



# HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WOMEN'S HISTORY IN INDIA

**Researching the Past, Reflections to the Present**

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**Abstract:** Women's history is the study of the role that women played in history, including the development of women's rights as documented in history, the evaluation of a historical figure, and the repercussions of historical events on women. When we properly examine history, one remarkable and obvious parallel is that women have been exploited and subjugated in all cultures, civilizations, and even societies of various faiths and religions throughout the ages. As the phrase goes, "old habits die hard," and some of the social sins that plagued women in the nineteenth century or earlier are still practiced today, even by educated people. With this context in mind, this paper attempts to provide an outline of developments in the historiography of women's history in India since ancient times.

**Index Terms – Subjugation, Women's History, Clio's consciousness, Matrilineal system, Stereotyped roles, Stridhana, Sahadharmini, Pativrata Dharma, Recasting Women**

## INTRODUCTION

Historiography went through massive changes in 20<sup>th</sup> century especially after the Second World War and the need for women's history is now recognized to a certain extent. Political history was replaced and challenged by socio-cultural history with broadening perspective towards theoretical innovations and brought new fields into historiography, most notably gender history which brought to historiography in the form of women history. However, gender studies are an independent discipline which brought fifty per cent of the population into the focus of historical studies that was previously generally gender blind or simply masculine.

Women are now well-known to receive little or no attention in conventional historical literature. One explanation for this is that traditional history has tended to focus on male-dominated spheres of human activity — politics, warfare, diplomacy — in which women played little or no role. The only women in conventional history textbooks were either women who successfully played male roles or women whom great men admired. Women's history emerged as an independent discipline in 1960s and 1970s because, the traditional historical writing has minimized and ignored the contribution of women and also the effects of historical events on women as a whole, in this respect, women history is often aimed at historical revisionism seeking to challenge the traditional historical consensus.

Women's history is the study of the role that women played in history which includes the growth of women's rights as recorded in history and the examination of an individual woman of historical significance and the effects of historical events on women. When we analyze the history carefully, one striking and glaring similarity is that different cultures, civilizations and even societies of different faith and religions down the annals of time, women were exploited and subjugated. History was written mainly by men and about men's activities in public spheres politics, war and diplomacy and administration. Women was usually mentioned or portrayed in stereotyped roles such as mother, wives, daughter and mistress. Religious texts and sacred texts were interpreted in such a way that the women folk remained subjugated and chained by ancient beliefs and traditions. In addition, we read in the history the deplorable plight of Indian women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, wherein women were denied even basic human rights. The women were not treated at par with men, and there were many social evils like child marriage, female infanticide and the inhuman practice of Sati. Only a small section of girls had received education. Widow re-marriage was prohibited, devadasi system and dowry system denied liberty to women. As the saying goes 'old habits die hard', some of the social evils that haunted the women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the period before continued to be practiced till today even by the educated people. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this article to furnish an overview of the trends in the historiography of women's history in India since the ancient times.

## WOMEN'S HISTORY IN INDIA

In India, women's history began as an act of reclamation. It has progressed in the direction indicated by the names of major works published in English in the 1970s. Because women had been 'hidden from history,' the goal was to 'raise Clio's consciousness' by 'liberating women's history' from ignorance and neglect, and, as a result, women in history were 'becoming visible' in the resultant work. In recent years, perspective on the past has broadened tremendously. History is no longer merely a record of monarchs and rulers wielding power, but also of ordinary women and men engaged in a variety of occupations. Women's history asserts that women have a history, albeit one that has been skewed, if not completely obliterated, by the biases that pervade our culture and scholarship. We must regard women as political forces, as reformers and revolutionaries seeking identity in their nation, class, and themselves. Women must be visible as producers, peasants, labourers, artisans, domestic servants, and in their responsibilities in the family as wives, daughters, and mothers. Women historians are interested in the entirety of women's life.

Women's history is emerging as a new field of study at a particularly interesting period. It has been fueled by two connected but mostly distinct developments: the maturation of social history and the expansion of an active women's movement. The publication in 1974 of *Towards Equality*, the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, which concluded on the basis of a countrywide investigation that the de jure equality guaranteed by the Indian Constitution had not been translated into reality and that large masses of women had remained unaffected by the rights guaranteed to them, was a significant landmark in the field of women's studies in India. It called experts' attention to the social sciences' neglect of women's roles and contributions. The rise of the feminist movement in the West inspired Indian intellectuals as well. Despite the prominence of women's subjugation in Indian society, historical research on the origins and growth of the patriarchal system is lacking. It is also recognised that women's history cannot be studied in isolation from 'mainstream' history. Given the regional, class, and caste variances in patriarchal behaviours, as well as their different histories in Indian society, specialized research are clearly required before we can create any helpful theory.

In this article, I have undertaken a small survey of work done in the field of women's history in India during the ancient, medieval and modern periods. While there has been a lot of research done on women in ancient and modern India, the medieval period has been overlooked. After 1921, there was a significant increase in research papers on women, which can be attributed to the impact of women's engagement in the liberation movement. Between 1947 and the 1970s, there was a decrease in the number of publications on women, as it was believed that because women had been guaranteed equal rights in the Constitution, their disadvantages would soon disappear. Generally speaking, most of the work has been done on women's positions in society, women's education, and women's role in the freedom movement. On the other side, there is a scarcity of research on the role of women in the business, science, information technology, art and culture. In recent years, research methodology has shifted from broad historical analysis to a more detailed and specialized assessment of present problems. So far, little theoretical work has been done, but such problems are now being addressed and contested.

## WOMEN'S HISTORIOGRAPHY IN ANCIENT INDIA

In Indian history we can get references about the role of women from the beginning of the Indus Valley Civilization which flourished from about 3000 BC to 1500 BC in the north-western part of India. As per historical evidences relations with the human beings were governed by the collective nature of production and consumption. Men and women enjoyed equal status in raising food and in their family relations. The women's work and their contribution to the family were same as that of men. Nature was often called by the term 'mother'. Matrilineal system continued for long and women's status seem to have attained a superior one over men.<sup>1</sup>

Women held a very prominent position in ancient India, in fact a far superior one to the men of the time. The feminine term "Shakti" signifies "power" and "strong." According to literary sources, monarchs and towns were destroyed because the rulers bothered a single woman. According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Ravana and his entire kingdom were wiped out because he stole Sita. According to Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata, all of the Kauravas were murdered because they publicly ridiculed Draupadi. Elango Adigal's *Sillapathigaram* teaches us that Madurai, the Pandya capital, was burned because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan inadvertently harmed Kannagi.

The essence of the Vedic period has been reflected in the four Vedas and their different branches like Brahmanas and Upanishads. During Rig Vedic times, women enjoyed an equal status with men. The Vedic literature mentions the name of many young women who attained eminence as philosophers. References are available to us that it was improper to perform penance with the wife. During the Vedic era the patriarchal culture superseded the matriarchal culture. But patriarchy never suppressed women's rights and privileges. The Vedic people were not conscious about gender power-politics and conflict at that time because Vedic society was then at a developing stage not in a complex mode. Women, like males, took part in the public sacrifices. Visvavara, a female rishi, is mentioned in one script. Some Vedic songs are credited to women, such as Apala, Atri's daughter, Ghosa, Kaksivant's daughter, or Indrani, Indra's wife.

Apparently, in early Vedic times, women were also given the sacred thread and were able to study the Vedas. The *Haritasmriti* mentions a class of women known as *Brahmavadinis*, who stayed unmarried and spent their lives studying and performing rituals. Panini distinguished between *acarya* (a preceptor) and *acaryani* (a lady instructor or a preceptor's wife) and *upadhyaya* (a preceptor) and *upadhyayani* (a lady instructor or a preceptor's wife) implies that women could not only be students but also teachers of sacred Vedas at the period. There were some notable female scholars in the past, including Kathi, Kalapi, and Bahvici. The Upanishads include various female philosophers who disagreed with their male counterparts, such as Vacaknavi, who opposed Yajnavalkya. Women involved in fighting are also mentioned in the Rig Veda. One queen, Bispala, is recorded, and a witness as late as Megasthenes (fifth century B.C. E.) describes heavily armed female soldiers guarding Chandragupta's palace. The Hindu religion has been attacked on occasion for supporting gender inequality, to the detriment of Hindu women.

Female scholars from the Vedic period include Ghosha, Lopamudra, Romasha, and Indrani. Women philosophers such as Sulabha, Maitreyi, and Gargi are mentioned in the Upanishads. Hindus have exalted women to the status of divinity in religious affairs. One of the most common misconceptions about India and Hinduism is that it is a male-dominated society and religion, which is not the case. It is a religion that has given the feminine the terms for strength and power. The feminine is the source of all male power. Without their feminine equivalents, the Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) are powerless. But, the degradation of women status was started in the Later Vedic period. Smriti writers Manu, Yajnavalkya began to favour seclusion of women. Social customs and traditions were reinforced by the law-givers which degraded the position of women and the gender discrimination has begun. Patriarchal families became powerful during this period and restricted women's activities. They were "looked down upon as a temptation and hindrance in their march towards higher development".<sup>2</sup>

During the Epic Age, the position of women further decayed. She was compared with razor's edge, poison, snake and fire.<sup>3</sup> The women who did not listen to and obey the advice and orders of men-folk were either cursed or given names in ancient India.<sup>4</sup> Chastity and modesty of women was insisted upon and that was not common to men-folk, during the period. Men could suspect a fidelity and righteousness of women without properly analyzing the pros and cons of women's sincerity in daily life.<sup>5</sup> The Buddhist age

witnessed a serious change in the status of Indian women. Women were accepted as nuns in the Buddhist monasteries. Admission of women into the monastic order secured for them a religious status and they played a vital role in propagating Buddhism. But Buddhism never tried to abolish existing social order. The two main joint forces which degrade women position are joint family and caste system remained unalterable. That's why it has been argued that the Buddhism was failed to understand the situation of woman from the angle of social justice.<sup>6</sup> The writer of Arthashastra, Kautilya considered women as a child bearing machine and encouraged pre-puberty marriages which damaged child bride mentally and physically because she was not physically fit to conceive a child and the adolescent pregnancy carries higher risk due to toxemia (organic blood poisoning). The effects on physical health also affect women self-confidence level. Polygamy was practiced especially by rulers and noble men.<sup>7</sup>

During the Sangam period, though the wife was considered as the light of the home and was honoured, it cannot be said that she was an equal partner in the household. In fact, she occupied a subordinate position in the household and it was generally accepted by the women of that age. The ancient grammarians also assign mastery behaviour to men and retiring dispositions to women.<sup>8</sup> The position of women had deteriorated during the Gupta age. The women had to live under one or the other restriction from the cradle to the grave. They had no individual liberty. Practice of *sati* was considered a venerable act. There were no property inheritance rights for women. However, *Stridhana* was made obligatory. As far as livelihood matters of women are concerned, the women of the last two varnas enjoyed absolute freedom whereas it was not allowed for the first two varnas.<sup>9</sup> During the period of Harshavardhana women of the higher castes observed no purdah. The girls were married at an early age, but there was no widow remarriage and the practice of *sati* prevailed. Female education was restricted to higher classes only. Women at all levels without any protest suffered partial to total subordination to women and their contributions to family and society rarely recognized.<sup>10</sup>

While looking into the sources available, there was a marked transformation in the condition of women for worse. According to Romila Thapar, Manu was felt that the inter-caste marriage would pollute the Aryan society. He also makes some provision for punishment of a woman by her husband if she makes any faults. She should be beaten by rope or by bamboo. Manu never sanctioned widow remarriage because she should remain faithful to her husband's memory but the widower could marry again.<sup>11</sup> The Rig-Vedic concept of '*Sahadharmini*' was replaced by '*Patrivrata Dharma*'. This began a master-slave relationship between husband and wife. The right of choice of life-partner was also taken away from woman. The status of women had met with downward trend during later Vedic period and thereafter. Even Jainism and Buddhism, the egalitarian religions in their mission tried to rescue women from their ignominious status in vain.

## WOMEN'S HISTORIOGRAPHY IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

During the medieval period, the history of women seems to have been liberated from ignorance and neglect and they have become more 'visible', but this period has been a subject of intense debate among scholars. The early medieval period has been viewed as a dark period in Indian history characterized by a decline of trade, metal economy and urban centres. However, recent researches have shown that this period was marked by a revival of trade and urbanization. The changes in the society affect the position of women in very different ways as it affects the life of men of the same class or social groups. Number of inscriptional and literary sources acquaint us with the position of women during this period. In addition to these, there are literary and epigraphic sources to study the status of women during the medieval period. The use of both literary and epigraphical sources helps us to reconstruct history of women as they provide us integrated information on various issues and themes related to women.

While taking into consideration the peculiar characteristics of Peninsular Indian polity, the Medieval Indian society had experienced a definite transition as it was also marked with foreign invasion and rule. The influence of alien culture and the development of composite culture had a bearing on the changing attitudes of women. The women's participation in the societal activities with the exception of a few royal and elite women has not been brought to light. During the early medieval period the status of women was gone lower and she was regarded equal status of Sudras. After the invasion of Muslims, "all Indian religion and social customs were faced with a system which was equally formulated and definite". Occupation began to be determined by birth and the caste system became more rigid. Now the lower society of Hindu

castes got an opportunity to assert their dignity by convert to the religion of equality, i.e., Islam. That is the reason why Islam spread very fast in some parts of India.

During the period of the Cholas, the position of women in the Tamil society was mostly the same in other parts of South India. The social evils like devadasi system, sati and slavery were important practices that enslaved women in the Tamil country.<sup>12</sup> The most prominent feature of this period was women's dependence to her husband. Child marriage adversely affected the health of the girls. Besides Muslim rulers in India had large *harems* which encouraged polygamy, even among the Hindus there was no limit set to the number of wives a man can take. Another social evil that existed in medieval India was female infanticide which was prevalent among the Rajputs and other higher castes and even among the Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Purdah system gained popularity with the advent of the Muslims. Purdah is actually a Persian word and according to Patricia Jeffrey, "purdah is a part and parcel of social stratification in India. It becomes the mental foot binding, the frogs in a well syndrome, the submissiveness of the young bride and the inability of adult women to cope with the world outside".<sup>14</sup>

Female infanticide was a negative effect of dowry system but this system became an integral part of the marriage ceremony in medieval India. It became a heavy burden to the poor people. The condition of Hindu widow became more miserable during this period. She was forced to lead a life which was full of sorrows and was far from all worldly pleasure. The feudal society of medieval India encouraged the practice of Sati. According to Saroj Gulati, "because of the continuous wars, there were chances of too many widows young and old, and a big question was how to accommodate them without bringing stigma to the family or creating problems for society". Prostitution became a recognized institution in medieval India besides the Devadasi system in South India degraded the status of women. With the exception of big town and cities, the Hindu traditions and customs at the grassroots still held sway and the family life at this level did not get disturbed. In the feudal land relations, the size of the Hindu nobility was reduced due to the emergence of Muslim nobles, but the position of women-folk in general had remained more or less same as in the past.<sup>15</sup>

The Mughal rule was an extended but more of an Indianized version of the rule of the Delhi Sultanate and with a well-grown enlarged feudal characters. Though in this changing scenario, the women could get more space but they were slated for spicy roles in society. During this period, unlike the Muslim women, the Hindu women could play a role in the Bhakti Movement. In fact, the Bhakti Movement originated in South India first and spread to Northern India where it held sway till 16<sup>th</sup> century AD. As *Bhaktas*, the Hindu women also entered into the male domain and contributed their might towards the Bhakti cult in India. In matters of widow remarriage, divorce and property rights of women, the Muslim women enjoyed absolute rights whereas the Hindu women sulked in ignominy. The Muslim women despised with *sati* and almost all the Sultans and Mughal Emperors discouraged it as an abominable practice. The Muslim rule and the Bhakti Movement had helped in reducing the rigours of caste system in India.

It is widely acknowledged that effective growth and evolution of families, communities, and the nation as a whole cannot occur if women are not treated with respect and decency. They should be given opportunities to develop and enrich their life. When women are permitted to express their opinions and thoughts, they may make a vital contribution to the effective growth and development of families, communities, and the nation as a whole. Individuals in homes and communities must recognize that women should not be confined within their houses or remain in purdah, but rather that public observation should be promoted. The criteria that demonstrate that progress was made in women's rights. With this medieval legacy the Indian society had looked forward to a colonial regime of different economic system and social relations.

## WOMEN'S HISTORIOGRAPHY IN MODERN INDIA

Of all the foreign invasions, the advent of the British in India is different in many respects. In terms of impact that the rule had made on India on various aspects of society is significant and to some extent predominant over other foreign rule. The British era had brought in some changes in the socio-political and economic structure of the society. The contribution of European to rediscovery of India's ancient past was

widely accepted by several scholars and writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but their perception was influenced by British by two separate contradictory ways. One strand was represented by the Orientalists, whose reconstruction of the glory of Indian civilization was taken over lock, stock and barrel by 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian writers. Another strand was the Utilitarian and Evangelical attack on contemporary Indian society on the visibly low status of women. The early Indian nationalist writers successfully constructed an image of womanhood in the lost past as a counter to the real existence of woman in the humiliating present.

The woman question was not a theme that was fore grounded in the earliest work of the Asiatic Society. William Jones did not pay any attention to *sati*. It was Henry Thomas Colebrook who focused attention directly upon the women question on his first research, “One the Duties of the Faithful Hindu Widow” where he presented the textual position of *sati*.<sup>16</sup> In the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Raja Rammohan Roy declared crusade against sati, and argued that the ultimate goal of all Hindu was selfless absorption in a divine essence, a union that could not flow from an action like sati.<sup>17</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian intelligentsia group involve in a dual encounter with colonial ideology. Awareness of the past through Orientalist scholarship was encountered by a strong negative perception of the present and the missionaries, administrators and travelers were engaged in writing about this issue.

In response to the emerged liberal currents of the nineteenth-century renaissance, women made efforts to modify their socio-economic standing and position. Their slow evolution began with the logical beliefs of reformers and social intellectuals who believed that in order for the country to achieve freedom and self-government, women must be liberated enough to handle the new duties in free India. Women welcomed the fresh fragrance of the new education and readily absorbed it in their lifestyle and other social ends. The outworn traditions were willingly discarded by them, especially in the urban regions. They emerged as individuals "nationally important and socially useful." They daringly crossed every hurdle on their way to their emancipation. They swiftly marched ahead on the road to plenty, progress, and prosperity for themselves as well as for their nation.

Thus, from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the women-folk in India were given significant attention. With every custom affecting women having the silent blessings of religion and any chance or reform came to be considered as anti-religious.<sup>18</sup> The Christian missionaries who came to India were taken aback by the prevalent social scenario. They started propagating against the evil practices towards women. The women question became a crucial tool in the colonial ideology. Colonial writers focused on the barbaric practices pertaining to women of the Hindu civilization. One of the finest examples and best-known work in this perspective is James Mill’s “*History of British India*” where Mill suggested that the Hindus were a high cultured people but is now in a state of decline. His conclusion was that the practice of segregating women did not come with the “Mohammedans”; rather it was a consequence of the whole spirit of the Hindu society by which women must be constantly guarded at all times for fear of their intimate tendency towards infidelity. The degradation of women’s position in Hindu civilization requiring the protection and intervention of colonial state, that the Hindus were unfit to rule themselves. On this ground British rule in India could be justified by a humanitarian and moral level.<sup>19</sup> The Indian intellect classes react violently to this grim picture of Hindu civilization and marshaled argument against each major criticism.

The condition of women in past was a key aspect of historical writing in 1840s. One such example in this account provided by M.C.Deb, a converted Christian member of Young Bengal group, “men in India look upon women as household slaves and treat them with a superciliousness that even the Sultan of Turkestan does not show towards his meanest serf”. Clarisse Bader’s monograph on ancient Indian women was published in 1867 which was directly inspired by Max Mullerian view of romanticization of ancient past. According to Bader’s view the sati was an expression of woman’s ability to go beyond the bounds of requirement. This view was inspired by western Orientalists womanhood identity that a woman should be learned, free and highly cultured.

The woman question had dominated throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was something of a casualty during this period, it has faced a tremendous reaction against the Age of Consent Bill because of implicit fear of conservatives of the lost control over women’s sexuality. In addition, according to Jashodhara Bagchi, the inherent tension between past and present womanhood was resolved by Bankim Chandra in his last novels. In Ananda math he portrayed a woman character, Shanti who fights shoulder to shoulder with her husband in liberating the motherland from shackles. Here Shanti provided a role model of womanhood

closest to a national identity during late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, till up to Indian independence.<sup>20</sup> In the closing decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we have got a unique identity of Indian womanhood from Swami Vivekananda who characterized Hindu womanhood by her devotional and spiritual character instead of western materialist setting womanhood.

Pandita Ramabai Saraswathi, the feminist and social reformer of late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century say that the path was harder, as women of her days had not entered the public domain. Educated, outspoken and unorthodox, Ramabai lived her life on her own terms, while working for the social emancipation of women through institutional initiatives such as shelters for widows as well as through her writings and active public life. Kosambi draws attention to an aspect of Ramabai's perspective that almost anticipated the human development approach towards social and economic progress, namely, her belief that a society which oppresses its women and discriminates against them can never progress. In the changed political and social environment of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the women image which was portrayed by the nationalists was more important than the reality throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the image also came to be examined by the reality through the work of Altekar, as the historical reality.

Modern Indian women are educated, sophisticated, and self-sufficient, but they adhere to age-old life ideas and traditions. They were uninterested in western conceptions of feminism. The Indian government worked to not only establish legal reforms for their advancement, but also to make them a practical reality. Women in rural India have worked hard in a variety of sectors. They are employed in agricultural and cottage businesses. Modern Indian women are widely employed in a variety of fields. They operate in agriculture and cottage businesses. Modern Indian women work in a variety of respected professions in great numbers. Women's roles in the national battle, as well as their participation in the country's restoration, have been truly outstanding. They have made a name for themselves in every field and the story of their regeneration and participation in the task of nation building has grown in a progressive manner.

Kali for Women is credited with publishing the book that extended the horizon of historiographical research on Indian women from its initial concentration on uncovering women's voices and chronicling their colonial life experiences. *Recasting Women*, edited by two English literature professors at Delhi University, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, and containing writings by notable Indian historians such as Uma Chakravarti, Lata Mani, and Partha Chatterjee, was published in 1989 by Kali for Women. The editors indicated clearly in the preface the shift that the volume sought to mark within the historiographical area. Historiography can be feminist without being solely about women. Such historiography recognizes that every part of reality is gendered and, as a result, is concerned in examining everything we think we know, in a sustained investigation of analytical and epistemological machinery. A feminist historiography rethinks historiography as a whole, rejecting the notion of women as something to be framed by a setting in order to think of gender difference as both structuring and structured by a diverse set of social interactions.

*Recasting women* thus contributed to the broadening of the scope of women's history, which underwent a global change from women's to gender history in the second half of the 1980s. Accounts of women's lived experiences were mingled with studies of the discourses and narratives that shaped patriarchies in the colonial era, while the Subaltern Studies Group's impact led to the inclusion of concerns regarding the connection between elite and non-elite subjects. The early 1990s gender history was centered on a critique of modernity and development as generated by both nationalist aspirations and the colonial government. Postcolonial analyses impacted feminist historians' research on colonial India in these years, who read the narratives of the imperialist cultural endeavour through the lens of gender, centered on the dichotomy between a "Western self" and an "Oriental other" unchangeable in his customary passivity. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a number of transnational history projects took shape, implemented especially by scholars based in the United States. According to Ahluwalia, "feminist historians need to adopt a cross-national approach to question the agenda of those we are often tempted to celebrate because they forwarded a cause we understand as necessarily progressive".<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is well known by now that women receive little or no attention in traditional historical writing. One reason for this is that traditional history has tended to focus on areas of human activity in which men were dominant – politics, wars, diplomacy – areas in which women had little or no role. The only women who found a place in traditional history were either women who successfully performed male roles or whom

great men loved. In addition, India is also a patriarchal society, which, by definition describes cultures in which males as fathers or husbands are assumed to be in charge and the official heads of households. A patrilineal system governs the society, where descent and inheritance are traced through the male line and men are generally in control of the distribution of family resources. These traditions and ways of Indian life have been in effect for so long that this type of lifestyle is what women have become accustomed to and expect. Indian women do not take full advantage of their constitutional rights because they are not properly aware or informed of them. Women are not often encouraged to become informed about issues.

It was around the 1970s that the contemporary women's movement began to be more radical and active, led to a fight back by women's organizations which greatly increased their scope and power. The Indian woman is not, however, defined wholly by the right's attempts to appropriate them. Many millions of women are engaged in a variety of protests against such gender distinctions, small or large. Protest by women in India against oppressive conditions comes in many forms. Today the women's movement exists in a highly decentralized form with hundreds of organizations in both urban and rural areas throughout the country. Through autonomous, flexible and informal structures and collective types of organizations the Indian women's movement has been able to achieve in both political and cultural spheres. The need for women's history has been recognized in the contemporary period since women in India today are involved in redefining their own gender roles. Indian women today are far from the ignorant, oppressed stereotype perceived in the west. They in fact are active in both an individual and collective approach to organization, and are centrally engaged in transforming their own lives.

Since its inception, the historiography of women and gender in India has largely focused on in-depth examinations of the late-colonial era, viewed as a past capable of explaining the present and its problems. Many major works have focused on the intertwining of colonial and nationalist patriarchies, their goals, and their competing or partnered interests, as well as the discursive and material implications of this relationship on the lives of women. The historiography of women and gender has recently merged the two approaches, incorporating women not only as sites for others' reformulation of concepts and norms, but as subjects with autonomous consciousness and distinct voices, and agents of their own history. Women historians based in India have always merged activism and theoretical knowledge in their writings, as they are deeply concerned with the disparities and inconsistencies of the setting from which they speak. These scholars' agendas have frequently been influenced by Indian social and political events, which have included communalism and the rise of Hindu nationalism, discrimination against low-caste groups and tribal communities, environmental degradation, and LGBT rights, broadening the scope of their research far beyond the condition of women. This intimate link with the milieu outside the boundaries of academia has remained a distinguishing feature of women historiography in India until the present day. As recent events in India have brought sexual violence to the forefront of global public attention, scholars of women's and gender history are once again at the forefront of efforts to understand the origins and development of the systemic, institutional, societal, community, and individual structures that allow perpetrators to remain unpunished.

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