

Discover India

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Purnavas, a well-known weekly newspaper, in association with Aadarshila, an association of a group of writers, journalists and artists, holds an annual award function recognizing excellence in various creative fields. It is my pleasure to inform you that for the year 2000 Discover India came to the notice of the organization and won the Best Editor award for me. I am aware that this is actually a recognition of the merit of our contributors. May I extend my congratulations to all of them, but more, my gratitude. Here is a toast to our continued long and happy association.

Daughters of the Land

Text and Photographs: Nihal Mathur



Department of Posts pays tribute to India's Women...

In a land well known for its saints and seers, it is befitting that the first ever stamp of a woman released by the Government of independent India was that of Meera — the 16th Century saint-poetess from Rajasthan. Along with other great saint-poets of her times, Meera rose above the dogmatic Hinduism of the priestly classes and took a more broader and humanistic approach. In doing that she set a more secular tradition based on devotion to God. That reflection we find in the canonized contemporaries of our times — Ma Anandamayee and Mother

Teresa, both of whom were honored by the Department of Post with special commemorative issues.

When devotion turns from God to the Nation, we find powerful women in history, who picked up the sword to defend their motherland. These were young women who were widowed at an early age but who rose to the occasion to take over the reins of the government. As reigning queens, they were truly enlightened rulers, endeared to their public. But when the moment of crisis came, they also did not hesitate to enter battlefield with indomitable

courage like surrogate sons of the soil. Commemorative stamps have been issued on Rani Durgawati (1548-1564) who ruled in central India and Rani Ahilyabai, (1725-1795) in Maharashtra. Besides them, there are many other heroines from Indian history who fought the British to assert the independence of their own states. Queen of Kittur, Rani Channamma (1778-1829) fought the British in Karnatka while Rani Rashomani (1793-1861) defied the British in West Bengal.

It was during the First War of Indian



Daughters OF the Land



in the Indian stamps where we find images of women in athletics, gymnastics, mountaineering and yoga etc. In stride with men in almost all walks of life, Indian woman today scales new heights — also as an astronaut! Symbolizing the technical achievements of the modern Indian woman is a special commemorative issue that celebrates the Indian Women in Aviation — once a male dominated preserve! But it isn't as if the Indian stamps celebrate only the distinguished daughters alone.

Two sets of four stamps each on the Indian Brides and Indian Rural Women portray the beauty, charm and intelligence of the Unknown Indian Woman from the four corners of the country. Philatelic imagery also provides a glimpse of the world of a working woman in India. Definitive series of stamps depict women spinning thread, weaving cloth, tapping rubber, plucking tea, carrying pots and of

course, caring for the young. Women's imagery is also intimately linked to the fields of education and medicine as seen in Indian postal issues.

Looking beyond its borders, India recognized the famous daughters of the world — Madam Curie, Helen Keller and Eleanor Roosevelt and honored them for their special achievements. Special mention however, must be made of India's so called "adopted daughters" who although not born an Indian, certainly became one by virtue of their dedicated work in India. There is Annie Besant, Sister Nevedita, Welthy Fisher, Maria Montessorie, Meera Ben, The Mother of Pondicherry and of course Mother Teresa, who needs no introduction.

In India where people worship the "Devi" or the Goddess, it is natural that the cult of the Mother is very strong. Department of Posts have released commemorative stamps on Kasturba Gandhi who became a

symbol of ideal Indian motherhood to the millions of her countrymen. Chatrapati Shivaji's mother Jijabai was also honored by a special commemoration because her life became a mother's attempts to transform society and influence the course of history.

Finally, it is the young daughter that grows up into a woman and a mother.

The ideals of Jijabai can be achieved only when proper nutrition and education is given to the girl child for her balanced growth and development. Among others issues, there are two stamps in particular that recognizes "Care for the Girl Child" and another that carries the message "Empowered Girl is Empowered Society". Today we look at "Astha" — name given to India's billionth baby that was a girl — to realize that ideal in the future. Only then can we be proud of all the daughters of our land.

Independence in 1857 that many daring daughters of the land rose in rebellion against the colonial British and sacrificed their lives fighting. There was Rani Avanti Bai in Madhya Pradesh and Hazrat Mahal, the Begum of Awadh who led the revolt in Lucknow.

Perhaps one of the greatest heroines of Indian history was the young Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi whose tales of

passionate spokesperson for the freedom of India in the western world. Equally eloquent was Sarojini Naidu, often referred to as the Nightingale of India. She was a patriotic bard who gave voice to nascent nationalism. The other leading ladies of India's struggle for freedom were Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf Ali and Rani Gaidiuliu, who have all been remembered for their role in Indian independence.

One of the most eminent daughters of India who came to enjoy the center stage in world politics was, undoubtedly, Indira Gandhi. Born into the illustrious family of the Nehrus, Indira was the Prime Minister of India between 1966-77 and 1980-84. During these years she provided dynamic leadership to a nation of 700 million, carrying out one bold step after another. As chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement, she came to be identified internationally as a crusader for world peace. She laid down her life in the service of the nation that fondly remembers her as Priyadarshini — a name given by her father. Indira Gandhi was indeed a remarkable woman who took equal interest in India's art & culture, natural heritage, sports, science & technology and education, as she did in Indian economy, politics, defense and foreign policy. Her persona came to redefine the modern Indian woman to the world at large.

The credit for bringing out the Indian woman from the shadows however, goes to several enlightened women of the 19th century who stepped out into public life and played a leading role in undertaking social reforms and development of woman and child. Some of the leading social reformers were Savitri Bai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade, Rameshwari & Kamala Nehru, and Rukmini Lakshmi Pathy. But it is Durgabai Deshmukh, who is considered to be the "Mother of Social Work in India". Born in a middle class Andhra family in 1909, Durgabai was

at once a freedom fighter, an administrator, an educationist, a parliamentarian but above all a social reformer. Among a long list of her achievements, she is credited with the setting up of the Central Social Welfare Board. As founding Chairperson of the Board, she mobilised thousands of voluntary organisations and workers to carry out programmes aimed at education, training and rehabilitation of the needy poor women, children and the handicapped.

Indian women also came to lead in the world of arts and crafts. Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, founder Chairperson of the All India Handicrafts Board and Sangeet Natak Academy, played an important role in providing institutional protection for the growth of handicrafts and folk arts in India. It was Rukmani Devi who, despite tremendous opposition, revived the Bharatnatyam — the classical dance form from Tamil Nadu. The Department of Posts also honored Begum Akhtar, the legendary queen of ghazals, and Nargis, celluloid heartthrob of the nation, for their contributions in performing arts. In the literary world, India paid tribute to poetess Subhadra Kumari Chauhan and Mahadevi Verma, both luminaries of modern Hindi literature. The Department of Posts also honored Jnanpith Award winner, Ashapurna Devi for being one of the leading Bangla writers. Providing role models for people, are women characters like Shakuntala and Damyanti from the old Sanskrit classics that are also celebrated in Indian stamps. Amidst the gallery of Indian painters, tribute is paid to Amrita Sher Gill who led the movement in bringing modern art to India. Indian postage stamps also celebrate the women in Indian miniature paintings and sculpture. Graceful movements of dancing women are also depicted in a set of five stamps on Indian classical dances of India.

Achievements of Indian women in the field of sports also find reflection



manly courage, bravery and military skill continue to inspire the Indians even today. A hundred years after the "mutiny" of 1857, the Government of India immortalized her in a centenary commemoration that depicted her in the battle dress of a soldier and mounted on a charger with a sword in her hand.

After 1857, when the British had entrenched themselves as the Imperial power in India, there followed a series of women who espoused the cause of Indian nationalism. To begin with there was Bhikaji Cama who became a