



INDIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

As Nancy Rothburn says, "A strong woman understand that the gifts such as logic decisiveness and strength are just as feminine as intuition emotional connection. She values and uses all of her gifts", many Indian women showed their decisiveness and strength in politics as an iron lady. The woman is always considered weak and fragile on the basis of her womanly qualities such as love and emotion. But, when she rebels and decides, she not only rivals the man but also compels the man to command her. So, on her quality, Plato says, "If women are expected to do the same work as men, we must teach them the same things" .He means that woman has been gifted the same quality and ability equivalent to the man. The history has shown that along with the powerful men who changed the course of history, there were a number of powerful women too who shone and blazed as a fiery path for countless women in their journey of trials and tribulations. In the words of Dorothy L. Sayers, " Whenever you find a man, you will find a great mother or a great wife standing behind him or so they used to say. It would be interesting to know how many great women have had great father and husbands behind them". So, we have to see such Indian women who sacrificed and spent the every moment of pleasure and luxury for others and for their nation.

The Rigvedic women in India enjoyed high status in society. Their condition was good. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were many women Rishis during this period. Though monogamy was mostly common, the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy.¹

Women often enjoyed prominent roles in politics. Megasthenes mentioned the Pandya women running the administration. The Satavahana queen, Naynika ruled the kingdom on behalf of her minor son. So did Pravabati, daughter of Chandragupta II, on behalf of her minor Vakataka Prince. A little after the Gupta period, queens used to rule in Kashmir,



Orissa and Andhra. Princess Vijaybhattorika acted as the provincial ruler under the Chalukya King; Vikramaditya I. Women were provincial and village administrators in the Kannada region.

Indian women's position in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period, when child marriages and a ban on remarriage by widows became part of social life in some communities in India. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought purdah to Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan the Jauhar was practiced. In some parts of India, some of Devdas were sexually harassed.² Polygamy was practiced among Hindu Kshatriya rulers for some political reasons.³ In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas of the house.

In spite of these conditions, women often became prominent in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion.⁴ The pages of history have shown that along with powerful men who changed the course of history, there were a number of powerful women too who shone as a fiery path blazer for countless women in their journey of trials and tribulations.

Razia Sultan (1205- 1240) became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi (1236-1240). She was a brave Sultana and she belonged to slave dynasty.⁵ She succeeded her father Shams-ud-din Iltutmish to the Sultanate of Delhi in 1236. She was talented, wise, brave, excellent administrator, and a great warrior that attracted her father which resulted that she became the next sultana of slave dynasty. One of Iltutmish's sons, Rukn-ud-din Citizens occupied the throne. He ruled Delhi for about seven months. In 1236, Razia Sultana defeated her brother with the support of the people of Delhi.⁶ Though her reign was just for three years, her bravery, her struggle and her undaunted spirit has been preserved in the treasures of history. Razia Sultan's tomb in Delhi is one of those places, which relieves the unthwarted spirit of the brave woman who ruled Delhi once and for all.⁷

Being an efficient ruler Razia Sultana set up proper and complete law and order in her empire. She tried to improve the infrastructure of the country by encouraging trade, building roads, digging wells. She also established schools, academics, centers for research and public libraries that included the works of ancient philosophers along with the Quran and the traditions of Muhammad. Hindu works in the sciences, philosophy, astronomy and literature were reportedly studied in schools and colleges. She contributed even in the field of art and culture and encouraged poets, painters and musicians.⁸

Gond Queen Durgavati Marvi (1524-1564) ruled for fifteen years in South before losing her life in a battle with Mughal emperor Akbar's general Asaf Khan in 1564. She was born in the family of famous Rajput Chandel ruler Raja Keerat Rai and her mother was the daughter of the famous Rajput King Maharana Sanga. From a very young age she was well versed in horse riding, sword fighting and archery.



Chandel dynasty ruled the Bundel Khand reign of central India between 9th and 13th centuries. One of the Chandel Kings was the famous Vidyadhar Rao who defeated Mahmud of Ghazni when he first invaded India in the 12th century. The famous Khajuraho temples were built by this dynasty.

Durgavati soon grew up to be a brave and beautiful woman and in order to strengthen the dynasty her father got her married to Dalpat Shah who was the eldest son of king Sangram Singh of the Gond dynasty.⁹ This resulted in the alliance of the Chandel and Gond dynasties proving beneficial especially during the invasion of Shershah Suri. Soon she gave birth to a son who was named Vir Narayan. After a few years her husband Dalpat Shah passed away but as her son was too young at that time she took over the throne helped by her dedicated and loyal ministers.

Rani Durgavati proved to be an effective and capable ruler. She moved her capital to a more strategic fort location as this fort in the Satpura hill ranges was located among hills and ravines which made it a formidable place of defence. She extended her territory and unified politically Garha- Katanga also called Gondwana with courage and tact. She was a liberal patron of learning and managed a large and well equipped army. Trade flourished and the kingdom became prosperous under her able rule.

While fighting bravely with enemy, fearing that she would be captured by the Mughals and to save herself from ignominy and dishonor she is said to have taken her own life in 1564.¹⁰

She was a symbol of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. She respected and extended her patronage to scholars, saints and intellectuals. She valued self-respect and honour more than life itself.

Chand Bibi defended Ahmadnagar against the powerful Mughal forces of Akbar in the 1590s. Jehangir's wife Nur Jehan effectively wielded imperial power and was recognized as the real power behind the Mughal throne. The Mughal princess Jahanara and Zebunnissa were well known poets, and also influenced the ruling powers.

Jijabai (Jan 12, 1598-Jun 17, 1674) was the mother of Shivaji, perhaps the most famous and successful Hindu warriors of the medieval age.¹¹ The life of his mother, Jijabai, is no less inspiring or sacred, and takes a proud place in our history. Her father, Lakhujji Jadhavrao, was an important leader serving under the Muslim Nizamshahi administration. During those days, many Hindu leaders of that region were serving under the Nizam. They had small armies of their own and had obtained lands, high position and ranks under the Nizam. But they hated one another and were always trying to increase their power and prestige at the expense of one another.



Jijabai was married with Shahaji, a son of Maloji Bhosale who was serving under Lakhojirao Jadhav, in her childhood.

When the Mughals invaded the Nizam's dominions, Shahaji was entrusted to look after the fort of Mahuli and Jadhavrao joined in the attack .After 6 months resistance, Shahaji had to evacuate the fort, with Jijabai who was then 4 months pregnant .Jijabai got to Shivaneri, where she gave birth to Shivaji.

She used to pray, while pregnant in the temple of Jagadamba, "O mother of the universe, give me some of your strength .Put an end to the pride of the Marathas in the shameful service to the Muslims .Grant our lands independence. Grant that my wish be fulfilled, O mother".¹² She was angered at being around men whom could not protect their women, children, country and religion. She longed that her son may be part of a generation who could do this. She studied the intricate political problems at the country, in the company of experienced politicians and diplomats .She could see people falling into poverty in the one rich land and could see the culture which she loved so much being disintegrated .If only a leader could be born who could unite the scattered Hindus. It was ordered that while she was pregnant, every comfort be conferred upon her ,but she wished for none of it .Rather she wanted to climb to the tops of forts on hills,to wield swords, to discuss political questions, to put on armor and ride on horse back.¹³ It has been said that in ancient Hindu culture and is a proven fact today,that the pregnant mother, by the environment she provides,by the thoughts she thinks and by what she wishes for her born child, does a tremendous amount to shape the child's life for good or bad.In Vedic traditions,there are a series of sacraments and chants to be carried out as to optimize the child's potentials. Jijabai infused in Shivaji such a spirit that was to emerge with great force throughout his life. So he established his own Maratha Empire against Mughals to protect Hindu and Hinduism. ¹⁴

Maharani Tarabai (1675-1761) also known as Rani Tarabai, was the Maratha Queen and the wife of Rajaram, son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja. After the death of Rajaram Maharaj in 1700, Tarabai became the defector head of government. She crowned her son Shivaji II, then a child of four and became

His regent.¹⁵

Tarabai is remembered for continuing the Maratha war of Independence and defending the territories of the Marathas. The Queen of Maratha Empire was a spirited lady who did not waste time or tears on the fall of the new Maratha Capital Satara within a month of Rajaram's death.¹⁶ She infused vigor in her people and organized a tough opposition to Aurangzeb.

Yesubai was the wife of the second Maratha Chhatrapati Sambhaji. She was the daughter of Pilajirao Shirke, a Maratha sardar, who was in the services of Chhatrapati Shivaji.¹⁷



Yesubai was taken prisoner along with her young son Shahu, when the Maratha fort Raigad was captured by the Mughals in 1689. Aurangzeb never looked after them although they were carried with him, place to place. After Aurangzeb's death in 1707 his son, the new Mughal emperor Azam released Shahu to incite divisions in Maratha ranks. The Mughals, however, kept Yesubai captive for another decade or so to ensure that Shahu kept to the terms of the treaty he signed upon his release. Finally in 1719, the Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath Bhat got her released when he negotiated a wide ranging treaty with the Mughals that recognized Shahu as the rightful heir of Shivaji.¹⁸

Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar (1725-1795) was the Holkar Queen of the Maratha ruled Malwa kingdom, India. Rajmata Ahilyabai born in the village of Chondi in Jamkhed, Ahmadnagar. She moved the capital to Maheshwar, south of Indore on the Narmada River.

Her husband Khanderao Holkar was killed in the battle of Kumbher in 1754. Twelve years later, her father-in-law, Malharrao Holkar died. A year after that she was crowned as the queen of the Malwa kingdom. She tried to protect her kingdom from the Muslim invaders, the plunderers. She personally led armies into battle. She appointed Tukojirao Holkar as the chief of the army.¹⁹

Ahilya bai was a great builder and patron of many Hindu temples which embellished Maheshwar and Indore. She also built temples and Dharamshala at sacred sites outside her Kingdom.²⁰

Rani Laxmibai (Nov.19,1828- Jun.18,1858) was born as Manikarnika on Nov.19,1828, in the holy town of Varanasi into a Marathi Deshastha Brahmin family. She was nicknamed as Manu. Her father was Moropant Tambe and her mother Bhagirathi Sapre. Her parents came from Maharashtra. Manikarnika was married to the Maharaja of Jhansi, Raja Gangadharrao Newalkar, in May 1842 and was afterwards called Laxmibai in honour of Hindu Goddess Laxmi.²¹ She gave a birth to a boy, later named Damodar Rao, in 1851, who died after 4 months. The Maharaja adopted a child called Anand Rao, the son of Gangadharrao's cousin, who was renamed Damodar Rao, on the day before the Maharaja died. The adoption was in the presence of the British political officer who was given a letter from the Maharaja instructing that the child be treated with respect and that the government of Jhansi should be given to his widow for her lifetime. After the death of Maharaja in November 1853, because Damodar Rao was adopted, the British East India company, under Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, applied the Doctrine of Lapse, rejecting Damodar Rao's claim to the throne and annexing the state of its territories. In March 1854, Laxmibai was given Rs.60000 and annual pension of Rs.5000 and ordered to leave the palace and the fort.²² So she rebelled against the British Raj in Indian Rebellion of 1857 and died on June 18, 1858 on the age of 29, at Kotah ki Serai near Gwalior.



Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) (born as Sarojini Chattopadhyay) also known by the sobriquet as the Nightingale of India.²³ She was an Indian Independence activist and poet. Naidu served as the first governor of the United Province of Agra and Oudh from 1947 to 1949, the first woman to become the governor of an Indian state.²⁴ She was the second woman to become the president of the Indian National Congress in 1925 and the first Indian woman to do so.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (1900-1990) was an Indian diplomat and politician, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, the aunt of Indira Gandhi and the Grand aunt of Rajiv Gandhi, each of whom served as Prime minister of India.

She was first Indian woman to hold a cabinet post. In 1937, she was elected to the provincial legislature of the United Provinces and was designated minister of local self - government and public health. She held the latter post until 1939 and again from 1946 to 1947.²⁵ In 1946 she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces.

Following India's freedom from British occupation in 1947, she entered the diplomatic service and became India's ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1947 to 1949, the United States and Mexico from 1949 to 1951, Ireland from 1955 to 1961 and Spain from 1958-61. Between 1946 and 1968, she headed the Indian delegation to the United Nations. In 1953, she became the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly.²⁶

In India, she served as Governor of Maharashtra from 1962 to 1964, after which she was elected to the Indian Parliament's lower house, Lok Sabha from Phulpur, her brother's former constituency from 1964 to 1968. Pandit was a harsh critic of her niece, Indira Gandhi's Prime minister years specially after Indira had declared the emergency. She retired from active politics after relations between them soured. On retiring, she moved to Dehradun in the Doon valley, in the Himalayan foothills.

Indira Gandhi (Nov.19, 1917-Oct.31,1984) was a key 20th century Stateswoman, a central figure of the Indian National Congress Party, and to date the only female Prime minister of India.²⁷ She was the first child of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. She served as Prime minister of India from 1966 to 1977 and then again from 1980 until her assassination in 1984, making her the second - longest - serving Prime minister after her father.

As Prime minister of India, Gandhi was known for her political ruthlessness and unprecedented centralization of power. She went to war with Pakistan in support of the independence in East Pakistan, which resulted in an Indian victory and the creation of Bangladesh, as well as increasing India's influence to the point where it became the regional hegemony of South Asia. Gandhi also presided over a controversial state of emergency from 1975 to 1977 during which she ruled by decree. She was assassinated in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards a few months after she ordered the storming of the Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar.



to counter the Punjab insurgency.²⁸

Pratibha Devisingh Patil (born on Dec.19, 1934) is an Indian Politician who served as the 12th President of India from 2007 to 2012. A member of the Indian National Congress, Patil is the woman only to hold the office. She previously served as the Governor of Rajasthan from 2004 to 2007.

These women shone the name of India in the world. These women ushered the path of glory and success. They put an ideal before other women to show that they have all the capacities to rival the men. So today's Indian woman is not that woman who was entangled only for hearth and child in past as Lord Tennyson says in his poem ' The Princess ' ,

*" Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword and for the needle she,
Man with head and woman with the heart;
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion " (Lines 427-431).*

but she can govern the administration and becomes a politician as her right which is given by the constitution. So India has the great proud of such women.

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