



EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN: ROLE OF SAROJINI NAIDU, THE NIGHTINGALE OF INDIA

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Abstract

Sarojini Naidu, the Indian independence activist and poet, was born in a Bengali Hindu family at Hyderabad. She had her education in Chennai and subsequently at Cambridge. She became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and played a stellar role in the Indian Nationalist Movement. She became the President of Indian National Congress and later she was appointed to be the Governor of the United Provinces, now Uttar Pradesh. Known as the 'Nightingale of India', she was also a noted poet. She took cognizance of the fact that merely getting freedom for the country without concomitant freedom and emancipation for the women folk of the country was of no use. That is why she left no stone unturned to remove the social evils practiced against women like Sati, Purdah system. She was also a strong votary of women education. She also took cudgels for women suffrage because she rightly believed that empowerment of women can be facilitated only by making them participate in the political process in the country.

Key Words: *Sarojini Naidu, Emancipation of Women, Sati, Purdah System, Women education, Women suffrage.*

In this research study, endeavors are made to study the prominent and important role that was played by Sarojini Naidu for the emancipation of the women in the country during the British rule in India. Sarojini Naidu joined the national liberation movement and dedicated her entire life not only for securing independence for the country but also for the emancipation of the Indian women through dedicated and committed participation in social and political activities and also through her oratory skills. She was one among the few women who participated in the national movement. Her participation in the social and political activities made it quite clear to her that until the pathetic and pitiable condition of the women is rectified; freedom for India would be a very distant dream. As a result, Sarojini Naidu made fight for women's rights her priority. Her strenuous efforts to emancipate the women and make their living conditions better can be understood through her speeches where she exhorted every Indian to work for the betterment of the women. Though she did not initiate any movement as such for the emancipation of women, she visited each and every corner of the country and delivered lectures and exhorted the people, especially men to remove the social disabilities that are plaguing the women's social life and made them aware of the need for providing appropriate education to women, doing away with Paradah system, doing away with enforcement widowhood, encouraging widow remarriages, accepting divorce for women, need for equal qualification between women and men etc.

In spite of many painstaking efforts that were made by many social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, M.G.Ranade, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and D.K.Karve and despite many social legislations that were brought about in the field of women's emancipation, there still persisted many social evils like polygamy, child marriages, female infanticide, widowhood, discouragement and prejudices against women's education, Paradah system etc which were making the life of women very miserable during the British rule. The men subjugated, suppressed and oppressed their womenfolk. They were not allowed to step out of the house and were confined to house attending to domestic chores and begetting and raising children. They could not give vent to their desires or inborn talents. Sarojini Naidu wanted to bring about awareness among women and dedicated her time to remove the social disabilities that were being



faced by women of the day. Sarojini Naidu was very much impressed by the work that was done by her parents in the field of women's education and emancipation and that provided the necessary impetus and inspiration for her to take up the cause of women.

It was very natural for Sarojini Naidu to become a part and parcel of the women's movement of the time. Sarojini Naidu met some of the social reformers and leading thinkers of the day when she attended the 18th session of the Indian National Congress in Bombay at the fag end of 1904. Sarojini Naidu, in this session, addressed mammoth crowds among whom ladies were present in significant number. A major part of the deliberations of the sessions was confined to the issues pertaining to the emancipation and liberation of women from the persisting social evils. Issues like the social status of women, women's education, widow remarriage, abolish of the child marriages, abolish of polygamy, removal of

Paradah system and employment and careers for women were discussed animatedly at length. ¹ Ramabai Ranade was one of the prominent women leaders who made a very enlightening and illuminating speech on the status of women. She made an earnest appeal to the women to throw off the bondages of superstition, backwardness and tradition and to work sincerely and earnestly for the removal of their misery and poverty and she also made an appeal to them to send their girl children to schools and appealed to the government to start more schools for the girls and to start more orphanages and homes for destitute women. In this context, Ramabai Ranade was the pioneering women even before Sarojini Naidu.² At this particular meeting, Sarojini Naidu was very active and like a young charger who is ready to start work recited a poem which was full of patriotism in the following words

*"O young through all the immemorial Years! Rise Mother, rise,
regenerate from thy gloom. And like a bride high- mated with
the spheres, Beget new glories from thine ageless womb. The
nations that in fettered darkness weep
Crave thee to lead them where great mornings break. Mother, O
Mother, wherefore dost thou sleep?
Arise and answer for thy children's sake!
Thy future calls thee with a manifold sound
To crescent honours, Splendours, victories vast; Waken, O
slumbering Mother, and be crowed, who once wert empress of the
sovereign past ".³*

Sarojini Naidu, through this poem, tried to awaken Mother India who was in deep slumber and exhorted the countrymen by saying that the time has come to wake up and move forward and also to show the beacon light of freedom to the countrymen, her own children. This poem won the appreciation of all the countrymen. Sarojini Naidu was not the pioneer in the field of women's emancipation. She was preceded by other great women reformers like Muthulakshmi Reddy, Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade who made pioneering works in the fields of emancipation of women. However Sarojini Naidu was endowed with a very rare gift of touching the heart of listeners and grabbing their attention in such a way that they became very active listeners and got influenced by the dint of her personality and ideas.⁴ In this particular meeting, Sarojini Naidu made a passionate plea to the men present at the gathering to give their wives the freedom they richly deserve because it was their birth right.⁵ Mrs. Naidu, in her later years, became a leader of Indian women because of her dynamic energy and her keen social consciousness. Sarojini Naidu spoke at length on the issue of "The Education of Indian Women" at the



Indian Social Conference in Calcutta in 1906 when the Swadeshi Movement was its height. She was of the opinion that there should be no distinction of community, caste or creed and she expressed the same at the conference. As a result, the word 'Hindu' was changed to Indian at her instance.⁶

Dwelling on the issue of 'female education' she stated that India in the earlier centuries was a great civilization and had contributed immensely for the sake of world's progress. She said that in ancient times, there were umpteen examples of women of the highest genius and widest culture but however the same could not be continued for long. She said that it is highly imperative and the time has come for according importance to women education and mere passing of empty resolutions in favor of female education would not suffice and some fruitful measures and appropriate steps must be taken in the direction. She opined that the whole efforts that are being made for a common national ideal should be centred around the "women question". She expressed regrets that even an "unanimous acceptance" of the dire need for women education for the process of nation building is not acknowledged.⁷ Mrs. Naidu asked "Does one-man dare to deprive another of his birth right, God's pure air which nourishes his body? How then, shall a man dare to deprive the human soul of its immemorial inheritance of liberty and life? But man had so dared in the case of Indian women."⁸ She advised and exhorted the Indian men that they should change themselves to restore to their womenfolk the rights that they richly deserve and she told women that it were they and not the men who were the real nation builders and without the voluntary and active cooperation that is rendered by women for the progress of nation all the conferences and congresses will go in vain.

Sarojini Naidu through her speeches tried to imbue in the minds of the people of India the need for according education to women. Educating women was always a priority because she strongly believed that education was one important entity that will help women to lift themselves out of the morass of poverty, deprivation and will help them escape the deplorable conditions that they were living in. She advised the men to educate their women and the nation will take care of itself.⁹ Sarojini Naidu once had an occasion to act as President of a meeting of Hindu Social Reform Association which was held at Mehaboob College Hall, Secunderabad. She, at this meeting, condemned the prevailing social evils like the dowry (*vara Sulkam*), the bride price (*Kanya sulkam*), infant marriage, prostitution (*Nautches*), extravagant expenditure on marriages and other religious and social functions and the wide age disparity that existed between the brides and the bridegrooms of the day very vehemently and fearlessly.

Comparing graphically the past and present state of the Indian society and Indian men, she stated, "In days of yore, India possessed real men who honored women and spared no pain to raise them to their level and make them help mates. Ancient women of India recognized the worth of men and were prepared to make any sacrifice for their sake."¹⁰ She further stated that the men of the past had sufficient love and warmth in them and as a result, if their wives performed sati it was mostly out of love for their husbands and the regret for the loss of their beloved. She questioned the audience if the men of the present days deserve sati. The men of the present day according to her were not men at all but were the degenerated descendants of ancient heroes.¹¹ A meeting was held in Bombay in March 1908 to celebrate the silver jubilee of a Bombay Gujarati monthly, 'Stree Bodh'. Sarojini Naidu was invited to address the meeting and she made a very passionate plea to the audience to support of the cause of the abolishing of 'Paradah' system. She expresses strong opinion that 'Paradah' system was a great hurdle that was coming in the way of social reform in the country.¹² Among the audience were present many Muslim women who were sitting behind the screens and among them were some speakers.

Addressing the Muslim women she said, "the Paradah system did not mean that there should be Paradah on the mind and also on the soul. It only meant that the modesty and the chastity of the women should



be protected assiduously. Sarojini Naidu wrote a poem, “The Paradah Nashin”¹³ (means one who lives behind a veil) where she praised the chastity of women. She glorified the paradah system because it was there to protect the chastity of women and at the same time she said that without removing Paradah, women can be educated and can be made to have progressive ideas with modern outlook.

Sarojini Naidu, on December 3, 1908 attended in Madras, the 22nd Session of the Indian National Social Conference. The venue was consisting of a large number of audience and was composed of all creeds and classes which included apart from others Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Justice, Dr. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar. Sarojini Naidu was one among the panel of speakers and she made a resolution regarding “Hindu widow” as follows, “This conference invites all communities concerned to give their earnest endeavors to save Hindu widows from the customary disfigurement, to ameliorate their conditions by providing them with educational facilities and a widows’ home of the model of Professor Karve’s so that they may become better qualified than now to be Sisters of Mercy and useful and respected members of society, and also by placing no obstacles in the way of their remarriage.”¹⁴ Sarojini Naidu, through this speech, advocated widow remarriages, education for widows and establishment of widow homes across the length and breadth of the country.

She participated in another public meeting in December 1908 that was conducted at the Congress Pavilion in Madras which was conducted under the aegis of Pachaiyappa’s College Historical Association. The theme of the conference was women’s education. Sarojini Naidu, speaking after Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya remarked that she was greatly pained and troubled by the pathetic conditions in which the girls of the country were living. She further stated that Indian women like the women in Western countries can play a very significant and active role in the social and political evolution of the nation. However, while the men of the country were imbibing new thoughts and ideas and progressing in life, women were not allowed to do so and as a result they are lagging behind with regard to their development. She urged the men of the country to aid and assist the women in their development otherwise the progress of the nation will be of far-fetched dream. She again harped upon the importance of education for women to improve the conditions of the women of India.¹⁵

In the year 1913, the health of Sarojini Naidu broke down when she was relentlessly and vigorously campaigning for the cause of emancipation of Indian women through education and as a result she was advised by doctors to travel to England for recuperation. When Sarojini Naidu travelled to England, the great suffragist campaigning was going on there. Without taking any rest Sarojini Naidu plunged into the movement and propagated and championed the cause of women and tried to dispel the wrong opinions and notions that were prevailing in England about India.¹⁶ She returned to India from England in the year 1914 and she had to suffer the death of two men who were of great influence on her life namely, her father Agharnath chattopadhaya and her mentor Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Sarojini Naidu stood unperturbed and undaunted by these calamities and joined the nationwide campaign of speeches for exhorting the Indian women and the youth of the nation to carry on with their duties.¹⁷

The 22nd annual social gathering of Hindu Ladies Social and Literary Club was conducted at the the *Chanda Ramji* Hindu Girls School in Bombay on 16 January 1916. Sarojini Naidu was the prominent speaker there and she spoke and championed the cause of Indian womanhood. Presiding over the meeting, she said, “The real test of nationhood is in the womanhood. The work of nation building must begin from women. It should be brought to the notice of the mind of Indian women that she is neither a toy, nor cattle, nor an instrument of pleasure, but the inspirer of the spirit.”¹⁸ Sarojini Naidu always emphasized on the goal of upliftment of Indian women spiritually. She always used to ask, “ why are the



names of Sita, Savitri and Damayanti so sacred and familiar? What were the qualities that made them so great?"¹⁹ She opined that it was because these women were bereft of petty quarrelsomeness, stupidity, timidity and idleness. It was their intellectual development and spiritual understanding which not only made them great but also worthy of emulation. She, therefore, opined that spiritual development was the need of the hour for the Indian women. Sarojini Naidu tried to unite all the women of the country for the betterment and improvement and said that no one could be greater than a good woman.

Mrs. Naidu, addressed a meeting in Urdu on 30 March 1918, at *Kanya Mahavidyalya* at Jullandhar . She once again reiterated the need for education for women. She questioned the audience why there was bigotry and prejudice against education of women. She said that it was only the parochial and narrow minded men who said that the education for women is worthy of condemnation because it makes the women independent in her thinking. She reminded the people that women in past played a very prominent and significant role in the social and political life of the nation. She said that it was the privilege for the country that India had possessed women who were bolder and braver than men and the testimony for these facts lie in Indian scriptures. She referred to the two great Indian epics namely, Mahabharata and Ramayana where the women accompanied their husbands not only into the wilderness of forests but also into the thick of battle and wars.²⁰ She reminded the audience that it was indeed a great privilege for India to have women who were more courageous than their brothers.

She stated unequivocally that for the sake of betterment of conditions in the country and for amelioration of the suffering of the common masses, it is highly imperative that the cooperation of both the sexes is sought. She again stated, "you demand political rights. Do not forget, that a lame person can walk but slowly, a one eyed man sees only one side and that the carriage with one wheel cannot move properly."²¹ In this particular speech Sarojini Naidu wanted to stress upon the fact that freedom cannot be achieved from the British unless women played a very active role in the freedom movement. Hence, it is highly imperative to improve the conditions of Indian women if freedom is to be achieved.

On 31st of March 1918, Mrs. Naidu again addressed a women's conference at Jalandhar entitled, "A Vision of India's Future Women". Addressing the women she said that women keep the beacon fire of the nation alive and aflame apart from keeping the hearth fire in her own home burning. The educational system of the country must be such that it preserves the best tradition of both the West and the East and it is imperative upon the intellectuals, upon the country to reconstruct the education on those lines. Mere bookish knowledge is not going to help the people of the country. Liberal, large and priceless education along with its accompanying culture does not come from the books alone but from the life itself, experiences that are gathered from life, salubrious environment etc. Here, Mrs. Naidu was harping upon the wholesome development of individual personality for the people of the country and especially the women.²² Addressing a conference on "National Educational Women" at Lahore in April 1918 Sarojini Naidu said, "you talk of Indian womanhood, you talk of the courage and devotion that took Savitri to the very realms of death to win back her husband's soul, yet to the Savitris of today you deny that power to win back their lives from the depths of death."²³

In July 1918, speaking at a conference entitled, "Opening of the National School for girls" at Mylapore, Madras,²⁴ Mrs. Naidu championed the cause of women education and exhorted the people to send their girl children to schools and impressed upon the need for the girl child to be educated. In similar fashion, at the Special Congress Meeting in Bombay, in September 1918, Mrs. Naidu moved a resolution on "Equal Qualification between Men and Women". The resolution stated, "women possessing the same qualifications as are laid down for men in any part of the scheme shall not be disqualified on the account



of sex.”²⁵ With an intention to know the views of individuals and groups for the sake of constitutional reforms, Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy and Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State planned a tour of India in 1917. Margaret Cousins and Saraladevi Chaudharani mentioned some social and educational demands before the dignitaries.²⁶ However, the officials pertaining to the Commission informed Margaret Cousins that only political issues were being considered by the Secretary of State and as a result Mrs. Cousins revised the draft and included also ‘Opportunities for Political Service’ which included the subject of women’s franchise.²⁷ At that time, the Indian women were not so much bothered about their political and voting rights as much as they were interested in social and educational rights.²⁸ However, Mrs. Naidu wanted to bring all the women into the political arena of the country because it will empower them and will assist to remove the social disabilities that they were facing due to want of political power. Therefore, Mrs. Naidu led a delegation of fourteen prominent women which presented an all India representation to Lord Chelmsford and Edwin Montagu in Madras city on 15 December 1917.²⁹ The All India Women’s Deputation under the leadership of Mrs. Naidu drafted and presented a memorandum to Edwin Montagu and Lord Chelmsford stating that the women of India championed the cause for self-government in the Empire and they also ardently supported the scheme of reforms that were drawn up by the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. The delegation demanded that franchise should be extended to all the people without regard to gender and the members of the Council should be elected by the people. Women should also be allowed to contest for the elections for the Council and they should not be discriminated on the basis of their sex. Local self-government should be granted and women should have adequate representation in the local bodies.³⁰

Mrs. Naidu’s efforts to empower women by giving them their political rights was appreciated and applauded across the country and many political conferences and public meetings were conducted across the country supporting the demand for women’s right to vote.³¹

Sarojini Naidu, at the 18th session of the Bombay Provincial Conference which was conducted at Bijapur in 1918, moved a resolution on “Women’s Franchise”. The resolution stated, “This conference welcomes the requisition of the ladies of the Bombay inviting the support of this conference for the women’s franchise in India, and places on record the opinion that such a franchise should be given to women, but under suitable conditions, and recommends that this resolution be forwarded to the Congress through the Provincial Congress Committee.”³²

Mrs. Naidu speaking in support of the resolution stated that the word “man” should also include politically “woman” with regard to the discussions pertaining to political rights, rights of citizens and their franchise. She requested the audience to consider the question of women’s franchise from a national point of view. She asked the people the question if it was possible for the reconstruction of the National life in a rich manner without the support that was lent by the women who constituted the soul of citizenship and the life of the nation.³³

Sarojini Naidu, again spoke at length at the Special Session of Indian National Congress on the issue of “Women’s suffrage” on 1st September, 1918. She again reiterated that women who possess the same qualifications as men should not be disqualified on account of sex in any part of the scheme. She enjoined upon the audience that all the rights that a man possesses should also be granted to women because they are also responsible along with men for the prosperity and honor of the nation. She further stated that men and women have their own separate goals and separate destinies. She further added that just as the man can never fulfill the responsibilities or the destinies of a woman, similarly, a woman cannot fulfill the responsibilities of man nor his destinies. Speaking on the importance of voting rights



for women, Sarojini Naidu said that women should have the right to vote not that they might interfere with men in their official functions, their public place, wield power or interfere in the civic duties of man. She says that women need voting right so that they might lay the foundation of national character in the souls of the children that they hold upon their laps and instill among the children the ideals of nation life.³⁴ This special session was attended by 5000 delegates and the resolution was passed by nearly 75% of the majority of the delegates supporting the cause of women rights.

In 1918, Southborough Franchise Committee paid a visit to India to seek information regarding the granting of voting rights to women. The Second Women's deputation met the committee members and sought franchise reforms and likewise provides voting rights to women. However, injustice was already done to women in the Montague- Chelmsford when the Commission made no mention of the voting rights for women and completely ignored their demands.³⁵

In similar lines, the Southborough Franchise Committee also concluded that it would be premature to grant franchise to Indian women. The committee concluded that the woman did not want vote and even if they did they would not be in a position to exercise their franchise because the social custom would stand in the way of its implementation. The Indian women who had worked for franchise to the sisters were furious because the Southborough Franchise Committee had completely ignored their demands. They felt cheated because the women were excluded from voting in respect of their social position, property or qualifications of education. They came to a conclusion that women suffrage will not be a reality until the 'Pardah' system was removed.³⁶

In July, 1919, the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Government of India Bill was appointed with an aim to take opinions from the representative Indians, regarding the reforms and plan them on a workable basis. A delegation of women again waited on this committee. Therefore, Sarojini Naidu, in July 1919, made a trip to England along with Annie Besant to plead before the British Parliamentary Committee with regard to the formulation of the promised Reform Bill.³⁷

In England, Sarojini Naidu made untiring efforts to mobilize all the different Indian political organizations and spearheaded a formidable agitation with an aim to achieve voting rights for Indian women.³⁸ Sarojini Naidu, though at heart was not a feminist, was in the thick of the agitation for women's rights because a sense of justice is inevitably drawn into the women's movement. Making out very strong case for women's suffrage for the Indian women, she presented, on August 6, 1919, a memorandum to the Joint Select Committee on Indian Reforms supporting the cause of women's franchise.³⁹ Pleading before the Committee she said that she was a representative of all Indian women, even orthodox Muslim and Hindu women. She reiterated that women if granted voting right will become a powerful force to be reckoned with and will ensure the progress of the nation. She brushed aside all the objections that were raised by the Committee regarding the difficulties of voting for women while observing 'Pardah'. She told the committee that 'pardah' system was practised only by few "upper-class" women. The majority of the women do not practice the system. She told the Committee very categorically that she had never known 'pardah' come in the way of anything that a woman wanted to.⁴⁰ The women delegation which was headed by Mrs. Naidu so thoroughly convinced the Committee that the British Parliament began actually to consider giving voting rights for women and treating that as a 'domestic subject' left it to the Indian provincial legislature to discuss the issue and settle the matter.⁴¹ The Southborough Committee, in the light of the prevailing social conditions in India, thought that it was premature to extend franchise to women. As a result, it did not recommend extension of franchise to women. Through the efforts of Mrs. Naidu, the Government of India Act of 1919 left the responsibility



of deciding the issue of women's franchise to be settled by the provincial legislatures. One after one, the provincial legislatures started giving the women the franchise on the same terms as men.⁴² Madras and Bombay provinces were the first ones to extend the franchise to women in the year 1921. Likewise, they were followed by United Provinces in 1923, Punjab and Bengal provinces in 1926 and the Central Provinces, Assam, Orissa and Bihar in the year 1930.⁴³

When Sarojini Naidu was elected the President of the Indian National Congress in its Kanpur session in the year 1925, it appeared as if the debut of Mrs. Naidu as the President of the Congress party heralded in the women into Indian politics. Women conferences were held across the country championing the cause of women during the year 1926-27.

Women started demanding the right to contest elections and to be elected to the legislatures after they secured the right to vote. It was only in the year 1926 that women were granted the right to be members of provincial legislatures and even that was allowed not through elections but by nomination by the Government. In the year 1927, the first woman legislator, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy was appointed by the government to the Madras Legislative Council.⁴⁴

Women were asking to be granted permission at least to seek elections to the Municipal Councils and four women were elected to the Bombay Municipal Council after winning four different wards in the elections. Sarojini Naidu was one among them and in fact she was also invited to become the Mayor of Bombay which she politely declined and never held the position.⁴⁵ Sarojini Naidu, in the year 1930, was elected the President of the All-India Women's Education Conference. Addressing the women on 1 March 1930, Mrs. Naidu said she hoped that the women of India will realize the need for their solidarity and that's going to be a real foundation for national development in the country. She further added that the time has come when all women of India irrespective of their community, creed, race and rank should concentrate both their talents and energies for the service of the nation.

During 1931-32, in the deliberations of the Round Table Conference in London, the question of women suffrage featured once again quite prominently. The implications of the forthcoming political reforms were not lost on the leaders of various women's organizations of India. The Women's Indian Association, All India Women's Conference and the National Council of Women, determined that their voice should not go unheard, met in a joint conference and voiced their concern regarding the absence of voting rights to women and demanded immediate adult franchise to all the people of the country without any discrimination based on gender. This issue was already a subject of discussion during the first session of the Round Table Conference. Sarojini Naidu participated in the Second Session of the Round Table Conference which was held from September 1931 to December 1931 and she represented the Indian women and championed the cause of adult franchise to Indian woman. However, the Lothian Committee, in its final report rejected the adult franchise bearing in mind the size of the country, the large population living in the country along with the high rate of adult illiteracy.⁴⁶

Though the Act of 1935 failed to meet the aspirations of women with regard to adult franchise, the groundwork that had been done for granting of adult franchise lead to the giving of voting rights to all the people across the country after it became independent in 1947. All people, irrespective of their caste, gender, class and creed were given the right to vote. There was to be no more discrimination on the grounds of religion, sex, race or caste for which Sarojini Naidu has made unrelenting struggle during all the years till India became independent.⁴⁷



Sarojini Naidu's commentator rightly commented that it was indeed a tragedy that she did not live to see the day when both women and men gathered together before the polling booths to cast their votes in the first general elections that were held in the country in the year 1952.⁴⁸ In spite of her many preoccupations, Sarojini Naidu played a very prominent role with regard to the opening of Lady Irwin College in Delhi for providing education to women exclusively. A special committee of women of which Sarojini Naidu was a member along with other educational experts helped in the establishment of the college.⁴⁹

Divorce for women was one of the burning issues of the day and in 1932 a heated discussion on the topic of divorce took place in Allahabad. Women organizations across the country were fighting for this right to be granted to the women who were facing harassment in the hands of their husbands. Sarojini Naidu questioned as to why should men have the right to Polygamy and she further asked if the women need to be loyal to her husband if he neglected one wife for another.⁵⁰

In 1945, Sarojini Naidu, at Lahore, was elected the President of All India Women's Conference. As the President of the Conference, she made untiring efforts for the emancipation of women in India. The grand climax arrived with the appointment of Sarojini Naidu as the Governor of U.P., the largest province in the country. It became a milestone in the progress of equal political status for women.⁵¹

Sarojini Naidu dedicated her entire life for the cause of the emancipation of women. She was provoked by the effects of the economic and administrative measures of the British government on the social, economic and political institutions of India and as a result, she was not only for Indian independence but also for the emancipation of Indian women. She was of a firm belief that unless Indian women were free from the exploitation which was the result of religious practices, freedom for India would be a very distant dream. She thoroughly believed that women were a potent factor in the evolution of the country. Hence, she came forward to improve the position of women in the country and inspired them to realise their latent power by giving examples of Damayanti, Savitri, Sita etc. through her speeches.⁵²

Though Sarojini Naidu believed in the greatness of ancient women, it did not mean that she was against modernity and the progress of Indian women. She respected her religion and tradition and at the same time detested and condemned the evil practices that are prevailing in her religion. She was against superstition and 'Pardah' system. Speaking about the 'Pardah' system, she said 'Pardah' denotes chastity of women, it is for her protection. It is tradition and culture and as a result we should follow it. She, however, stated that Pardah does not mean veiling one's own mind. She is meant to be open to modern education and liberal thinking.

She was the first Indian woman to think that political rights were highly essential for women and she was the first women who believed that fight for women's rights should be a part and parcel of the struggle for Indian independence and she was a fountain of inspiration to the Indian women who made them conscious about their social and political rights. It is for this reason that 13th of February, the day of Saroja's birth, is celebrated as "National Women's Day" in India.

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4. Baig, Tara Ali, Sarojini Naidu, op. cit., p. 32.
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8. Ibid. pp. 12-13.
9. S. R. Bakshi, Sarojini Naidu Struggle for Swaraj, op. cit., p. 28.
10. Ibid. p. 28.
11. Stree Bodha, a Bombay Gujrati , monthly which was started by Kaikhushro Navroji Kabraji in 1857 to work for the amelioration of women. He was a writer, journalist and social reformer and also a contemporary of Dadabhai Naoroji.
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