

attempt is made to cover the period 800 BCE - CE1800. This is highlighted under subtitles that include the role of women in pre-literate society, the Sumerian civilization (3500 BCE - 2000BCE), and women's roles from 3000 BCE - CE 600. Also, within the framework of this historical period, mention is made of women's legal status and social rights, as well their role in economic life.

The last section of this part puts emphasis on the status of women in the Islamic period in CE 610 in Arabia. Here, the authors believe that many of the older beliefs and practices regarding women were institutionalized in the religious law of Islam. Nonetheless, before the death of the prophet Mohamed, women in Islamic society had a visible role in the social, political and economic aspects of life. However, parities in inheritance, rights for divorce and others have been addressed without any discussion of arguments concerning the claims to Islamic wisdom behind them. Moreover, no mention, whatsoever, is made to the contemporary and strong Islamic movement that challenges the seleftist interpretations of the Qura'anic verses and Hadeeth in connection with women's status and rights. In addition, overlooking the status of Middle Eastern women in Judaism and Christianity in this part of the book omits necessary and crucial information about the comparability of women's low status in the three religions.

Part II of the book deals with the status of Middle Eastern and North African women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here, an attempt is made to reveal the impact of European imperialism and colonialism on women's status as reflected by a confusion between modernity and tradition. Within the perspective of the world economy, the economic status of some North African women (for example, in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria) and others from Syria and Turkey is highlighted. Here, the role of colonials as women's custodians is over-exaggerated, because the authors neglect the positive role of the indigenous nationalist movement. For instance, Gasim Amin of Egypt advocated and struggled for Egyptian and Muslim women's human rights more than two centuries ago!

Women and politics during the period is also highlighted, strictly from the view point of referenced citations or else from the stereotypical views. Although the authors claim that literature on the cultural and social world of women during the nineteenth century is scanty or thin, there is a substantial body of literature written in Arabic on the same theme.

In the section on the twentieth century, the enhancement of women's status and their positive role in politics, economy and culture have been highlighted. Although the book is a scholarly, referenced writing, it is not free of some gaps that have to be bridged with the necessary rational interpretations.

Dr. Ahmed Abdel Magied  
Ahfad University of Women  
Omdurman, Sudan

---

***Women in Asia: Restoring Women to History.*** Barbara N. Ramusack and Sharon Sievers. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999; 266 pages; maps.; ISBN 0-253-21267; \$14.95 US.

Writing history is an arduous task; restoring women to history is a formidable enterprise. The challenge becomes overwhelming when the location of women whose historic roles are under study lies in an area where women's gendered roles have assumed a make-believe world of reality.

Long before the editor of *Atlantis* asked me to write this review I was not only familiar with the volume under review but the whole series of four books that formed the original project of Restoring Women to History undertaken by the Organization of American Historians. While getting ready to teach a course on "Women in South Asia: Culture and Tradition" in the Fall of 2001 at Gettysburg College, I was searching for a history text that would give an overview to my young North American students of history with women at the centre. An observation of the series editors' in the introduction of this volume helped me to select *Women in Asia* as the book I was in search of.

The note, while recounting the challenges of *Third World Women's History* (the emphasis is mine), said: "It is important to avoid three common pitfalls: interpreting women as the exotic, women as victims, and women as anomalies" (xvii).

The book fulfills a gap long felt in teaching a general understanding of women's historic roles in Asia. The style is simple and free of jargon. Unlike most similar works, this one places glossaries, maps, and chronologies at the beginning and not the end, which makes the reading easy and smooth. In terms of time and span this study glides through centuries, from the earliest to the 1990s. It explores human experience as informed and shaped by a diverse terrain of concepts, philosophies and beliefs, ranging from the Vedic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic patterns.

The volume falls into two sections. The first section, "Women in South and Southeast Asia" (1-141) is authored by Professor Barbara Ramusack and the second one, "Women in China, Japan, and Korea" (143-2540), is by Professor Sharon Sievers. Both these sections have extensive bibliographies including only secondary sources written in the non-indigenous languages by researchers and authors either from outside the regions or by those trained at and informed by non-indigenous institutions. This is by no means a reflection on the credibility of the authors' research tools and methodology. What it does, however, is change the focus of events and analysis of roles and thus create a perspective different from a woman's.

Let me give an example to illustrate what I mean by this oversight of a selective use of sources for restoring women to history. Ramusack's narrative of women in South Asia has overlooked even a simple inclusion of the name of Chand Bibi, who challenged the power of the mightiest Mughal, Emperor Akbar, in the seventeenth century of the Christian era. Similarly amazing is the lack of knowledge of the role of Begum Hazrat Mahal, who led the armies of both Hindu and Muslim male stalwarts against the British colonialists in the first War of Independence in 1857. Ramusack does mention the role of Rani Lakshmi Bai, another charismatic leader and Hazrat Mahal's contemporary by

saying: "For the next four years the Rani tried to secure the rights of her adopted son, and eventually she *joined the revolt of Indian troops in 1857*" (emphasis is mine). A slight twist of the words and phrases changes the whole role of Indian women leaders in the First War of Independence of 1857. Later, however, the narrative brings up women's activism both in the reform and the nationalist movement of the twentieth century. All of this discussion heavily relies on non-Indian sources.

In her second narrative of "Women's History in South East Asia," Ramusack guides the reader to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines. Once again, the task of recreating women's roles from 1500 BCE to the most recent is a challenging one, and the information is drawn from historical writings in the English language, so that the author's arguments tend to emphasise outside influences on local ideas and movements. Overall, however, the work is a commendable addition to the scarce writings on South East Asian women's history.

Sharon Sievers covers a similarly wide area in terms of space and chronology in her section on "Women in East Asia" which reconstructs the history of China, Japan, and Korea for us. With the help of diligently prepared maps, chronologies and bibliographies, Sievers in her study analyses the impact of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and other philosophies and beliefs on women's lives and experiences. The author has finely dealt with the issue of footbinding custom in China (182-84) and how it should be examined in classroom teachings.

*Women in Asia* successfully reconstructs women's history for the use of classroom teaching in the colleges in the West. At the same time, it sets out the possibilities of further research with the help of well-prepared bibliographies.

Tahera Aftab  
Gettysburg College

---

***Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice.*** Marianne Dekoven, editor. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press,