

Review Article

Forgotten History of Empowered Women

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Abstract

Background: Since the time immemorial half of the humanity has been ignored and hardly mentioned in the history book compared to the other half of humanity. History has been written by men, of men and for men. There is tons of literature talking about and glorifying kings, generals, lords, inventors, poets, writers, philosophers, artists, that were men. However not much literary work has been produced on the same scale to exalt the other gender.

Methodology: The literature search was employed through electronic databases including Embase, PubMed, Research gate, Scopus & Google Scholar. The most difficult question to settle before embarking upon this research was which personalities should be selected for fulfilling the criteria of the research. Eventually selection was made covering most parts of the globe since ancient times.

Results: The study of history reveals the fact that women in the past have contributed in almost every field yet they were just mentioned in margins of history and as a support, rather than the main characters. Although women have influenced in many fields but this study revolves around few empowered women who influenced socio-political arena of their time and space.

Conclusion: It has become imperative to bring the forgotten past of these women to build upon the rational of gender equality.

Keywords

Women Empowerment, History of Women, Gender Equality



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Introduction

In this study attempt has been made to bring to the lime light the forgotten past of few extra ordinary women who have played significant roles in their relevant capacities. It was difficult to make a choice between so many such women and to highlight few of them. The selection thus was made to bring women from different parts of the world.

Women have played significant roles in almost every field of life. They have worked side by side along with men in the progress of the human society from the very beginning. Even when human beings were living nomadic life and they were called hunter and gatherers, men used to hunt and women used to gather the food that was available on the plants and trees.

Later after the Neolithic Revolution at around 8000 BCE human beings started to grow food and rear animals. During this time women used to work alongside men in the fields. Until now in agrarian societies all across the world women work alongside men in the fields actively and participate as equal labor over the top of their house hold duties. Men used to do the hard labor like, plowing the field, making water channel and women used to plant seeds, water fields, plucking, harvesting and threshing along with men.

Pantea Arteshbod: (559-529 BCE Time of Cyrus the Great)

Amongst the greatest of the empires in History, Achaemenid Persian Empire has a place of its own. It was an unmatched and unique empire spanning over parts of Asia, Europe and Africa. Persian Empire was the earliest of the large empires followed by Greek and Roman Empire. History is witness to the fact that behind all great empires there were always few great personalities behind them who made it possible for kings and emperors to attain and retain their power.

Where history screams about the male general and warriors it hardly whispers the names of great women warriors who lead

from the front and made through the ranks through highly competitive patriarchy. Pantea Arteshbod was one such woman. The history of Persian Empire would not be complete without mentioning her name and her feats. In old Persian Pantea means 'strong'¹. She was one of the greatest generals of Cyrus the Great, the most notable amongst Achaemenid rulers.

She commanded the most prestigious military unit of ancient Persian Empire the Immortals². This section of the Persian army was the pride of the emperor feather in the cap. It was a unique unit which was specially raised from the early age to serve the emperor and it always inducted only people of Persian blood to keep loyalty to the emperor. It was a great honor for anyone to command such a prestigious unit of army.

She led Immortals into the battle of Opis, one the most significant battle during the reign of Cyrus the Great. It took place in 539 BCE between Cyrus and the Neo-Babylonian Empire³. After the great victory of the Neo-Babylonians Cyrus complete his conquest of Mesopotamia as this was the last strong hold. After the battle Pantea took control over a large area and brought balance to the newly conquered area or the new extension of the Empire.

Cleopatra (69-30 BCE)

The last of the Egyptian Pharaoh, Cleopatra has always been portrayed as the most fascinating leader in the history. All the stories and fiction written about her has captivated readers from all shades of life. Novels, dramas and other literature has been written about her for the last two millennia. In the last century she was subject of motion movies as well. It would not be wrong to say that Cleopatra is the most known historical figure and Egyptian pharaoh. She was the only Ptolemaic ruler who learnt Egyptian and declared herself as the daughter of Egyptian god Ra (the sun god)⁴.

Historian trace her ancestry to Macedonia, the city state of Alexander the Great, her

distinct ancestor. Before Roman Empire, Greeks had a considerable influence over Egypt after its conquest led by Alexander. She was the last ruler of the Ptolemaic Dynasty which was established in 305 BCE and ended along with Cleopatra's death in 30 BCE⁴.

She was an intelligent ruler who ruled Egypt with utmost responsibility. She continued her rule in the face of the daunting enemy in the form of Roman Empire. Egypt did not have the military power to resist against the might of Romans. She had to take an alternate route to continue, protect and consolidate her rule. She used her charm and delicate diplomatic skills to delude two Roman Emperors one after another (Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar) and a great general (Mark Antony)⁵.

One of the greatest literary work of William Shakespeare (1564-1616 CE), Antony and Cleopatra revolve around the personal and nationalistic ambitions of the queen which fail at end. Her reputation as a queen surpasses several other queens and had no competition during her time across the world. First, she courted with Julius Caesar the Roman Emperor of the time and even had a son with him known as Ptolemy XV Caesarian in 47 BCE⁴, which Julius never acknowledged. She even visited Rome along with Julius and sent ripples across Roman Senate. The visit was very beneficial for her rule in Egypt and alliance with Rome however it did not please the senators who criticized Julius for this act.

Later she consorted with Marcus Antonius (popularly known as Mark Antony)⁶. She also had twins with him, Cleopatra Selene and Alexander Helios who survived after her death. Augustus Caesar was ambitious and wanted to extend his rule officially over Egypt⁶. He first got rid of Mark Antony and later dealt with Cleopatra. He had announced that he would go to Egypt and take it over. To avoid the humiliation and foreseeing her possible fate she chose to die an honorable death rather than by the hands

of enemy. She took her own life by a snake bite.

Her suicide is probably the most famous suicide in the history. She did everything to defend her rule and protect her lands from outsiders. It was unfortunate time of Egypt that it had lost the glory and might it once have had. With her demise the final conquest and takeover of Egypt by Romans was complete.

Rabia Basri (717-801 CE)

Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya commonly known as Rabia Basri is one of the most revered Muslim women outside the family of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She was born during the time of Umayyad dynasty and in the year when Umar bin Abdul Aziz became the Caliph, 717 CE. She was born in a famous historical town of Basra, located at the juncture of Iraq, Iran and Kuwait. It was a very busy place because it also served as a trade route between these countries and even Arabian Peninsula.

She was the fourth daughter to her parents in the time when girls were not considered as a child of choice⁷. However, her father, a mystic himself raised her well. After his death she was separated from her sisters and lived a solitary life in desert. Throughout her life she devoted herself towards the love of God and never let the worldly affairs come in her path. She gave new meanings to the love of God and defined mysticism for later generations to follow. Her prayer to God is a depiction of it,

*"O Allah! If I worship You for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell,
and if I worship You in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise.
But if I worship You for Your Own sake,
grudge me not Your everlasting Beauty."*

Islam gave equal rights to women and elevated the status of women to new levels while in Europe women deprived of any equal rights and social status. Rabia Basri became an example of the social values of

women in Islam. She was revered very highly by almost all of her contemporaries and after her death she left a philosophy of Sufism behind her for later generations to follow. "Rabia Basri constantly and all the time was absorbed in the thought of God and had reached the pinnacle of mystic path i.e., Fina-Fillah"⁸. In another poetic work she stated that,

*"Your prayers are your light;
Your devotion is your strength;
Sleep is the enemy of both.
Your life is the only opportunity that life
can give you.
If you ignore it, if you waste it,
You will only turn to dust."*

Until today she remains amongst top three Qalanders in Muslim history⁸. For over twelve hundred years she has influenced countless lives and character of Muslims and considerable non-Muslims as well. She lived a life of hardships and struggle and never deviated away from the path of devotion towards the God. She has undoubtedly laid down the foundations of Sufism and mystic traditions in Islam. Today a lot can be learnt from her teachings, poetry and life struggle to stay on one path and stay away from conflict and violence.

Razia Sultana (1205-1240 CE)

She was a daughter of the second Sultan of Slave Dynasty, Iltutmish. Her siblings, three brothers were Nasiruddin Mahmud, Muiz ud din Bahram and Rukn ud din Firuz. Her father is considered as the real founder of the Delhi Sultanate because he expanded the Muslim rule and consolidated it by laying down strong foundations of administration. Razia was a favorite of her father from the very beginning and accompanied him in many of the official affairs of the state.

Razia Sultana had a spark since her childhood and was very attentive in the state affairs of her father. She learnt combat and horse riding as a princess. She was also favored by her father over her brothers because her brilliance in various aspects of

royal affairs and traditions. During a campaign in Gawaliar in 1230-31 CE, Iltutmish had to leave capital for several months, he appointed Razia as his replacement to deal with the day to day affairs in the royal court. At the death bed, "the dying monarch named his daughter Raziyya. The courtiers, scandalised by this suggestion, urged the insuperable objection of her sex, and the king, languidly replying that they would find her a better man than any of her brothers, turned his face to the wall and died, on April 29, 1236"⁹.

Her superiority over her surviving brothers, Nasir Uddin Mehmood had died during life of Iltutmish, was evident and was acknowledge by her father as well. However still she had to face hardships to claim her right full throne. Ignoring the advice of their dying king the nobles placed Rukn Uddin Firuz on the throne and later, time proved that Iltutmish was right. He was a weak ruler and the kingdom was virtually governed by his mother Shah Turkan, a mistress of Iltutmish. With six months the legacy of Iltutmish was destroyed by the duo and resulted into many rebellions. While Firuz was away from Delhi, Razia seized the opportunity and compelled general public of Delhi to rise against the immoral and destructive rule of her step brother and place her to the throne as her father wished.

In November 1236 CE she became the first female ruler of Muslim world. She was an outstanding monarch. She had declared to the people that if she does not meet their expectations, they can overthrow her from throne. She exited the attention of orthodox by shedding female clothing and wore king's attire in battles. She headed the open courts and rode in public. The world during the thirteenth century was not ready for such dynamic woman. She was probably the only one across the world to be able to achieve greatness as a monarch. She bravely challenged the system of nobility established since the time of Qutub Uddin Aibak and later fell victim of their intrigues. She flaunted her affection for an Abasynian man

Jammal Uddin Yaqut (master of horse, royal stable). He kept loyal to him until he was put down by her opponents. She ruled with such fervor that no one challenged her in battle field and whoever did she was able to overpower them. It took deep rooted conspiracies by people close to her to get rid of her.

Her character estimate is best described in the following words by, Shrivastav, "Although her reign was brief, lasting barely for three years and a half, she was, without doubt, a very successful and extra ordinary ruler. She was brave and energetic. She was a good soldier and general. She was adept in the arts of political intrigue and diplomacy. She succeeded in restoring the prestige of the Turkish kingdom in India, she raised the power of the crown and made it absolute. In fact, she was the first Turkish ruler of Delhi to have imposed the royal will upon the amirs and maliks. Qutub-uddin was the chief noble among the nobles. Iltutmish was shy to sit upon the throne in the presence of his peers. Other members of the dynasty of Iltutmish, both before and after her, were much weaker in personality and character. Raziah was, therefore, the first and the last ruler of Iltutmish's dynasty to dominate the politics of the Sultanate of Delhi by sheer force of her ability and character"¹⁰.

Joan of Arc (1412-1431 CE)

A simple poor girl belonging to peasants of France came on the scene for just over a year changed the course of war in the favor of France, her mother land during the Hundred Years War between France and England. At the tender age of 17 years and few days Joan approached the court of King of France and claimed that she had been guided by God to take command of the French army and lead them against the invaders¹¹.

Many took her as a joke until they saw the seriousness behind her claims and devotion. The French king and nobility were frustrated and demoralized by the consecutive defeats by the hands of invader and their advances on the lands of France. Joan on the other hand

looked more than confident that she can defeat British and claim the land back for France. She had to convince everyone to give her a chance. It looked almost impossible to give command of a regiment of army in the hands of a teenage girl in the medieval Europe where women did not enjoy much civil liberties.

She finally was able to accompany army to the siege of Orleans where French were trying to oust British for the last five months¹². After her arrival she was able to turn the tables by her presence and charisma. She was struck by an arrow during a battle between neck and shoulder while carrying French banner but it did not deter her motivation and she continued until French were victorious. The tales of her great victory spread quickly amongst the French and British both. French found a new motivation and believe and on the other hand superstition penetrated in the ranks of English army who considered Joan as the sign from God.

British king was fully aware of the danger of such fears in his army and devised a plan to capture her and get rid of her through trial and declaring her a heretic. Otherwise she would be as dangerous as alive if die as a martyr. In May 1430 she was deceived and captured with the help of conspiracy. Later she was shifted in the strong hold on British where she faced a religious trial. The main purpose of the trial was not to give her a chance to explain her self rather it was an attempt to declare her as witch.

Almost after a year on 30th May 1431 she was burnt alive at stake in front of people. Her dead body was burnt until she was reduced to ashes and then her ashes were thrown into Seine River¹³. Undoubtedly, she was the most feared women by British throughout their history. She can be termed as the most powerful and influential teenage girl in the history of the world who influenced great military events during the time when women were not considered as equals.

She broke many stereotypes. She led army being a woman. She wore battle clothes and actively participated in battles by carrying her banner when the role of women was limited to tending the wounds of the fallen soldiers. One of the charges she faced during her trial was 'cross-dressing'. She cut her hair short for her convenience in the battles. She single handedly brought life to the already demoralized army and turned their defeats into victories¹⁴.

A retrial took place in 1455 CE by the order of Pope Callixtus III after deliberations over few years finally declared her as innocent. Since then she was not considered as a heretic. After almost five centuries in 1920 CE she was canonized by Catholic Church by Pope Benedict XV and declared as Saint Joan of Arc. Finally, she received the honor she deserved for serving her nation and people.

Elizabeth (1533-1603 CE)

She was a very unfortunate child who became the cause her mother's death because her father wanted a boy. However, she was the most fortunate princess who lived a life of hardship due to the shadows of bastard offspring of King Henry VIII and became the queen of England by virtue of turns of events. No one had thought that she would ever survive the wrath of her step sister Mary of Scots who did not consider her a legitimate child of her father. She did not only survive her; she also became the queen after her death.

Elizabeth was the daughter of one of the most glamorous kings of England, Henry VIII. He was the second king of Tudor dynasty and the one who laid the foundations of the power full England of future¹⁵. Henry was married to Catharine of Aragon the princess of Spain and power parents. He severely desired a boy however he was unable to get one from his first marriage. He became involved with a French maid in the royal household known as Anne Boleyn. She was impregnated by the king and he wanted to marry her before the birth of the child which in his view was going to be a boy.

However, he was unable to divorce his first wife because of the political pressure. On the other hand, he cannot marry another wife because polygamy was forbidden in Catholic Church and pope refused his request for a second marriage. His desperation led him to break away from the church and became the head of Anglican Church in England through 'Act of Supremacy 1534 CE which permitted him to marry Anne Boleyn¹⁶. To his surprise rather than a boy, a girl was born and she was named Elizabeth. Later Henry killed Anne Boleyn on the charges of adultery and married another wife. He ended up marrying six women throughout his life.

Since the death of her mother the young girl was not given the due attention a child need. She was always considered as illegitimate child of her father and had almost no chances of claiming the throne for herself. It was a due to the deaths of her step siblings, first Edward and Mary next, that paved the way for her to become a queen. At the time when became Queen of England was fighting a civil war in the name of the religion because Mary of Scots, her sister was a staunch catholic and turned the country back to Catholicism. Elizabeth favored a separate English church as her father had established and her first challenge was to put the whole country on single page regarding this issue¹⁷.

The next big challenge she faced was from the husband of her dead sister Philip II who was also the king of Spain, a greater power at the time in Europe. Philip extended the marriage proposal to Elizabeth after the death of his wife and queen of England Mary, which was flatly refused by Elizabeth¹⁸. This refusal was not taken lightly by Philip who decided to teach a lesson to English queen by sending the most power naval fleet in the history until that time the Spanish Armada. In 1588 CE Spanish Armada reached the English waters and was met by defiant and resilient English navy which through their superior naval combat techniques were able to defeat the undefeated Armada. The defeat of Spanish Armada was the most considerable achievement of Elizabeth which turned the

direction of politics in Europe for future. The supremacy of Spain over the politics of Europe was shaken up by her.

Her most famous quote is, "I know that I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a King." She throughout her reign proved it. Her task to rule a country in Europe four centuries ago was more difficult than a man, because she had to prove to the society every day that she is capable and has the ability to be their monarch. Her rule was not devoid of opposition and people who wanted to get rid of her. She had to deal with them on regular basis. She refused to take a partner in life because she wanted to give most to her country. She remained single until her death. It was an ultimate sacrifice she had to give.

She turned England into one of the greatest power in Europe at the time. She smashed the gender stereotypes through her rule and proved to the world that women are not less than anyone. She was the only female monarch of Europe who ruled the country for such a long time without the shadow of father or husband. Her administration was one of the most efficient in Europe which resulted into the might of England. During her rule England started to claim an important role in the politics of Europe. She commissioned explorers and companies to trade in the new lands of the world. British East India Company was commissioned during her rule in 1600 CE. The glory England has enjoyed for the last four centuries is due to the strong and efficient reign of Elizabeth which brought peace, tranquility, harmony and prosperity to the country.

Her strong personality has been the subject of literature and popular culture for over four centuries. The earliest and most famous was the Epic poem "The Faerie Queene" written a great poet Edmund Spenser in 1590 CE. It is a long work based on Elizabeth. The most recent is the two movies series Elizabeth by Hollywood. Her legacy is immense and her contribution to England, Europe and politics

of the world can never be forgotten and undone.

Ada Lovelace 1815-1852 CE:

In the twentieth century the biggest development amongst all the other inventions and developments was in the field of computing. In the first twenty years of twenty first century the advancements in the information technology are moving forward on an unprecedented pace. In current times every one knows the names of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg etc. No one has any idea about the beginning of the journey through which computing and information technology has reached this level.

It's a common knowledge that computing is based on algorithms which allow machines to perform complex tasks. The person who realized this fact and developed algorithm for the first time was a woman known as Ada Lovelace in 1843 CE¹⁹. Initially she was asked to translate a research paper of Luigi Menabrea and she wrote her notes on it while translating it. Her notes were of such quality that later her notes were published 1843 CE and recognized as original scientific contributions. Charles Babbage, a great mathematician himself praised her work and stated that, her notes were three times the actual work she was translating²⁰.

Through her work she was able to convince the world that Analytical Engine is capable of far more than just computing simple mathematical tasks. Her published work was first published algorithm ever in the history²¹. We can easily state that due to Ada Lovelace we are able to enjoy all the technology based on computers.

Conclusion

Limited data is in favour of positive effect of music on psychological parameters but it is firmly demonstrated that music consistently and reliably interferes with the mental performance, also indicated by our study. But it is recommended that further studies should be performed to compare the positive

or negative impacts of music or the specific type of music causing either positive or negative effect on memory and attention.

Conflicts of Interest

N/A

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