



# The Ascent of The Woman – Overcoming Cultural & Religious Discrimination



Henry Burger  
Oration

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Dr. Duru Shah

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*India*

*The Churning  
Crucible of  
Human  
Civilization*



# India Decoded

1.2 billion population



4693 Communities



4500 Endogamous Grps



325 Functional  
Languages



100 sub-castes



4 main castes



25 Scripts

# Genetic Diversity

- India is the global melting pot of human diversity
- India was the first stop made by early settlers.
- The genetic diversity originated here !

# India's History -

- Many Dynasties (Maurya, Mughals, British)



- Many Religions
- Conquering invaders

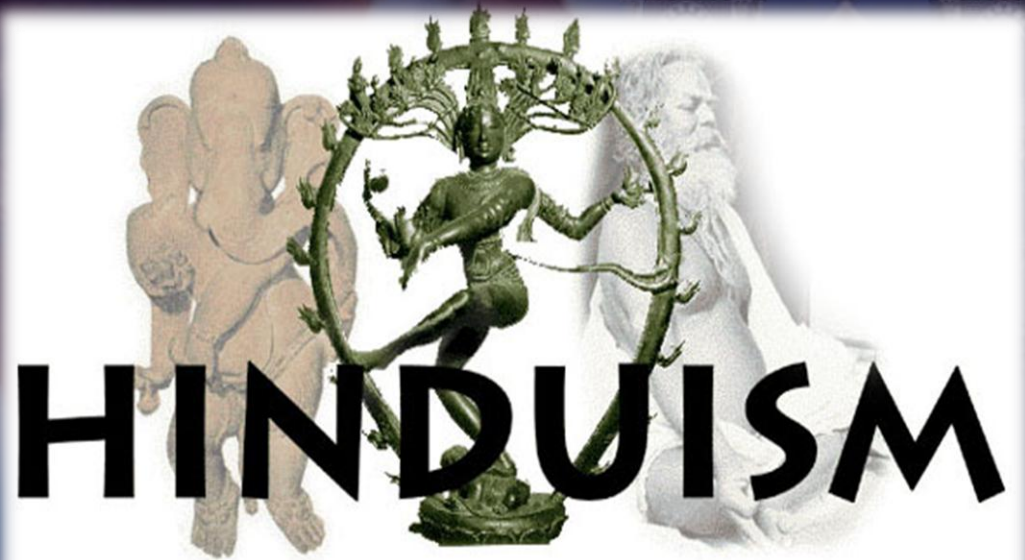
# Major Influence in India's History

- Hinduism
- Brahmanism
- Hellenism
- Buddhism
- Islam



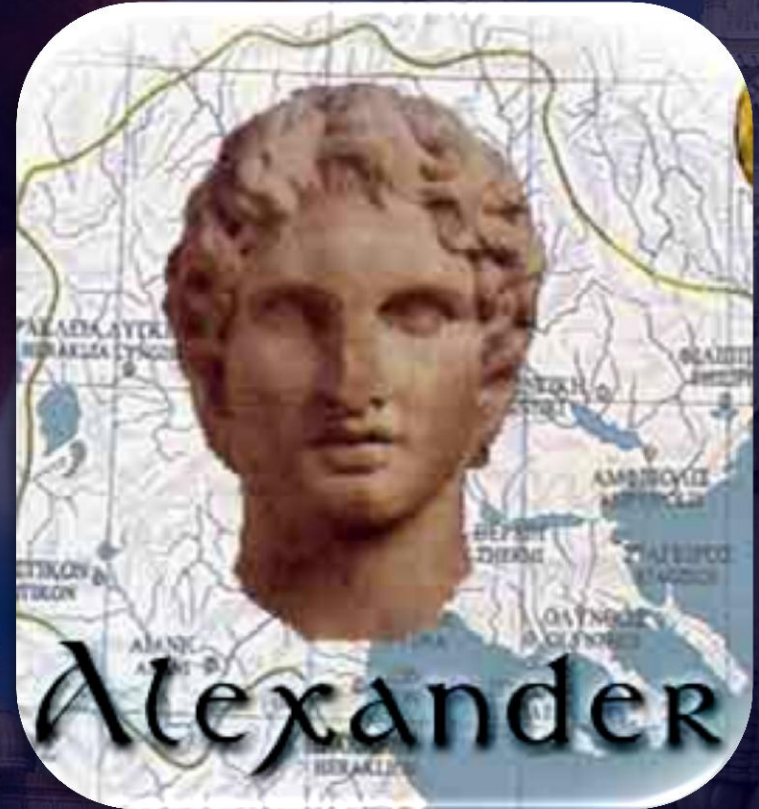
# Hinduism

- Began about 1500 BC
- Has been the unifying thread in India's history



# Hellenism

- Brought in by Alexander in 326 BC
- Continued to influence India for many years after his death



# Maurya Dynasty - 184 BC

- Buddhism dominated for over a century
- Brahmanism then replaced Buddhism
- Hindu caste system spread



# Gupta Dynasty

- Indian culture grew to new heights
- Hinduism peaked



Emperor Samudragupta

# Mughal Empire

- 1526 to 1707 AD
- Exerted considerable Islamic influence on Indian culture



# The British Empire

- Entered India in 1608
- Initially as a trading organization, *The East India Company*
- Replaced Moghul rule in 1858 and remained in control till 1947



# The British Rule

- In spite of reforms, hostility grew
- Multiple uprisings failed
- Religious and political conflicts arose between Hindus and Muslims



# Satyagraha

- In 1930 Gandhiji ordered Satyagraha and led a revolt against the British
- Britain made truce but conditions did not improve



# Independence

- British remained till 1947
- Gave India Independence and created Pakistan
- Separation along religious lines



# Multiplicity of Cultures

- Ethnic and religious communities co-exist in India
- It is a perfect setting to discuss how women have struggled to overcome cultural and religious discrimination over the years



# The Cast System

- More than 80% of Indians practice Hinduism
- Cast divides people into 4 social classes



# Medieval India

- Women held in high esteem
- Foreign invaders brought their culture with them
- Dark Age of women initiated



# Moghul Invaders

- Woman was the sole property of the father, brother, husband or son
- She had no will of her own
- Polygamy was the norm to fill harems



# Curtailed Freedom of Women

- Not allowed to move freely
- Denied education
- Made to wear a veil to protect them from roving eyes of invaders



# Changed Mindset

- Women's stature reduced
- Considered liability
- Financial burden



# Evils of Change

- child marriage
- satí
- jauhar



# Child Marriage

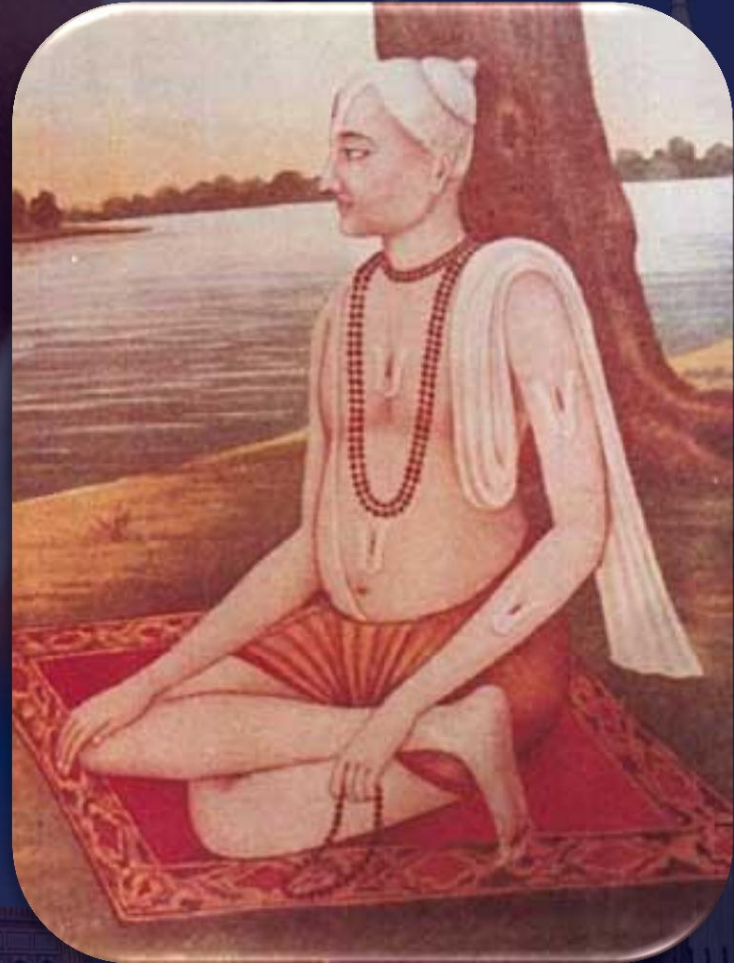
- Married off at age 8 – 10 years to prevent pregnancy before marriage
- Post puberty multiple pregnancies in incompletely developed bodies resulting in high morbidity and mortality rates such as fistulae



# Tulsidas said . . .

"Dhol, gawar, shudra,  
pashu, nari, yeh sab  
tadan ke adhikari"

*Animals, illiterates, lower  
castes and women, should be  
subjected to beating alike*



# Satí

- Plight of widows worse than animals
- Women voluntarily jumped into funeral pyres of husbands
- If feared, thrown into fire in which body of her husband was placed



# Jauhar

- Similar to sati except it is mass suicide
- On losing a war, Rajput women arranged a pyre and set themselves on fire rather than live in invader's harems



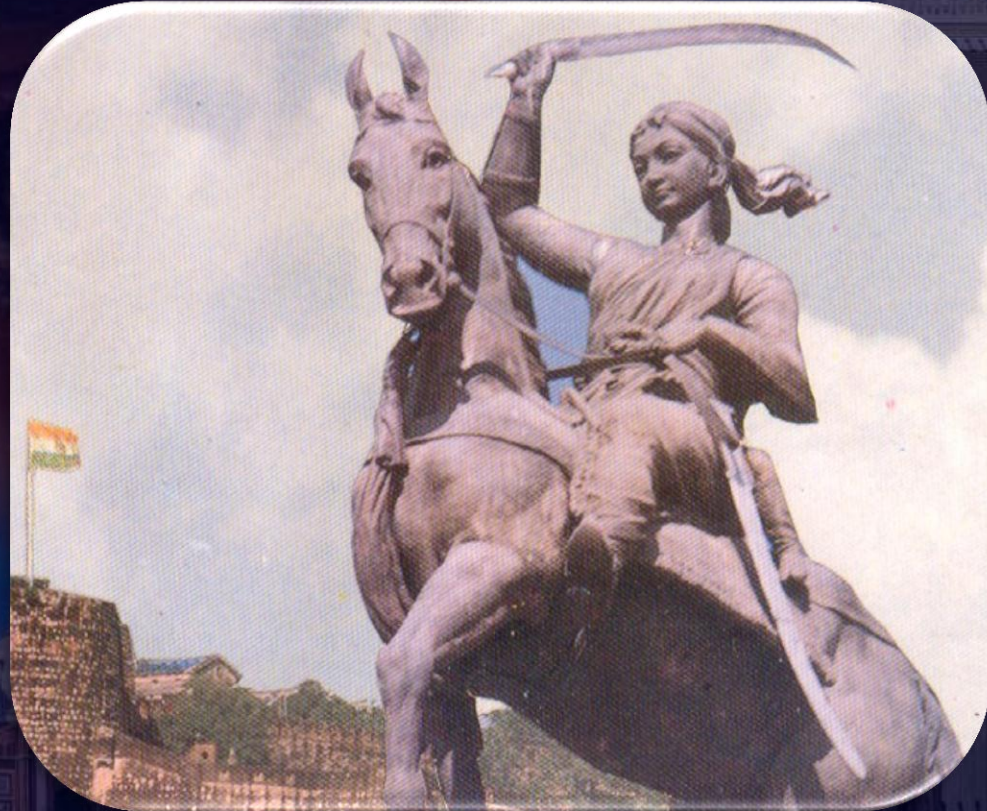
# Why Jauhar?

- Life after husbands death worse than jumping into fire. It was a curse
- Widows lead pious lives
- Remarriage ostracized
- Hair shaved off
- Could not participate in any celebrations



# Women's Struggle

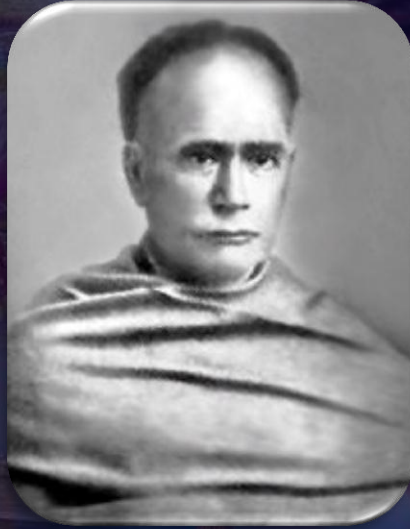
- In 1857 Rani Laxmibai showed exemplary courage to save her kingdom from Governor Dalhousie
- She put the British rulers to shame
- A true leader of women



# Men who Championed Women's Cause



Rajaram  
Mohan Roy



Ishwarchandra  
Vidyasagar



Swami  
Vivekananda



Swami  
Dayanand  
Saraswati

# Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

- Laid stage for emancipation of women
- A lawyer by profession practiced law in South Africa
- Racial discrimination in South Africa by the British led him to return to India and fight for India's independence from British rule

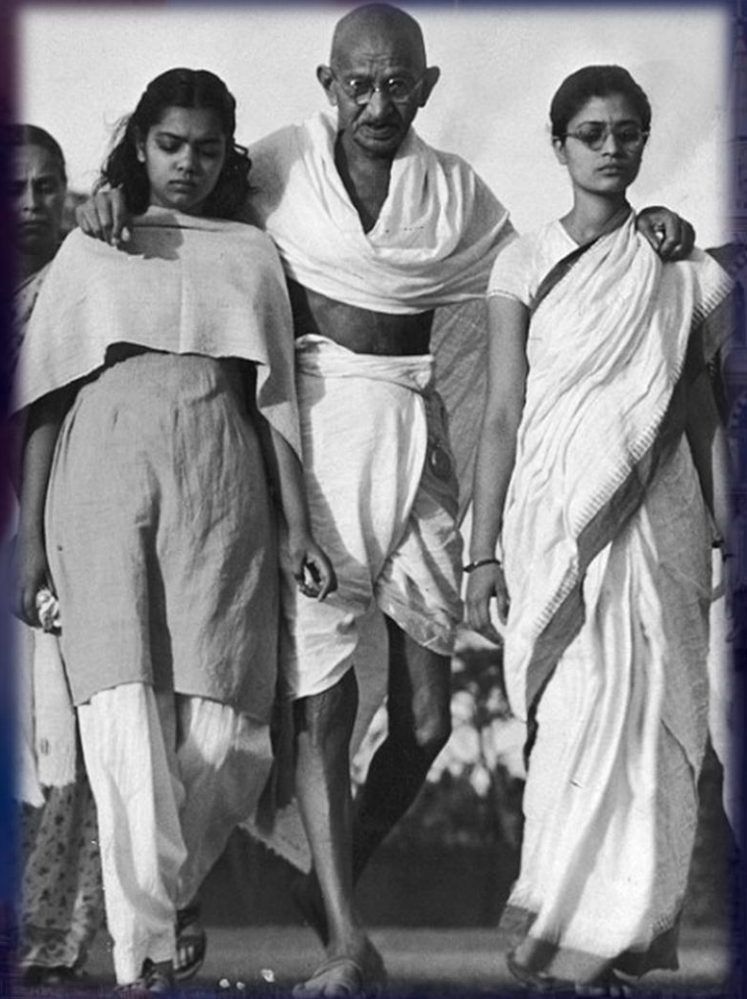




Mahatma  
Gandhi

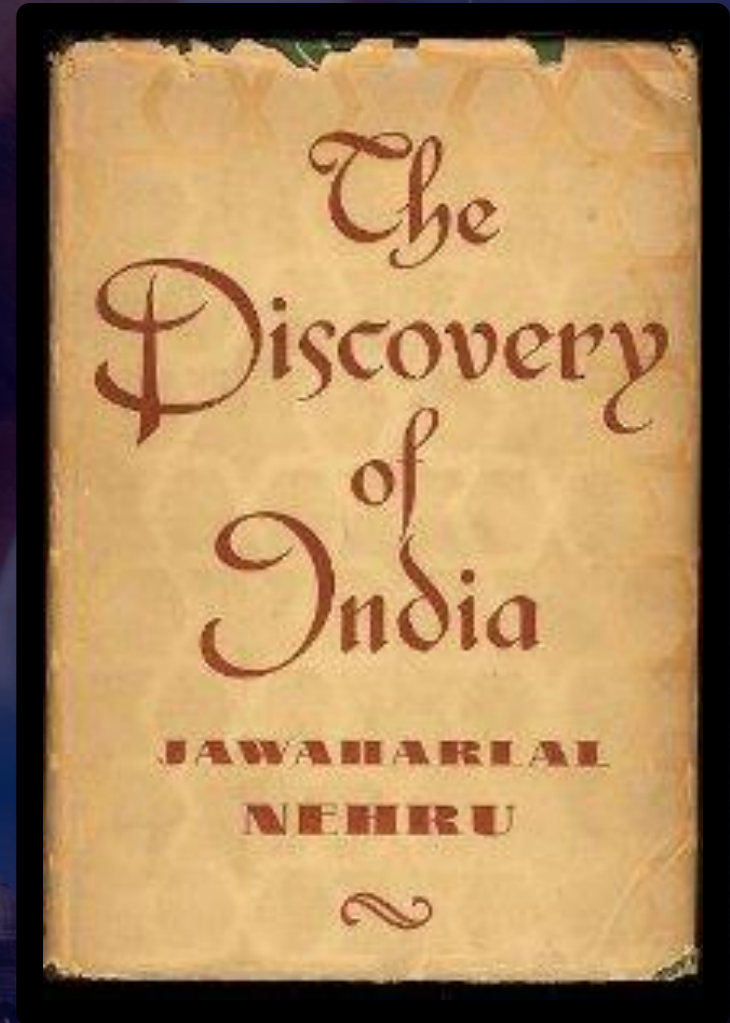
# Women's Participation

- He had thousands of women along with him who did not enjoy basic rights, but who fought for the cause of the nation's Independence



1930

"Most of us men folk were in prison. A remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there of course, but now there was an avalanche of them which took not only the British Govt by surprise but also their men folk by surprise."

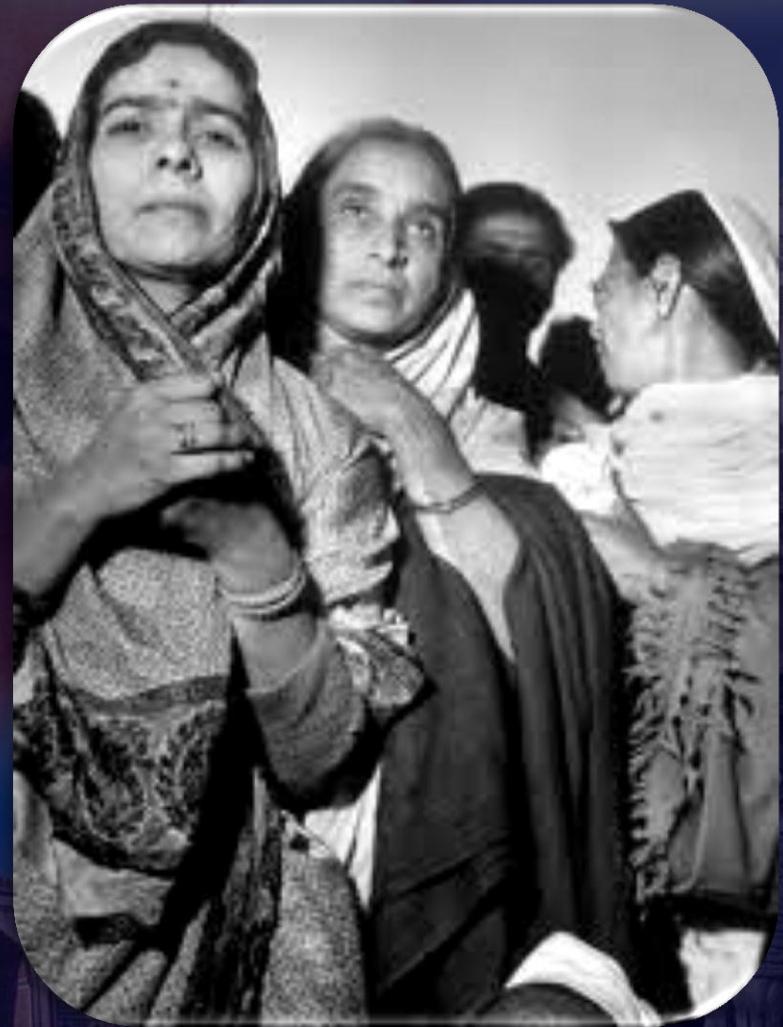


"Here were these Women of upper and middle classes sheltered in their homes, peasant women and working class women pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of Government order and police batons! It was not only their display of courage and daring but the organizational power they showed."



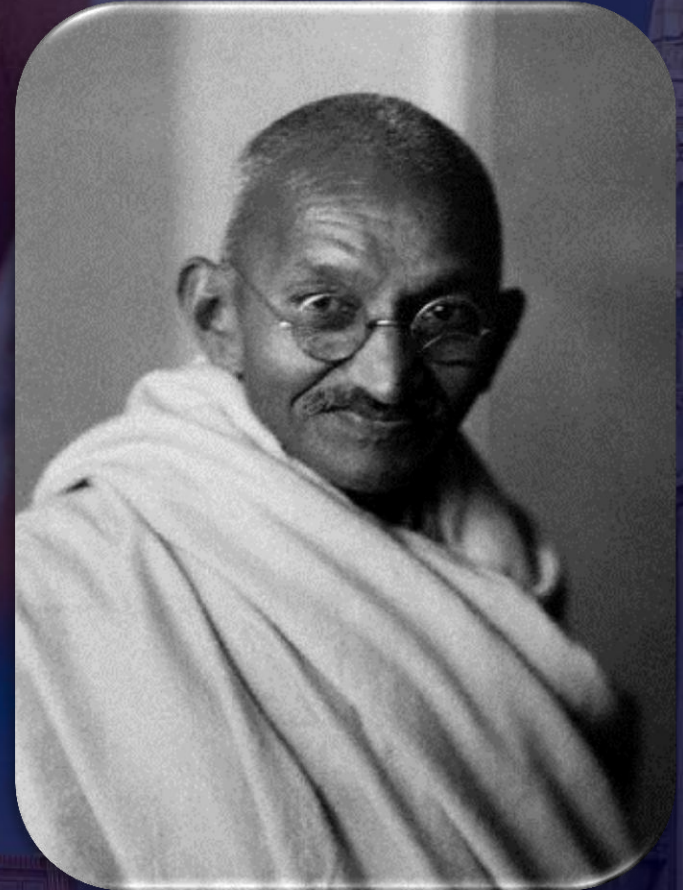
# Women During Independence Era

- Average Life expectancy - 27 years
- Only 2% were educated



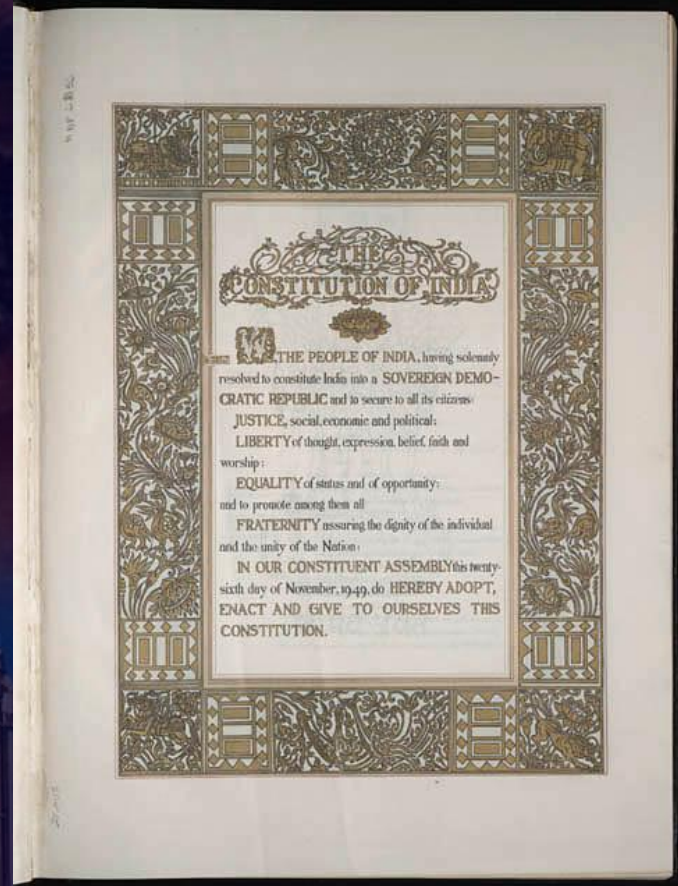
# Empowerment of Women

- Liberated the women from the clutches of **purdah**
- Encouraged widow remarriage
- Criticized child marriage
- Spread message of gender equality
- Gave opportunity to women to prove their capability as men



# The Constitution of India- 1947

- Women got the right to vote even though in the developed world women got this right much later.



# The Women's Movement

- The main driving force to changing women's status in India
- Roots can be traced to "social Reforms" of 19<sup>th</sup> Century – a campaign for betterment of women's lives



# The Women's Movement Causes Taken Up

- Women's Education
- Condition of women at work
- Formation of self help groups to assist in social change



# Picketing Liquor Shops

- Fed up with domestic violence after alcohol consumption, women in Andhra Pradesh picketed rural liquor shops and had them closed



# The Education Movement

- Traditionally women held a position of respect but not of equality
- An instrument of change bringing women out of their homes
- Now acquiring an economic dimension



# Government Initiative

- Incentives to rural families who educate their girls
- This removes gender bias
- Provides opportunities for employment



# Panchayati Raj

- To prevent harassment of poor by rich zamindars
- 1/3<sup>rd</sup> seats of all village governments were reserved for women by the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment. In some states it has gone up to 50%



# Governance

- Indian women did not stop at local governance
- A massive change occurred, when Indira Gandhi became PM of India in 1966.
- Even though women occupy 1/3<sup>rd</sup> seats at village level, the same is not true in the state assembly or national parliament



# National Commission for Women- 1922

- To facilitate redressal of grievances
- Recommended remedial legislative measures
- Advise government on policy matters



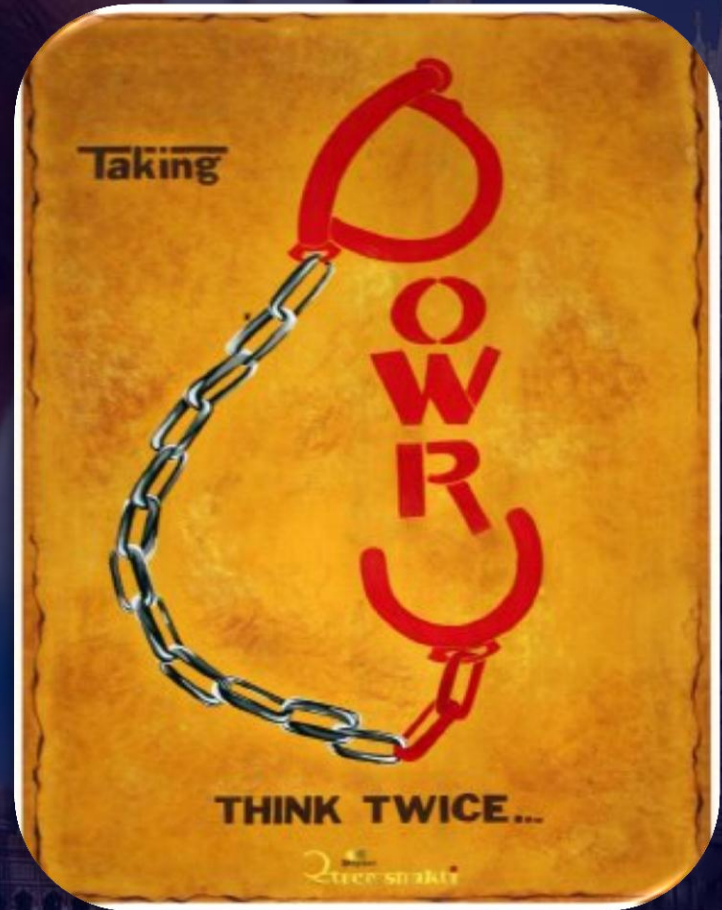
# The Women's Movement

- Mobilized support for changing many laws...

- Rape

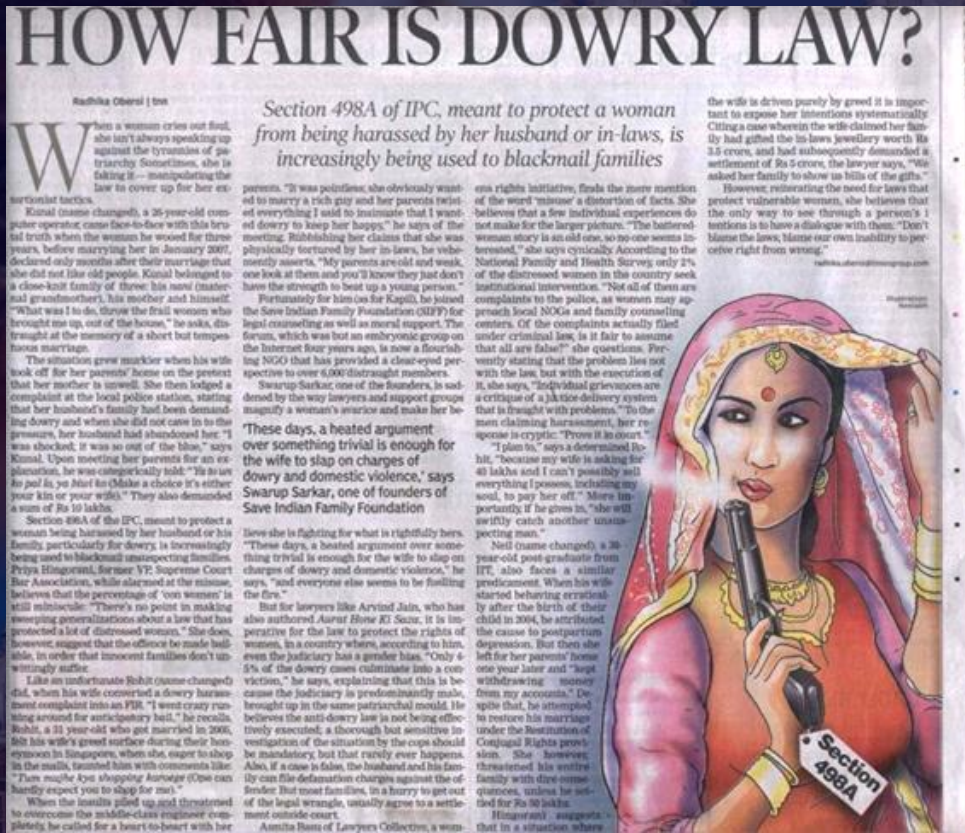
- Dowry

...and made them more stringent



# Mere Change of Law Effective?

- To be effective it must be implemented
- Problem lies not in the law or the state but societal prejudices, norms, cultures and religion



# India- Global Surrogacy Destination

- Women agree to surrogacy with 2 beliefs
  - understand emotions and hardships attached to infertile women
  - Empathy
- Money earned, used for daughter's dowry



# India – The Land of Contradiction

- Imminent rise as economic power
- Share in GDP services – 50%
- Growth 8%



But what does all this mean for women who constitute 50% of population

# The Contradictory Indian Woman

- Among the most oppressed yet
- Among the most liberated
- The most articulate
- The most free



Depends on where she is born Urban or Rural India

# India's Dynamic Women

President

Pratibha  
Patil



Congress  
Party  
President

Sonia  
Gandhi

# India's Dynamic Women



CEOs



Beauty  
Queens



Astronaut



Sports  
Professionals

# Worlds Largest Number of Women Professionals



Doctors



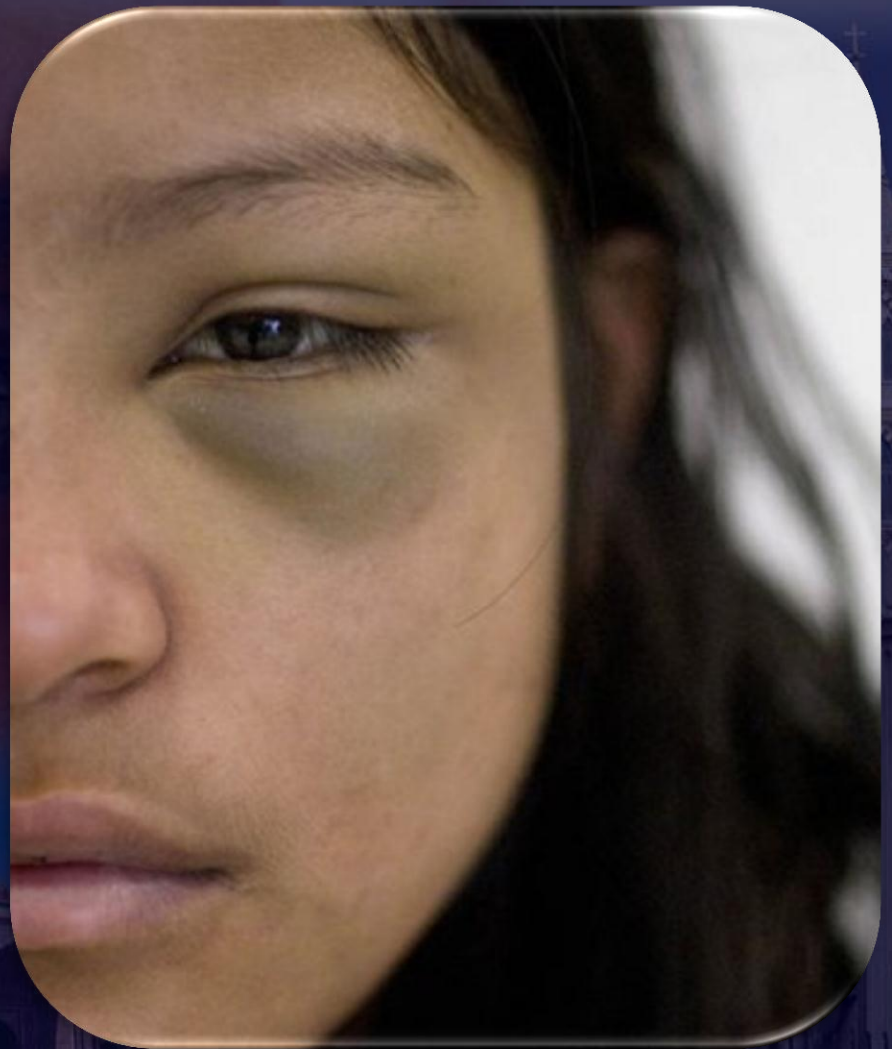
Scientists



Professors

# Violence Against Women

- Affects lives of millions of women worldwide
- Affects all socio-economic and educational groups
- Impedes rights of women to participate fully in society



# Violence Against Women

- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse
- Child marriage
- Female genital cutting

All violate fundamental  
human rights

The logo is contained within a dark grey rounded rectangle. It features the word 'iVow' in a large, white, sans-serif font, with a red dot on the 'i'. A thick red horizontal line is positioned below 'iVow'. Underneath the line, the words 'to fight VAW' are written in a smaller white font. At the bottom, the words 'Violence Against Women' are written in a red font.

**iVow**  
to fight VAW  
Violence Against Women

# Respect for Human Rights - Universal

- Founded on international consensus
- Cannot be automatically enforceable

How do we find ways to  
harmonize views and values in  
cultures that violate human rights



# A Balanced Approach

- Striking a balance between personal and religious freedom and ideals of a common citizenship is proving to be an enormous test for European countries with a large Muslim population



# Easy Concessions

- Ban genital cutting practiced in parts of Africa
- Harsh punishment as in Koranic schools of Britain



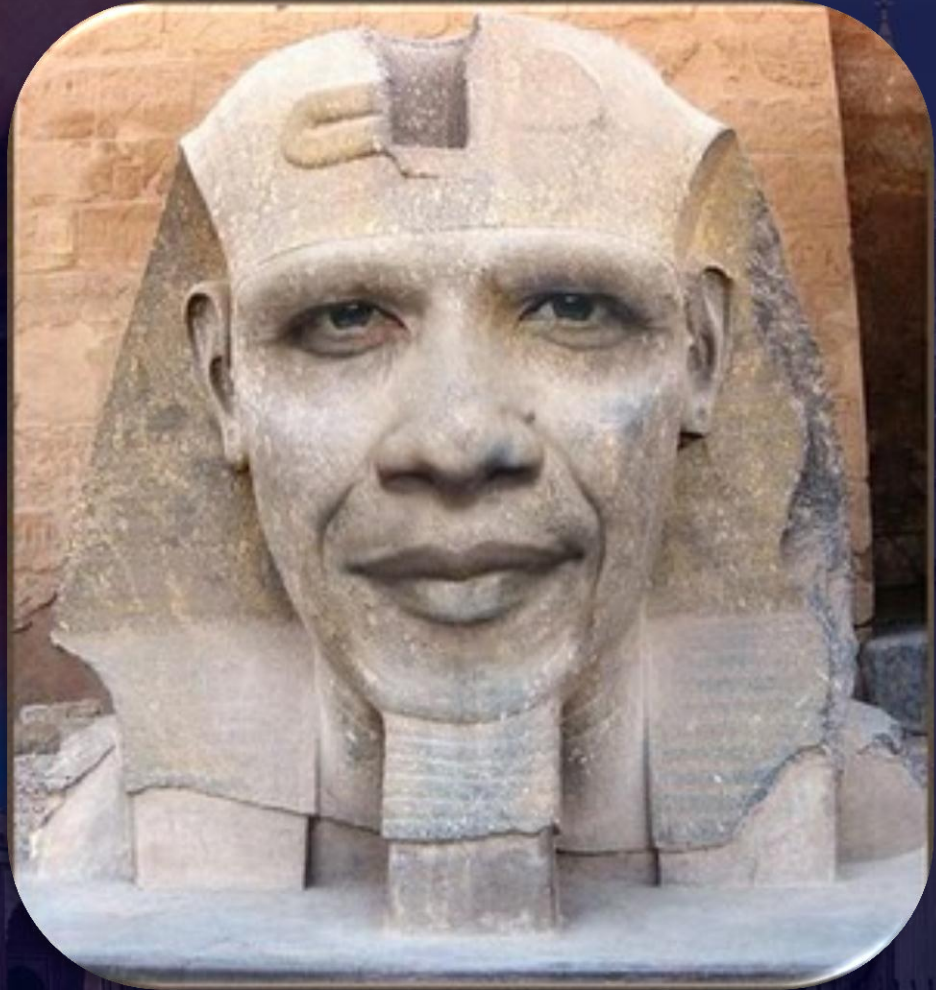
# Controversy

- wearing burqua to cover the face, banned in some countries to release women locked in slavery.
- 1978 declaration of human rights portrays women as subordinate to men



Barack Obama

"Western countries  
should not dictate  
what clothes a  
Muslim woman  
should wear"



# Burqa- Boon or Bane?

- If a law to ban burqa is in place, does it go against her own culture because she herself may be wanting to wear it!
- This could go against the very principle of sexual equality for which the law is designed



# Unfazed Rayana Khazi

- 22 year old Muslim woman unfazed by death threats, sees nothing wrong in wearing a salwar kurta which covers her from neck to feet



**COURAGE UNDER FIRE:**  
Rayana R Khazi

## Against the veil

Rayana R Khazi is unfazed by death threats for refusing to wear the burqa

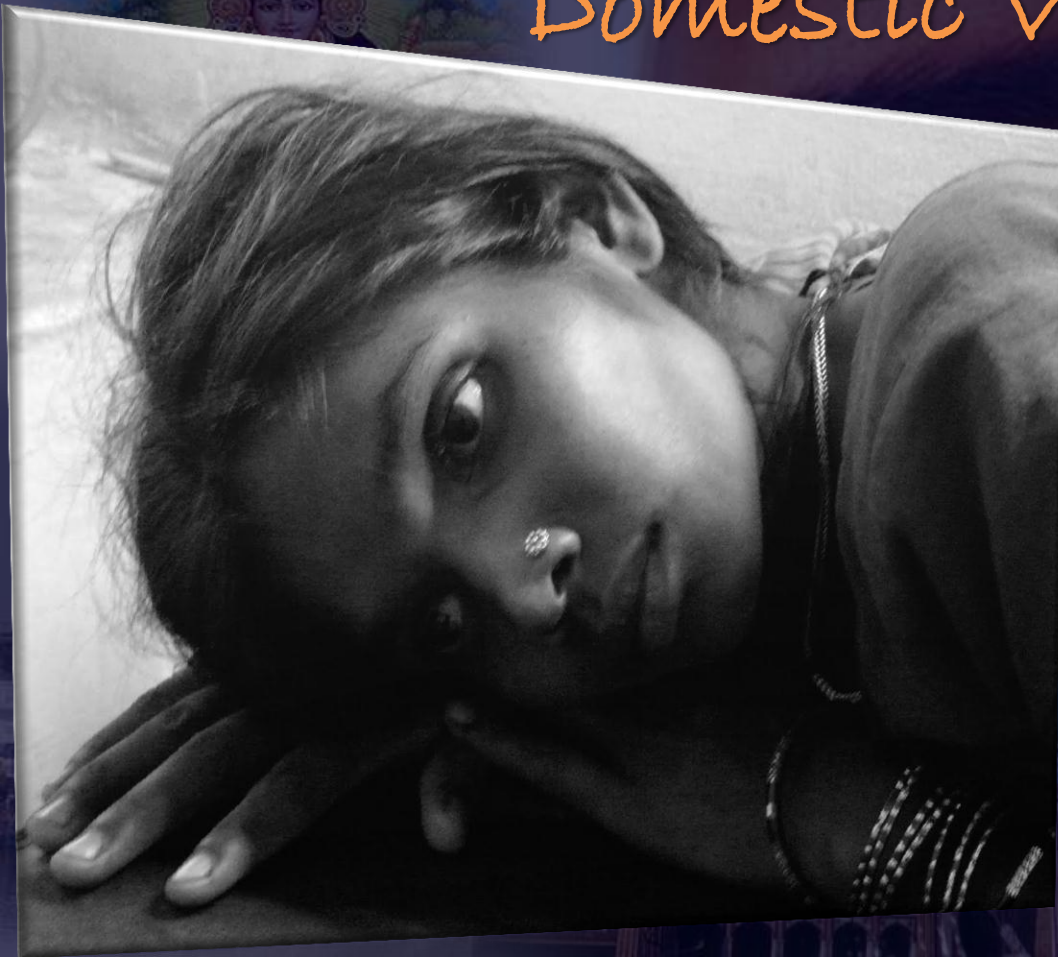
# Rayana Khazi

- She moved court and is provided police protection
- The Quran does not say women should wear the Burqa



Her deadline 26<sup>th</sup> Sept. If she did not comply she would be killed

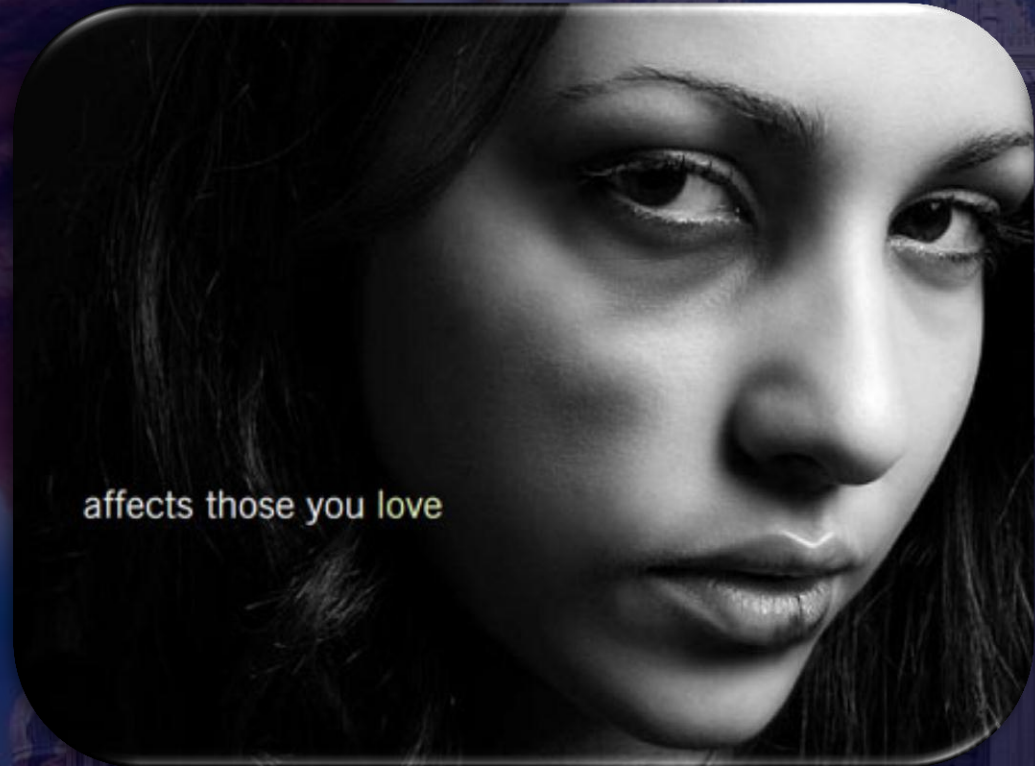
# Domestic Violence



- Every 5 minutes a violent crime is reported
- Wife beating perceived normal or the husband's right

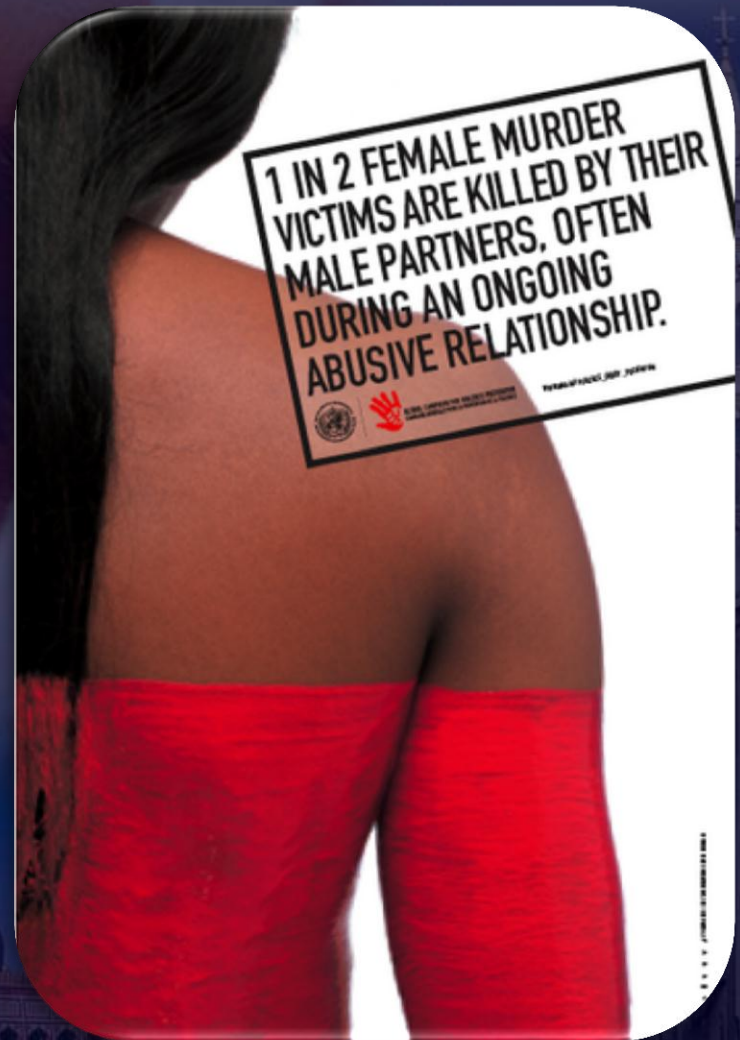
# Financially Dependent

- Hence bears the brunt
- No where to go
- Social stigma of returning home
- Share her home another woman as religion allows more than 1 wife



# Unequal Family Laws

- Based on religion
- Govt. refuses reforms as it believes communities have right to preserve tradition
- Worried about political fall out in enforcing change



# Dowry Deaths

- 6000 deaths reported every year in spite of Dowry Prohibition Act in existence since 33 years
- As woman is considered a burden, an amount of 5 times girl's family's annual income is demanded during marriage
- Demand continues even later



# Dowry Deaths

- If girls family does not comply, she becomes a victim of physical and mental torture and –  
accidental kitchen burn death



# Sexual Abuse

- A rape every 25 mins
- Most go unpunished as they are not reported due to stigma
- Others due to discriminatory threats and pressures



# Female Infanticide

- Another inhuman form of violence against women
- Modern technology like USG used to selectively terminate female fetuses
- As a result gender ratio 0.8 : 1 girls to boys

**India kills 10 million girls  
in 20 years**



# Female Infanticide

- Govt of India has passed a law to halt this practice
- With connivance of medical technologists and desperation to have a son, this practice continues



## The Missing Girls

Where have all the 'missing girls' gone?  
Gone! 'Gone, to the grave yard'  
Where have all the missing girls gone?  
Gone! 'Gone, to the grave yard'

She missed the bus  
While being born:  
They pulled her back,  
Wring her neck,  
Tore her into the  
Trashcan!

Where have all the missing girls gone?  
Gone! 'Gone, to the Trashcan!'

As an infant, she missed the bus  
Her brother got all the milk,  
Her brother got all the rice,  
She was left to starve and rot  
On the bus to the Trashcan!  
Her brother got all the  
'Cause:

She had no shoes,  
She had no clothes,  
She had no books,  
How could she even get on?

But she had flour,  
Vegetables, rice and spice,  
She cooked the food!  
She missed the bus,  
When she sat down to eat:  
Her father and brother ate up all  
The crumbs were all she got...

But she had a broom,  
A mop, a wiper:  
She swept and wiped the floor,  
Cleaned off her own blood!  
Whatever was left  
Her tears washed-up!

# The Missing Girls

Oh! So easy:  
Just a scan!  
And then, the forceps &  
'Sound', & whirring of  
Suction pumps....  
Or,  
'Dilatation', & 'Curettage'  
Hear a bit of crunch!  
The 'job' is done!!  
In a minute or two....  
No evidence left behind  
Oh! What a find!  
This USG is just divine!!  
All is thrown into the 'Dustbin',  
Who can say?  
There ever was  
A 'Girl Missing'!!

(Termination of pregnancy following sex  
determination)

ed the bus to 'colle  
She was 'married',  
ady with a child or

it she got on the bu  
To the graveyard!  
in flames in Shamsh  
re all the missing g  
Gone, to the grave  
Gone, to Shamshan

at the bus to mark  
sold for a thousand  
Again and again...  
it on the bus to He  
Again and again...  
yes! Here she got...

For sure!!!

re all the missing girls  
Gone, gone to 'Hell Gate'

ages they wondered:  
What to do?  
How to get rid-off  
is unwanted baggage  
Of doom!

ed the pillow on her face,  
o stifle the scream,  
Lest it was heard!  
first scream of the 'birth'  
ould not even get to cry,  
d was the very first out cry!  
n whispered in corridors,  
ld not sleep after daily chores:  
eir souls were black  
as the night...  
ich kept them awake-  
conscience pricking  
eyelids and eyes-  
All night!

ne-day technology came:  
What a boon!  
Shot to fame!  
re we can 'do the job'!



**Zoya Zaidi**

# Women's Health in India

- Intrinsically linked to social strata
- Strong son preferences
- Daughters - low education, malnourished
- Repercussion for self and family



# Variation – Culture Sensitivity

- wide variation from state to state
- UP the most populous state
  - fertility 5 children / woman
- Kerala the most literate state
  - fertility rate under 2



# Malnutrition

- Women in India eat last
- Many times no food left
- Nutritional deficiencies like anaemia, hypoproteínemia common
- Repeated pregnancies, prolonged breastfeeding



# Maternal Mortality

- 78000 die every year during pregnancy
- No death review
- These are just numbers



## Dying to be a mother

Every year around **78,000** women die during pregnancy, childbirth or within 42 days after delivery

By Jisha Krishnan

# The Metrosexual Woman

- Spoilt for choice
- Comfortable surroundings
- Less painful delivery options at private hospitals



# Rural Women

- Struggle to get basic facilities
- Nobody accountable for preventable deaths
- They are just numbers and may be not even that



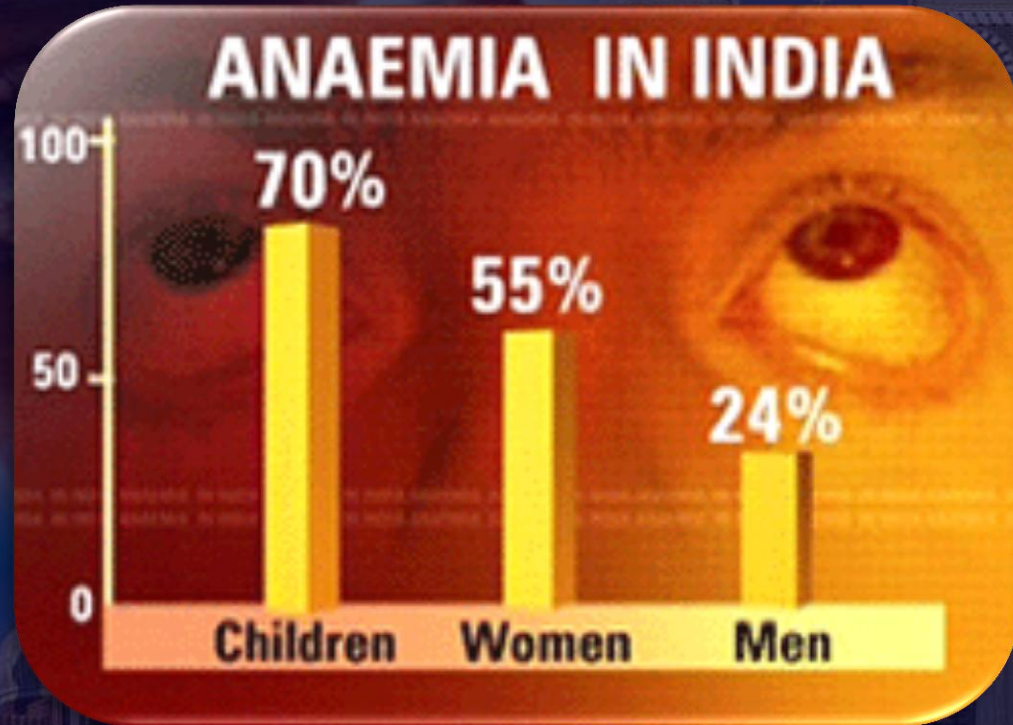
# Child Marriage

- Still continues in villages
- Girls giving birth before their bodies are ready in spite of law which prevents girls below 18 years from getting married



# Poverty Status - Malnutrition

- 80% women severely anemic in pregnancy
- ↑ maternal mortality following normal bleeding after delivery
- Delivery at home with traditional attendants



# Urbanization – Money Power

## Unhealthy Lifestyles leading to ...

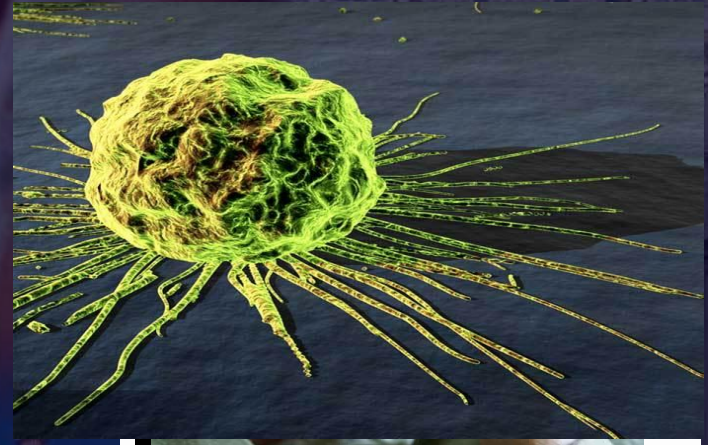
- Ischemic heart disease

- Osteoporosis

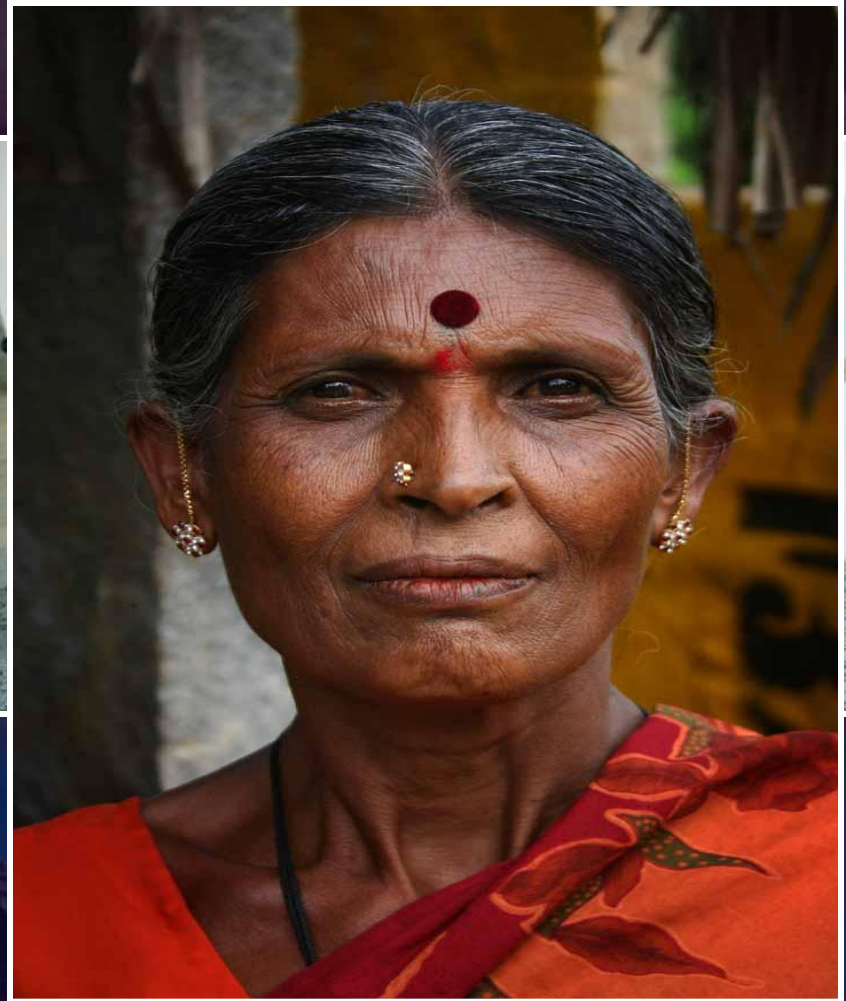
- Dementia

- Cancer

- the new diseases of womanhood!



Our goal should  
be to see that of a  
woman ~~herself~~ ~~for~~ ~~over~~  
ind ~~health~~ ~~ty~~ ~~years~~  
not simply  
taking longer to  
die!!



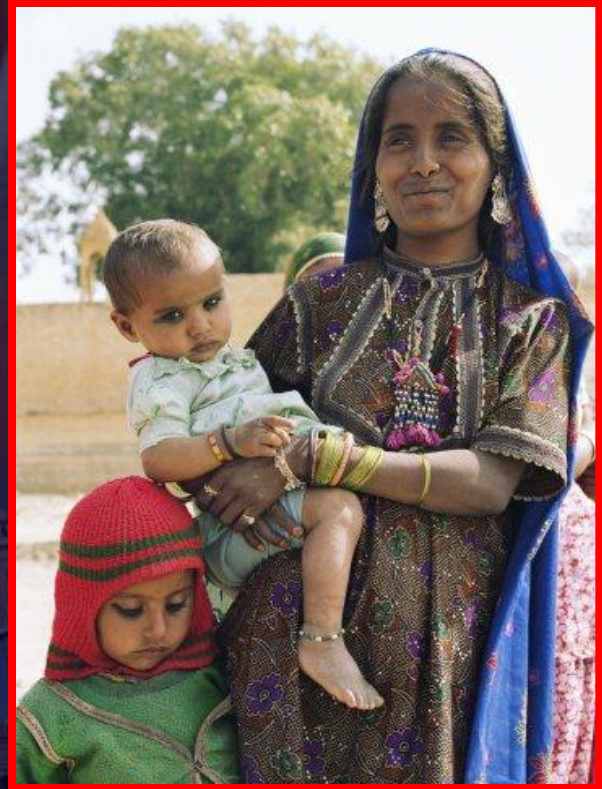
Today...



- No government program in place for the care of the older woman

# Assisted Reproduction Becoming Successful

- Egg donors & surrogates easily available
- A new form of **Ascent of Women** being experienced
- Babies at 65 & 70yrs



# Current Scenario

## International Safeguards

- India a party to various International Conventions to support women of all religions, castes and cultures



# Conventions

1968... Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination

1979... International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights

1993... Ratification of the Convention of all forms of discrimination against women

1995... Faculty UN World Conference on Women in Beijing to ensure women's rights in India

# Conventions

2000. . . Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on gender based violence

2001. . . Prime Minister announced the year as the Year of Women's Empowerment and unveiled the relevant National Policy

2003. . . All laws deemed discrimination to women were to be reviewed and amended by 2003

# Women's Empowerment – Positive Aspects

- Political representative of women
- Increases in life expectancy
- Increases in education levels
- Initiatives to empower women economically and politically



# The Fundamental Rights

- Available to all Indian Citizens without discrimination to caste, race, sex or place of birth
- Implementation insufficient
- Wide gap between good intentions and reality
- Social and cultural pressures force women to compromise / withdraw their demands





# Women's Empowerment – A Success only with...

- A fully accountable and supportive administrative and criminal justice system
- A vibrant human rights movement
- State officers and politicians playing a crucial role in ensuring these rights

# The Future is Bright

- Young girls are being educated in rural India



# Grit and Honey

- A young backward class village girl in Bihar fights for her right to education and sets an example for many through her successful business



Anita Kushwaha

# Humble Beginnings

- Was expected to shepherd goats
- Marry young
- Her father – a poorly paid employee in a grocery shop
- Anita expected to follow what all girls in her village did



# Anita Kushwaha

- Persuaded parents to attend school
- Parents agreed till class v
- She taught other children to pay school fees
- Ran errands for **honey keepers** and learnt the trade



# Growing Ambition

- Used Rs 5000/- saving from tuitions set up business in 2002 with 2 bee boxes and as many queen bees
- In few months made significant profits



# Bee Stings

- Swollen face an object of ridicule
- Father joined business, collected honey from different sources
- Her mud house replaced by brick house
- Gifted motorcycle to brother



# Improved Social Standing

- Her mother now village chief of a political party
- Her success inspired others to take bee keeping
- Every girl in her village goes to school now



# What Next ?

- A lot has been done
- A lot more needs to be done



The ascent of women in India  
has begun

# My vision for India

❖ ~~For every individual~~  
No woman would  
be in a place where  
she is not wanted  
or not wanted  
in a place where  
healthcare  
international rights  
standards



# My Mission

- To propel health and population issues to the forefront of the country's agenda





