



THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD AND THE CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY WOMEN'S EFFORTS TO OVERCOME IT



Dr. Sunita Gajare Patil
Dayanand Arts and Science College Solapur.

INTRODUCTION:

The Middle Ages (around 8th to 18th century) are considered to be an important period in Indian history. During this period, the condition of women changed to a great extent due to political upheavals, foreign invasions and the influence of social customs and traditions. Women were dominated by the patriarchal social system. The purdah system became prevalent, especially during the Muslim rule. Child marriages were widespread. Sati was found in some areas. The main task of women was considered to be fulfilling domestic responsibilities. Educational opportunities were reduced compared to ancient times. Only a few women from the upper class or royal families received education. Ordinary women were deprived of formal education. Women had limited rights to property. They used to help men in agriculture, handicrafts, and household industries. They had less freedom to make independent financial decisions.

Some women did great work in the political and religious fields even under adverse circumstances.

Razia Sultan -

The only female ruler among the Sultans of Delhi. Her reign was between 1236 and 1240 AD. She was the daughter of Iltutmish. Iltutmish of the Slave Dynasty recognized Razia as more capable than his sons and declared her his successor. After her death, there was a power struggle for some time, but eventually Razia Sultan came to power. She abandoned the purdah system and wore men's clothes. She herself used to be present in the court and run the administration. She was known as a just and capable ruler. She emphasized education and public works. The chieftains did not accept a female ruler, so conspiracies were hatched against her. Finally, she was defeated and died in 1240.

Historical significance

Razia Sultan was a brave and skilled female ruler of medieval India. She set an example of the power of women by maintaining power in a patriarchal society. Due to her work, she occupies a special place in Indian history.

Rani Durgavati -

Rani Durgavati was a brave and powerful queen of the Gondwana kingdom. She was born in 1524 AD. She belonged to the Chandela dynasty and was married to the king of Gondwana kingdom, Dalpat Shah. After the death of her husband (1548 AD), she took over the reign on behalf of her young son Veer Narayan. She maintained a proper system of the Gondwana kingdom and worked for the

welfare of the people. She laid special emphasis on administration, agriculture and defense. During the reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar, the general Asaf Khan invaded the Gondwana kingdom (1564 AD). Rani Durgavati fought bravely with the enemy. When she realized that defeat was certain in the war, she sacrificed herself instead of surrendering.

Historical Significance

She is considered a symbol of valor, self-respect and patriotism. Many monuments and universities have been established in her memory in Madhya Pradesh. She set a shining example of women's power.

Chand Bibi -

Chand Bibi was a very brave and accomplished queen of medieval India. She was the princess of the Nizamshahi kingdom of Ahmednagar. She was born around 1550 AD. Her father Hussain Nizamshah (Sultan of Ahmednagar) arranged her marriage to Ali Adilshah (Sultan of Bijapur). After her husband's death and during a period of political instability, she took over the governance of Ahmednagar. As the Regent of the state of Ahmednagar, she fought against the Mughals. The army of the Mughal Emperor Akbar attacked Ahmednagar (1595 AD). Chand Bibi defended the fort bravely. She showed great courage, diplomacy and leadership qualities. Due to her bravery, Ahmednagar was saved from being captured by the Mughals for some time. Due to internal conspiracies, she was assassinated in 1599 AD. She is considered a symbol of valor, courage and self-respect. In history, she is known as the "Virgin of Ahmednagar".

In the Middle Ages, the Bhakti movement gave women a sense of equality at the religious and social levels to some extent. Saint-poets raised their voices against injustice in society. The Bhakti movement that emerged in the Middle Ages challenged caste discrimination, gender discrimination and rituals in society. This movement gave women the opportunity to express their views in religious and social spheres. The main message of the Bhakti movement was that God belongs to everyone. There was no distinction between men and women, high and low, rich and poor in devotion to God. This gave women the freedom to participate in devotion to God.

Contribution of Saint Poets

Many women actively participated in the Bhakti movement

Mirabai -

Mirabai was a brilliant personality in the Bhakti movement. Her devotional songs and selfless love have left an indelible mark on Indian literature and society. She is still considered a symbol of devotion, dedication and female power. She gave the message of women's freedom in society through her devotion to Shri Krishna. Through her devotion to Shri Krishna, Mirabai brought about not only a spiritual but also a social revolution. Through her life, the society received a strong message that a woman can have an independent personality and spiritual freedom. She made people aware of personal freedom. Despite being from a royal family, she adopted the path of devotion despite worldly constraints. Even though there was a custom of committing Sati after the death of her husband, she rejected it. She gave the highest place to her faith. She challenged social constraints. At that time, women were confined to the home. But Meerabai used to perform public kirtans and bhajans. She did not accept caste and gender discrimination. Her poems expressed the emotions of women. She showed equality in devotion. According to her, there is no difference between men and women in devotion to God. She considered Shri Krishna as a friend, husband, and adored one and created a personal relationship. This was a bold step at that time. She gave the message that devotion is a personal and independent choice of everyone. Her literary contribution is also important. A beautiful blend of love, dedication, pain and confidence is seen in her hymns. From verses like "Mere to Girdhar Gopal, Doosrona koi" Her devotion is evident. Her poetry gave prestige to women's feelings and women's spiritual rights.

Janabai

She depicted the suffering and daily life of women in her abhangas. Janabai was a prominent saint poet of the Warkari sect. She grew up in the company of Saint Namdev and built her life on devotion to Vitthal. Her abhangas very effectively express the hard life, pain and emotions of the women of that time. She depicted the reality of daily life. She herself used to work as a maid. Therefore, she had a direct experience of the hard life of women. Her abhangas describe tasks like grinding grain, sweeping, and fetching water. She also gave the form of devotion to household chores. For example, — She says that the idea that Vitthal himself comes and helps her in her work is an idea that honors women's labor. By giving voice to the suffering of women, she presented the injustice, humiliation, and hardship faced by women in society through her Abhangas. She indirectly criticized the mentality that considers women only as servants or inferiors. Both the inner pain and self-respect of women are visible in her poetry. She gave a message of equality through devotion to Vitthal. She expressed the idea of the Varkari sect that everyone is equal before God through her Abhangas. This gave women spiritual freedom and confidence.

Akkamahadevi

Akkamahadevi was a famous Veerashaiva saint poetess from Karnataka in the 12th century. She was associated with Basaveshwara's Lingayat movement. She rejected the customs, traditions and restrictions on women in society and embraced the path of renunciation. She challenged social restrictions. At that time, strict expectations of marriage, family and society were imposed on women. Akkamahadevi renounced worldly life and chose the spiritual path. She embraced the path of freedom despite external pomp and social restrictions. Her worshipped deity was Channamallikarjuna (Shiva). She devoted herself completely to Shiva devotion. Her "Vachane" (Kannada poetry) shows the influence of renunciation, self-knowledge and love of God. She gave the message of women's freedom. She opposed the view that sees women only as bodies. She gave the message that soul and devotion are the true values. Her life is a reflection of women's self-respect and spiritual freedom.

Bahinabai

Bahinabai expressed the reality of the difficult life of women through her Abhangas. Bahinabai was a saint poet of the Warkari sect in the 17th century. She is considered to be a disciple of Saint Tukaram. The hard, struggling and emotional life of medieval women is vividly expressed in their Abhangas. They showed the reality of women's lives. Due to marriage at a young age, they had to face many difficulties in life. They experienced the burden of housework, farming, and family responsibilities. Their Abhangas show the pain, struggle, and tolerance of a woman's heart. Support in devotion Even in difficult situations, they found satisfaction in Vitthal devotion. They gave the message that devotion is the strength and support in a woman's life. They gave spiritual height to the suffering of women. They indirectly criticized the social system that belittled women. They recognized the hardships of women and their emotional world. Their Abhangas show a confluence of self-examination, humility, and faith. They indirectly criticized practices like child marriage, sati, and lack of female education. They did not limit women to the home alone, but gave importance to their spiritual strength. They tried to give women recognition as independent personalities. They increased women's self-confidence through kirtans, bhajans, Abhangas Through Rachna, women began to participate publicly. Bhakti gave women a platform to express their thoughts. They began to gain spiritual respect in society.

Conclusion

Chand Bibi was a brave and skilled female ruler of medieval India. She protected the kingdom in adverse conditions and set a shining example of female power. Rani Durgavati was a brave and accomplished female ruler of medieval India. She achieved an immortal place in history by demonstrating courage, leadership qualities and self-respect in times of crisis. Mirabai gave an effective message of women's freedom and equality in society through her devotion to Shri Krishna. She chose her own path despite the customs and traditions and created an inspiring example of confidence, faith

and self-respect for women. Janabai's abhangas give a vivid picture of the real life of medieval women, their hardships, sorrows and self-confidence. She gave recognition to the feelings and existence of women through devotion. Therefore, she occupies a special place in Marathi saint literature. Akkamahadevi rejected social restrictions and accepted disinterest and achieved self-liberation through devotion. She is considered an effective symbol of women's freedom in the medieval period. Her work strengthened the position of women in the Bhakti movement. Bahinabai's abhanga effectively expresses the hard life of medieval women, their endurance and faith. She gave words to women's experiences through devotion and gained an important place in Marathi saint literature. The status of women was generally degraded during the medieval period. Their freedom was limited due to social constraints, customs and traditions and lack of education. Still, some courageous women achieved an immortal place in history with their achievements. The achievements of all these ideal women certainly inspire women of today to live.

References / Bibliography

1. History of Medieval India – Satish Chandra, Orient BlackSwan Publications.
2. Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals – Satish Chandra, Har-Anand Publications.
3. A History of Medieval India – Irfan Habib, Aligarh Historians Society.
4. Women in Medieval India – Radha Kumar, Oxford University Press.
5. The Bhakti Movement in India – M. M. Agrawal, Prabhat Prakashan.
6. Saints and Devotional Literature in India – Karine Schomer, Motilal Banarsidass.
7. Women Saints in Medieval India – Neeti M. Sadarangani, MunshiramManoharlal Publishers.
8. History of the Maratha People – C. A. Kincaid and D. B. Parasnis.
9. Medieval India – Romila Thapar, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
10. The Wonder That Was India Vol. II – A. L. Basham.