is not a simple process. because the widows were forced to endure hardship due to the fact that they did not possess any property of their own. As a result, in 1937, the British government passed a law called the "Hindu Women's Right to Property Act" in an effort to ameliorate the economic situation of Hindu women. As a result of this Act, Hindu widows now have the legal right to demand a division of their property and the legal right to continue enjoying it during their lifetime. She was no longer reliant on the assistance of others. Mrs. Annie Besant, on the other hand, worked via the Indian Association in 1917 to support educational opportunities for women. 1920 saw the founding of the first federation of universities for women, while the year 1925 saw the beginning of the National Council of Women. Other organisations such as AryaSamaj, Gopal Krishan Gokhale, Swami Vivekanand, Pandita Ramabai, and Keshab Chandra Sen were among those who made significant contributions to the British administration in order to elevate the position of women.

## **WOMEN AND THE RAJ**

The British in India viewed themselves as a progressive force, particularly for the advancement of women's rights. They based their argument on the legislation that had just been passed that improved the legal standing of women. They made nine important changes to the system between the years 1772 and 1947. The laws that prohibit female infanticide, sati, and child marriage, as well as the laws that raise the age of consent, enable widows to remarry, and improve women's inheritance rights are all included in this category. In every one of these instances, they had the backing of Indian reformers. However, British support for the concerns was sometimes vague, and their actions on other topics contradicted their assertion that they were a progressive influence. Despite this, the issues continued to receive some attention from the British government. The official British policy was one of non-interference in personal and religious affairs. This policy, which impeded the emergence of social change in written legislation, was called the "non-interference in personal and religious matters." However, as Jana Matson Everett demonstrates, none of this would have been significant if Warren Hastings, the Governor of Bengal, had not interfered with the Hindu understanding of law in the year 1772. Custom was the foundation of Hindu law, which could be construed in a flexible manner in accordance with the prevalent view of the time and embodied a wide variety of methods according to cultural, geographical, and caste variations. The majority of laws were oral, with the exception of those enacted by brahmins (the highest caste). However, in an effort to bring Hindu tradition into conformity with British law, Hastings mandated that all Hindus follow the religious texts written by brahmins as their sole source of legal authority. This law was intended to be applicable to everyone in the same manner and to be based on the binding force of parliamentary acts that were interpreted according to precedent. The result of this was that the restrictions on Hindu women's lives that had previously been limited to high-caste women were extended to all Hindu women. In order to maintain the integrity of the caste system, high caste women were subject to the most stringent legal restrictions on

their ability to engage in certain activities. For example, the majority of women from upper castes were not allowed to hold immovable family property, could only marry once even if they had been widowed while they were young, and were not permitted to get a divorce. There was no social taboo against lower caste women divorcing their husbands or remarrying, and there was also no official restriction on their ability to hold property. Shortly after the British Crown assumed control of the government of India from the East India Company, Britain implemented more reforms that made Indian law more stringent. After 1864, the legal interpretation of religious texts by Hindu pundits was replaced by the decisions of Western-educated Indian judges who interpreted the texts according to developing precedent. In 1858, Victoria's Proclamation as the first Empress of India confirmed the policy of non-interference. The end result was that Indian law became even more firmly rooted in the past, so impeding its development in conformity with shifting social norms. Two cases exemplify the conflicting perspective that the British had toward the legal standing of women in India throughout their rule. They undoubtedly took credit for the most for the practise of Sati, which was the burning of widows. On the other hand, the collapse of the matrilineal family that was caused by the implementation of economic and legal measures is covertly forgotten about.

### **Sati**

The British claimed a significant portion of the credit for putting an end to sati. During the eighteenth century, members of some of the higher castes, particularly members of the Kshatriya caste (the second highest rank), participated actively in the ritual. One of the standards by which the success of a prince was judged in some realms was the number of ladies he brought to the death pyre with him. Twenty was the number that was believed to be "normal," although there were situations where there were as many as 84. Wellesley, who served as Governor General of India at the start of the nineteenth century, is credited with being the first person to bring up the issue in the British parliament. However, his request to outlaw sati was repeatedly denied. In 1812, 1815, and 1817, the British Government issued legislation that made it illegal to employ force or intoxication to coerce a woman into going to the pyre; nevertheless, they did not go so far as to abolish the practise of sati itself. In British India, the practise of sati was not ultimately outlawed until 1829, when it was made illegal by the liberal Governor-General Bentinck. In spite of the efforts of both Indian and British reformers, issue lingered unaddressed for more than twenty years until it was finally dealt with. Even among liberals like Bentinck, there was a lot of confusion about the British government's true intentions. During that time period in England, the liberal alliance that posed a challenge to the principles of the Conservative Party comprised of Radicals and Evangelicals. The former viewed India as backward and illogical, while the latter viewed its people as heathens who were waiting for the enlightenment of Christianity in order to be saved from superstitions such as sati. Their goal was not to establish gender equality; rather, it was to propagate their own brand of reason and, in each case, their particular faith. The prohibition of sati was the first time that the government intervened in the Hindu religion. The prohibition of sati was also the first step that the British government took toward the freedom of Indian women. The British government regarded this as their first step. However, the uncertainties underlying the action could be plainly observed in the ulterior objectives driving the involvement, as well as in the reluctance to interfere over the course of twenty years. In contrast, the regulations that were put on the matrilineal family expressly and purposefully eliminated the previous liberties that women had and set new limits on them.

### **Family origination**

As demonstrated by Maria Mies, the Nayars of Malabar in the state of Kerala maintained a matrilineal form of family until the British revoked the women's rights to marriage and inheritance in the nineteenth century.

Prior to this time, the Nayers had a matrilineal family structure. The Nayar family, also known as the "taravad," was composed of a woman, her brothers and sisters, and the offspring that each of the women had born in succeeding generations. After a marriage ceremony in which neither party gained any rights or obligations towards the other, women were granted the right to engage in sexual activity when they reached the age of puberty. After that, the lady would be able to have "sambandhan" relationships with visiting spouses, which are informal partnerships that can begin and terminate at any time. Because the men were required to reside with their mothers, they were only able to see their wives in the evenings. All members of the taravad shared ownership of the family property, which meant that it could not be divided until all of the members agreed that the taravad had become unmanageably huge. The eldest brother, also known as the "karanavan," had jurisdiction over the land and managed it, although he was unable to sell it. The taravad had the power to remove him from his position if they deemed him to be inept. The taravad did not include any fathers, spouses, or in-laws among its members. There was no idea of a marital family, and there was no father-child bond since sambandhan partnerships did not have to be permanent in order for them to exist. Instead, the natal family supplied for all of its members' subsistence needs.

The British government during the nineteenth century established a series of legislation that had the effect of dramatically rearranging the Nayar family's system of sexuality and inheritance. In the year 1868, a legislation was enacted that said a man was legally obligated to pay for his wife and children, despite the fact that this obligation was meaningless within the framework of the taravad. After this, Karanavans began to give taravad land to their own offspring, which resulted in the filing of 4,365 lawsuits against them in the courts of Travancore between the years 1887 and 1906. The Madras Marriage Act was passed in 1896 and defined the sambandhan relationship as a monogamous marriage. The Madras Marriage Act also gave the wife and children the right to maintenance from the husband. The only way to dissolve the marriage was through the legal system. Thankfully, the regulation did not have much of an impact because sambandhan partnerships were not required to be recorded. Following this, a number of Nayar Regulation Laws were passed that declared the act of giving a gift to a woman (which was customary at the beginning of a relationship) to be a legal act of marriage; prohibited polygamy; mandated that a marriage could only be dissolved through the process of a legal divorce; and granted the non-Nayar father the right to inherit the property of his wife's family. As a consequence of this, the puberty wedding as a symbolic rite of passage no longer exists. In contrast to the taravad, where all property was held in common ownership, the Malabar Wills Act of 1898 granted the male the ability to leave his private property to his children. This was previously impossible under the taravad system.

The 1912 Travancore Nayar Regulations allowed for the split of taravad land, and the 1933 Madras Marriage Act identified the children of a man's wife as his heirs rather than the children of his sister, who are known as the taravad. The British viewed the sexual freedom of the women as promiscuity rather than simply as a different form of family organisation, and they viewed the collective ownership of property through the female line as the dispossession of the males. Additionally, the British viewed the inheritance of property through the female line as the dispossession of property. Their assault on the Nayar organisation of sexuality and inheritance resulted in the dismantling of the matrilineal family structure, the abolition of the women's sexual rights, the elimination of communal property ownership, and the deprivation of the women of their inheritance. As demonstrated by Maria Mies, the transition was not the unavoidable consequence of urbanisation and industrialization; rather, it was the result of concerted legal and economic actions taken by the British in order to eradicate a type of social organisation that the British held a strong animosity toward.

### **The importance of women's subordination to the Raj**

The British approach to the situation of women was inconsistent, as seen by the conflicting acts taken with regard to sati and matrilineal families, as well as the attack on the Hindu notion of law. They made the legislation more lenient for certain categories of women, while at the same time restricting it for others. They asserted that they were both a liberating influence and that their policy was one of noninterference simultaneously. The reality of the matter is that they were quite selective in both their lack of intervention and their liberalising of the situation. This was due to the fact that the subjection of women by Indian males supplied the British with one of their favourite arguments for their control over India as a foreign power. They had an interest in both preserving the lowly position of women and in advancing it toward greater equality. The purpose of the first was to demonstrate that India was not yet ready for self-rule, and the purpose of the second was to show that Britain was superior in terms of how it handled relationships between the sexes. The debate that was sparked as a result of the publication of *Mother India*, a book published in 1927 by Katherine Mayo, is a good example of this point. The author came to the conclusion that male supremacy, not British colonialism, was to blame for India's "poor, disease, ignorance sadness, ineffectiveness inferiority". The book emphasised the negative impacts that patriarchal abuses had on women. The book offered the ideal justification for denying India's requests for self-rule by merging the two distinct topics of imperialism and patriarchy into a single argument. The book was said to have shown "the filthy habits of even the most highly educated castes in India-which, like the degradation of Hindu women, are unsurpassed even amongst the most primitive African or Australian savages," according to an article that was published in the *New Statesman* in 1927. (quoted in Andrews, 1967: 114). And it came to a conclusion with this: 'Katherine Mayo renders the claims for Swaraj (Self Rule) as senseless as the will to give it is virtually criminal.' It is possible that the defensive reactions it provoked among Indians could have been categorised as apologies for patriarchy if the book had not been written in the context of foreign rule, or if it had acknowledged the contribution of colonialism to the maintenance of patriarchal abuses; however, the colonial context confounded such an interpretation. Because Mayo's work was utilised by the equally patriarchal British not to fight for the eradication of male supremacy but rather to maintain the oppression of imperialism, we may say that Mayo's book contributed to the maintenance of imperialism. The establishment of British colonial power in India was partially supported by the institution of Indian patriarchy, which served as one of the cornerstones of that rule.

### **WOMEN AND SWARAJ**

It should not come as a surprise, given the way in which patriarchy was utilised by the colonists, that when women began to organise against male domination during the last fifty years of the Raj, they focused on imperialism as one of the major causes of their oppression. This occurred during the time period in which the Raj was in power. As Geraldine Forbes points out, the women did not place blame for their subordination on the men, but rather on the customs that had developed as a result of India's history of wars, invasions, and imperialism. They also argued that the problem of foreign dominance could not be divorced from the issue of women's rights. By equating the liberation of women with the liberation of India and creating an alliance with the national movement in the fight for Swaraj, they were able to defuse objections from the male population and win support for their cause. The liberation movement also benefited from this collaboration, so it's not like the ladies were the only ones who got something out of it. Gandhi saw the need of involving women in the Swaraj campaigns in order to build a widespread movement, and because of this, he was able to connect the concept of national liberation with the idea of women's freedom. According to what he had remarked, "many of our movements" come to a halt "halfway

because of the condition of our ladies." A significant portion of our efforts do not provide the desired results. It is demonstrated by Gail Omvedt that one of his accomplishments as the head of the Indian National Congress was to mediate the discontents of the bulk of women so that they remained focused at foreign domination. This helped unite both sexes behind the cause of independence in India (Omvedt, 1975: 47). However, there was a more fundamental reason for Gandhi to respect the participation of women in the movement than the fact that it was so successful numerically. He believed that women's qualities made them perfectly suited to his philosophy and practise of non-violent resistance. In fact, he suggested that he had learned this approach from his wife's implacable but silent resistance to his own demands on her. He believed that women's qualities made them perfectly suited to his philosophy and practise of non-violent resistance (Kishwar, 1983: 46). He was of the opinion that women will rise to the top of the "satyagraha" (nonviolent resistance) movement, which is predicated on the concept of self-sacrifice: "I do feel that it is woman's duty to display ahimsa (nonviolence) at its greatest and best...." As a result, a woman is better equipped than a male to practise ahimsa. I believe that when it comes to the guts to be a self-sacrificer, women are superior to men, just as I believe that men are superior to women when it comes to the fortitude to be a monster.

And he had no doubt about who had the most to contribute to the struggle or which sex he would prefer to have as his campaigners: I would love to find that my future army contained a vast preponderance of women over men. I would love to find that my future army contained a vast preponderance of women over men. If there were more women involved, I would have more self-assurance going into the battle than if there were more guys. The former's aggressiveness fills me with fear. Women would be my assurance that we would not have such a pandemic.

### **Freedom for India**

In point of fact, women participated in all aspects of the Swaraj movement, including nonviolent and violent protests, legal and illegal activities. According to what Aparna Basu says, "Women organised themselves into groups and were eager to join processions, despite the risk of being shot by police and going to jail." They disobeyed the rule about salt and picketed stores that sold alcohol and textiles made in a foreign country. There were some women who joined terrorist groups and assisted in the production of explosives as well as the editing and distribution of periodicals that were forbidden. It is impossible for a critic to overlook the fact that the Freedom Movement was successful in drawing women out of their isolation. According to the observations of the British historian Percival Spear, "the event that helped more than any other single thing to expedite the establishment of women's rights was the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-31." [Civil disobedience movement] The sentiment at the time was so intense that women who were already active in public life joined Congress Committees and began organising pickets outside of liquor and clothing stores, as well as processions and demonstrations. At the same time, many thousands of women emerged from conditions of privacy and semi-seclusion in order to support the cause. Some of these individuals were so passionate about their cause that on occasion, like as in Delhi, they took charge of the whole Congress activity in a region until they were jailed. (Spear, 1970: 213-214). During the time of the campaigns, an eyewitness from England described the following sight with awe and amazement, saying, "As the day wore on, even in the European streets I saw that in ones and twos Indian ladies were sitting themselves on chairs at the doors of particular stores." But if anybody tried to enter, the lady would clasp her hands together in a pleading gesture. She pleaded, she reasoned, and if none of those things worked, she would throw herself over the entrance and dare him to step over her body. These ladies have been known to throw themselves in front of a car and lie on the ground in front of its wheels until the

driver gives in and returns the prohibited items he has purchased from the shop.... The protesters were arrested in the hundreds, but there were always others to take their place. If they have not yet succeeded in gaining sway over India's government, at the very least they have freed themselves from the constraints of their own sexuality. Even in the more conservative northern states, I could hear the tearing of veils and curtains. As a result of the campaign of civil disobedience, the British government responded by classifying the National Congress as a criminal organisation and arresting the majority of its leaders. It was at this moment that the women on their own initiative took over the direction and organisation of the campaign, surprising even Nehru in the process. At this point, the most of the male people were incarcerated. After that, a surprising occurrence took place. Our women marched to the front lines and seized command of the resistance movement. Women had always been there, of course, but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British government but also their own menfolk by surprise.... Here were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working class women, rich women, and poor women, pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government order and police lathi (baton).'

The names of some of the woman leaders are now well-known across Indian history. After Gandhi's incarceration, Sarojini Naidu took control of the salt protest and led it until she was also taken into custody (Everett. 1981: 114). According to what her biographer stated, she was known as the Indian Judith, and she was overheard telling the authorities, "We want no quarter and we shall give none, and I will cut the barbed wire with pliers, and capture the salt with my own hands." The biographer of Nehru's sister made the following observation on Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, "Processions exclusively of women marched through cities, towns, and back country roads," which demonstrates how fearless Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was. After leaving their houses in the thousands, they immediately positioned themselves in the front of the line of march where police and troops were blocking it. It is said that Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay... persuaded other women to join her cause by interposing herself between the men who were surrounding Gandhi and the British cavalry that was about to ride them down. She did this by saying something to the effect that "it is much harder to murder women than men." When given the order to charge, British troops disobeyed, and Kamaladevi became and continues to be revered as a national hero. But disobedience on the part of the army in response to women participating in civil disobedience was an anomaly. Whether it was a peaceful march or a display of passive resistance, British army and police officers as well as government officials had no qualms about giving orders for women to be punished with the same violence as the males. On the 21st of January 1931, Gangabehn Vaidya led a parade in Borsad that consisted of 1200 ladies. Gangabehn was badly beaten up and bled excessively during the parade, but she did not give up the tricolour she was carrying despite the fact that the procession was lathi-charged. She spent her whole life up till 1934 in and out of jail. In addition, it wasn't just the female leaders who were treated poorly. During the salt campaign, more than 80,000 persons were arrested, and of those, more than 17,000 were women. The British government often handed out sentences of two years of harsh incarceration to adolescent females "for the simple act of yelling slogans or convening in assembly." After the police were unable to make any more arrests because the jails were already at capacity, they turned to other methods of intimidating the women: "The then Government of India, which considered itself the custodian of Lancashire and Manchester interests, was certainly not going to look on complacently at these feminine antics." The act of picketing was deemed unlawful, and protesters immediately began to be detained for their participation; yet, the more the number of arrests, the greater the number of protesters. In point of fact, the prohibition did nothing but stoke the flames of the campaign; detainees started being released without charges being brought against them since the problem of holding them became an

untenable one. The police used a variety of tactics to frighten the female population. In some areas, notably the larger cities, they put them in police vans, drove them into the surrounding wilderness, and then let them go when it was dark, with the expectation that they would be too terrified to return to the battlefield again. This tactic was used in the larger cities. But it did not work. In several locations, the police used water hoses to spray the ladies in an effort to make them feel uncomfortable and disgrace them. Additionally, they attempted to attack them by hitting them and throwing mustard and pepper powder at them.

The authorities from the very beginning regarded women as intruders and resented their presence in the movement. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay made the observation that the British did not like the presence of large numbers of women in the movement because it exposed police brutality and added a moral dimension to the struggle. Women contributed unquestionably more moral weight to the cause, while also throwing into greater focus the crimes committed by police. In the beginning, the officials were merely grumbling and swearing under their breath, but later on, they grew more vocal about their concerns.

One of the most striking aspects of the Freedom Movement, which was picked up on by spectators from all over the world, was the presence of women who took an active part in the campaign of deliberately breaching the law. The movement itself and analysts both current and historical agreed with Kamaladevi's conclusion that a new chapter had begun in the history of Indian women with the very first phase of the political movement. There is no question in anyone's mind that they played an important part. It is possible to say, without a shadow of a doubt, that the movement could not have been a success without their assistance.

### **Women's liberation**

Not only did the women battle for the liberation of India, but they also fought for other causes. They also laboured toward the liberty of themselves. Since its origin, the Women's Movement has maintained significant ties with the Freedom Movement; nevertheless, the Women's Movement became more clearly political as a direct result of the radicalising impact of involvement in the battle for Swaraj. They initiated the formation of independent women's organisations, within which they formulated an analysis of the oppression of women as well as a plan of action (Forbes, 1982). They saw their oppression as stemming from the impact of imperialism, which is why they put their energy into the Swaraj campaigns. However, they also saw their oppression in the patriarchal organisation of the family, and they expressed this view through a number of demands, one of which was the Hindu Code. Ultimately, they wanted to see a change in the Hindu Code. The Hindu Code enacted a number of reforms in the domain of personal law, such as marriage and inheritance, which had a disproportionately negative impact on women. Monogamy, marriages between people of different castes and religions, divorce, and equal inheritance and adoption rights for women were all included in the provisions of the Code, which was finally enacted into law after independence. It was opposed by many men in the National Movement due to the fact that it threatened the foundation of their own privilege in the family; however, the Code was eventually passed into law after the first General Election, largely as a result of Nehru's sponsorship of the legislation and his established supremacy in the new government (Everett, 1981: 187-188). Additionally, the women's organisations attempted to have housework included in the process of national accounting (Mazumdar, 1979: xvi) and attempted to get a phrase into the Constitution ensuring equality in marriage. Both of these initiatives were unsuccessful. Both attempts were unsuccessful, but they show that the Women's Movement had a clear vision of the source of their oppression, which lay in the personal spheres of marriage, inheritance, and domesticity, in addition to the influence of imperialism. Both of these factors contributed to the oppression

of women. Concerning a number of their other objectives, the male members of the Freedom Movement provided a more unequivocal show of support. For instance, women's suffrage was supported by all of the major political organisations in India as early as 1919, and this support was given for a variety of different reasons. One was the idea that any expansion of voting rights for Indians would almost certainly work against the interests of the British. Another goal was to show that India was anxious for women to receive the vote, in contrast to the actions of British males, who did not completely enfranchise their own women until 1928, after a campaign that lasted for half a century. This was demonstrated by Dumasia, a member of the Provincial Assembly, who provided an illustration of this point when she commented on India's embrace of the notion of female suffrage by saying:

"It is heartening to see that in a country where males are accused of treating women like chattels, the political growth of women has been more fast than in England," said one commentator. The ideas of female suffrage and sexual equality were included in the draught Constitution that the Indian National Congress created in 1928 as a direct result of the efforts that the Women's Movement undertook in relation to both national and female liberty. In the years leading up to independence, Congress established universal adult suffrage as well as a constitutional guarantee of racial, religious, and caste equality. Therefore, women not only played an essential and active role in the fight against imperialism, but they were also responsible for the introduction of two revolutionary concepts into the political system of India. These concepts included universal adult suffrage as well as economic and political equality of the sexes. Women were responsible for both of these developments.

## Conclusion

In India, throughout the time leading up to its independence, there was a gradual decrease in the proportion of women in the population. It was believed that the most significant contributor to this drop was the practise of sex selection abortion. During the time of the Vedas, women enjoyed a place within society that was characterised by respect and acknowledgment; nevertheless, this status gradually eroded over the course of Vedic history. It is clear from Indian culture that women are honoured in the form of the goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Durga. On the other hand, Indian women have a history of being subjected to ill treatment, including the practises of female infanticide and female foeticide, as well as other types of verbal and physical abuse. Polygamy, sati, child marriage, widow remarriage, right to property, and the killing of female infants were only few of the issues that plagued women throughout the mediaeval period. Other issues that plagued women during this time were child marriage. Women in Indian society were not accorded favourable treatment prior to the arrival of Islam. However, with the arrival of Islam, significant advancements were made in their status, including their right to live, right to education, right to equality, and right to own property. In other words, women's rights were improved.

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