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Revolutionary Mothers:

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Revolutionary Mothers is a history book about those women who actively participated in the war. In her book, Berkin has included all those women who played a significant role in the revolution. Those women were from every walk of life; native Americans, African Americans, Patriots and the loyalists. Women in America have gone through different stages of social transformation during the eighteenth century. America at that time was composed of a diversified segment of women population belonging to different social classes (Berkin). Every woman of that time had a similar social and political status despite the social standing of their husbands or fathers. Berkin explains the mindset of men towards women during that era when women were hardly considered as capable of doing things as men were entitled to do like education and politics.

Majority of men both educated and uneducated considered women as a subordinate to men; it was believed that women had certain specified roles that have been bestowed on women by nature. It was considered that women have the natural role of childbearing, nurturing, house chores and entertain men. Women born in that era considered the ongoing status of women as of their own. Society played an imperative role in portraying women as a subordinate and helper to men and this thing was imprinted in the minds of women from a very young age (Berkin).

It was expected of women to be obedient to their men and she was bound to obey decisions made from men and no personal saying in decision making. The intellect of women was highly underestimated, and the mentality was to such a conservative level that husband and wife were to be considered two bodies with one mind. Women position in the society was also threatened with conservative religious beliefs that the purpose of creating Eve was a helper to Adam (Berkin).

Women during the early eighteenth century accepted the status of women as it was offered by the society. The autonomy of women during that era was hardly accepted and women despite their social status, were dependent during their whole life. Women were considered an inferior object of the society and colonial laws which were imposed on by the English did not allow women any independence in the inheritance of property.

Women faced the worst form of discrimination as compared to their counterpart as brother or husband. They did not have the status of a citizen whereas men did have many privileges like they had the opportunity to take part in businesses, attend colleges whereas women were barred from all such activities either by law or customs did not allow women to do so.

Conditions were even hard for women who by chance were not married and the identity and adulthood of a woman were recognized by only marriage and those unmarried were considered even more inferior and a curse (Berkin). Though the matrons enjoyed some fundamental rights after marriage women were considered as a property of the husband and the husband had the full authority over his wife and law ensure English new husbands that their wives did not have any legal status and identity and what belonged to her wife became the property of her husband. Women were considered just a traveler from her parents’ home to her husband home and not a citizen and responsibility of the state

Women were considered highly productive in the agrarian societies as they were skilled workers on the farms and increase the agriculture output of the farms thus women role was that of agricultural labor for the family having traditional skills and secondly, she had the reproduction function as more children were also essential to work on the farms. With changing, societies and urbanization role of women somehow changed but the status remained the same; a subordinate to the husband. Mercantilism brought more goods within the reach of prosperous families which meant the production role of women was changed and women later got associated with more gentle work of decorating the house and making things within the house (Berkin). The status of women remained the same, to fulfill the expectations of her husband

Berkin explains the role of women during the war in a very clear manner. Women played a very bold role during the war, some helped in organizing gathering money to support soldiers, some acted as helpers in the camps and some provided intelligence to American soldiers by risking their lives and Berkin has mentioned all those brave stories related to women.

The war also helped women to realize their identity and true potential as women came out of their traditional roles and helped their husbands when they were at war and Berkin has included many cases of such women who went to the camps with their husbands to provide comfort to them and entertain them. Some women stayed at home and managed businesses and other activities which otherwise were the duties of men. Women also started taking part in politics and many of them played an active part in boycotting tea from England

There are two views about the transforming roles of women during and post war of independence (Berkin). One view is that war of independence did change the role and position of women in America as women contributed an equal part in the war of independence by making products to substitute the products imported from England and taking charge of the roles of men as men went on war. Some women did assist soldiers at war by doing chores they had been doing as a woman like sewing, washing, cooking and other daily chores that otherwise the soldiers were bound to do for themselves. The revolution brought about political awareness among women and breaking the traditional constraints for women to be politically active. Later women started taking part in diversified fields of education, politics, and literature. The war helped women in breaking their traditional roles of staying at home and being subordinate to men. The war of independence did ensure women to feel that they had a separate political identity as they were requested to assist soldiers and help in sidelining goods from England, so women realized their identity. Women after the war of independence started to protest for their rights, and in the initial stages, they were more concerned with their property rights and later that shifted to their political rights. It was due to the efforts made by women in America that they somehow managed to break the norms and gained considerable position int eh society

The assistance and help from women during the wartime, compelled authorities to recognize women role beyond the boundaries of home and women roles were to be redefined. Women gained social status and expectations from women were to be educated and many opportunities also opened to women after gaining their social status. Schools and colleges started opening to women and teaching were the first profession that was opened to women.

 On the other hand, the other viewpoint says that women were not able to materialize the opportunities available to them after the war because of limited prewar experience. Women still had the dominance of men and constraints still faced by women in every sphere of life. Childbearing was still the main responsibility of women. Although there were post-war economic, political and social changes woman remained to be a mother and wife and duties associated with these two restrained women from acting independently. Although the American war of independence brought in much social and political change, the patriarchal nature of society remained the same for a longer period following post-war. Women still had to bear the responsibilities of bearing a child whereas a male segment of the society was not bound for such responsibilities

Berkin, in the initial chapters of her book, has explained the contributions of women in the war and the way war helped those women. Women were considered as the real heroines of the war and soon after the war, women returned to their previous positions and this is considered as a major reason woman were neglected by historians.

Historian does a variation in opinion when it comes to the question that what the war served to the women. Some consider women were not able to gain much after the war while some argue that war had a greater impact on the lives of women (Lerner). While others argue that women were able to break the traditional norm because of the war, which helped women in organizing themselves in different groups, like the Patriots, loyalists, and some women even started political debates, and some started learning and it was the effort of women that later earned them political right of voting and right to own property

The general perspective is that expectation from women did not change on a macro level but there were changes which on a micro level following the war. women got the opportunity to be on the front and struggle for equal right in America between men and women.

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