

નારી અને પ્રજાપતિ જ્ઞાતિ સમાજ

આપણે સૌ નારીને હિન્દુ ધર્મના ઇતિહાસે નિહાળી તો જ નારીના મહત્ત્વ બારે પૂરો ખ્યાલ આવે. આથી પ્રયાસ છે કે કંઈક ઝલકરૂપે હું પ્રથમ લખું.

વિશ્વનું સર્જન થયું ત્યારે અન્ય પ્રાણીઓ સંગે માનવીઓને ઉચ્ચ પદ મળ્યું. પ્રભુની ઈચ્છા હતી કે નર અને નારીનું સ્થાન એક સરખું - ન કોઈ ઉચું કે ન કોઈ નીચું. સંસારે નર માનવનું કર્તવ્ય શું અને નારીનું કર્તવ્ય શું એ ઘડતર નક્કી થયું તેમાં એક વ્યક્તિ (નર) બીજી વ્યક્તિ (નારી) વગર અધુરી હતી. બે એક સાથે પાર્ણત્વનું દર્શન કરાવતા હતા. આવી ઉચ્ચ ધર્મ પ્રથામાં નારી એક દીકરી તો કોઈની બેન, એક પત્ની કે કોઈની માતા તરીકે પૂજાતી હતી. જેમ જેમ સમયનું વહેણ થયું તેમ તેમ નર પોતાની જાતને મહાન ગણવા લાગ્યો અને નારીને એણે નીચી પદવી આપી. સંસારમા સમાજે સમાજે નારીનું અપમાન થવા લાગ્યું. આ દુઃખ ભર્યા પરિવર્તનમા પ્રજાપતિ નારીને પણ ઘણું જ સહન કરવાની ઘડી આવી.

એક સમયે જ્ઞાનથી ભરપૂર પ્રજાપતિ જ્ઞાતિજન હિન્દુ ધર્મ પ્રમાણે પ્રજામા ઉચ્ચ સ્થાન પર હતો, અને એથી જ પ્રજાપતિ તરીકે ઓળખાતો હતો. એ અજ્ઞાનતાના અંધકારમાં ગરીબાય વેઠી રૂઢન કરતો હતો ત્યારે પ્રજાપતિ નારીને વધુ સહન કરવાની ઘડી આવી હતી. અને જ્યારે શિક્ષણના મહત્ત્વ નું જ્ઞાન જ્ઞાતિમાં ફરી આવ્યું ત્યારે પણ સ્ત્રીઓના ભણતર માટે ઉત્તેજન ન અપાયું. ઘરસંસારના કાર્યોમાં નારીઓને સલાહો આપવાનો હક્ક પણ ધીનવી લીધો હતો. પુરૂષ વર્ગે નારીનું અપમાન કર્યું. નારી એના હૃદયના ઉડાણમાં રૂઢન કરતી રહી. કિન્તુ એને સાંભળવા સમાજ તૈયાર ન હતો.

ભારતમાં અનેક રાજ્યો હતા. પરદેશીઓ પણ રાજ્ય સત્તા કરી ગયા એમાં આપણને મોગલ રાજ્ય તેમજ અંગ્રેજ રાજ્યના સમયગાળામાં જે કંઈ થયેલું તેનો વધારે ખ્યાલ છે. એ સમયગાળા દરમિયાન પ્રજાપતિ જ્ઞાતિ પર ઘણોજ અન્યાય થયો હતો. જ્ઞાતિ ગરીબાય સાથે જ્ઞાનગંગાડૂપી શિક્ષણ આપવા માટે અસંભવતા વધી ગઈ વળી, અંગ્રેજ રાજ્ય સમયે બીજી જ્ઞાતિઓએ લાભ લેતા હતા ત્યારે પ્રજાપતિ જ્ઞાતિજનોને વેઠ જેવી પ્રથાનો અન્યાય પણ સહન કરવો પડ્યો. અજ્ઞાનતાના અંધકાર હટાવવા જ્ઞાતિ વડીલોએ શિક્ષણને ઉત્તેજન આપ્યું. ત્યારબાદ જ્ઞાતિ જાગૃત થઈ અને પરિવાર પરિવારે દીકરીઓ પણ ભણવા લાગી. અનેક જ્ઞાતિપુરૂષોએ સમાજને પડકાર કર્યો અને પહેલા મુંગા રહેલ પ્રજાપતિ સમાજમાં પરિવર્તન થયું. ધીરે ધીરે પ્રજાપતિ બાલિકાઓ પણ શિક્ષણ છત્રે ચમકવા લાગી. આ પ્રમાણે ભારતમાં તેમજ પરદેશમાં ખાસ કરીને આફ્રિકા ખંડે પ્રજાપતિ નારીઓને શિક્ષણ મળતું થયું. ઈંગ્લેન્ડ આવી સ્થાયી થયેલ પ્રજાપતિ જ્ઞાતિજનોએ શિક્ષણ પ્રેમના માર્ગે નારીઓને ઉત્તેજન આપ્યું. અને ઈંગ્લેન્ડમાં તેમજ અન્ય જગ્યાએ નારીઓએ ઉચ્ચ ભણતર મેળવી સારી પદવીએ નોકરીઓ મેળવી. પ્રજાપતિ સમાજે પણ આ નારી પરિવર્તનની નોંધ લીધી અને પ્રેરણા માર્ગદર્શનનો પંથ અપનાવ્યો.

સંસાર નર અને નારીથી ચાલે છે. પુરૂષ કદાચ પરિવાર માટે ઘરડૂપી છત્ર આપી શકે કિન્તુ નારીજ એ ઘરને સંસ્કાર, ધર્મ, ભકિત અને પ્રેમ લાગણીનું ખાતર રેડી ઘરને મંદિર બનાવે છે. પહેલા નારી ફક્ત ઘરકામમાં ગુથાયેલી રહી બાળકોને સંભાળ રાખી જીવન જીવી રહી હતી. આજે એ જ નારી બહાર જઈ નોકરી કરી સંસારી જીવનને સહાય કરે છે.

આવા પરિવર્તનમાં સમાનતાના ત્રાજવે નારીએ કંઈક અગત્યનું ભુલવું ન જોઈએ. આર્યનારી માટે પતિ એક સ્વામી રૂપે છે અને પુરૂષના હૃદયમાં નારી એક દેવી સમાન છે. આવી ઉચ્ચ વિચાર ધારામાં એક બીજાને ઉચી કે નીચી કક્ષામાં જોવાની તક જ કદી ન મળે. પરિણામે એકબીજા પ્રત્યે પ્રેમ અને માન, અને સમાનતા પણ સચવાય જાય. કોઈક વાર ભણતર કે નોકરી કારણે નારીએ કંઈક ગર્વ કરી પુરૂષ પ્રત્યે અન્યાય કર્યાના દાખલાઓ હશે. એવું વર્તન અને વાતાવરણ અંતે પતનના પંથે લાવે છે. એથી નારીએ એ ન ભુલવું જોઈએ કે એ એક સંસ્કાર ભકિત પ્રેમભરી દેવી શકિત છે. એ દેવી શકિત તેજ પુજ્ય આર્યનારી.

આજે પ્રજાપતિ જ્ઞાતિમાં નારીઓએ એમનું સમાનતાનું સ્થાન ફરી લીધું છે આજે સમાજ અનેક નારીઓને સામાજિક કાર્યો કરવા તક આપે છે. અનેક પ્રજાપતિ નારીઓએ ઉચ્ચ ડિગ્રી મેળવી ઉચી પદવી મેળવી, સેવા કરી ગૌરવતા વધારી છે. શ્રી પ્રજાપતિ સમાજ (યુ.કે.) જેવી સંસ્થાએ ફક્ત ઈંગ્લેન્ડમાં નહી, પરંતુ ભારતમા સહાય કરી પ્રજાપતિ બાળકોને શિક્ષણના પંથે લાવવા અનેક કાર્યો કર્યા એમા પ્રજાપતિ નારીઓને પણ લાભ જ થાય છે એવી રીતે પ્રગતિના પંથે પ્રજાપતિ ગૌરવ વધતું રહે એવી અંતરની આશા.

નારી શકિત છે મહાન, જ કરો એવું અપમાન,
જર નારીઓ ચાલો તમો એક સાથે, અને લાવો પ્રજાપતિ જ્ઞાતિને પ્રગતિના પંથે,
શ્રી પ્રજાપતિ સમાજનું લક્ષ એવું રહે, કે નારીની કદર હંમેશ થતી રહે.

ડૉ. ચંદ્રવદન મિસ્ત્રી, કેલીફોર્નિયા, યુ.એસ.એ.



શ્રી પ્રજાપતિ સમાજ (યુ.કે.) 'પ્રજાપતિ મહિલા'



આ 'પ્રજાપતિ મહિલા' હેવાલનો હેતુ યુ.કે. સમાજમાં પ્રજાપતિ મહિલાઓએ આજ સુધી કરેલ વિવિધ કાર્યોની રૂપરેખા આપવાનો પ્રયાસ છે. આ ભગીરથ કાર્યમાં જુના 'પ્રજાપતિ સંદેશ', સમાજની શાખાઓ અને વ્યક્તિઓનો સહારો લેવામાં આવ્યો છે. હેવાલ ગુજરાતીમાં ટુકમાં આપવામાં આવ્યો છે અને અંગ્રેજીમાં વિગતવાર આપવામાં આવ્યો છે. આ હેવાલમાં નીચેના મુદ્દાઓને આવરી લેવામાં આવ્યા છે જેવા કે:

- 'નારી તું નારાયણી' - આપણા હિન્દુ શાસ્ત્રો અનુસાર
- સમાજમાં મહિલા કાર્યોની શરૂઆત
- મહિલા સમિતિ વિશે
- કેન્દ્રીય મહિલા કાર્યો
- સ્થાનિક મહિલા કાર્યો
- મહિલા કાર્યો લગતા આજના વિવિધ પ્રશ્નો
- મહિલા કાર્યોનું ભવિષ્ય



'નારી તું નારાયણી'

હિન્દુ શાસ્ત્રોએ સ્ત્રીને ઘણું મોટું સ્થાન આપ્યું છે. આ સૃષ્ટિની પાછળ કોઈ સર્વોપરી શક્તિની હયાતી છે એમ દુનિયા ભરના પ્રખ્યાત ચિંતકોની માન્યતા છે. જ્યારે આ પરમેશ્વરની શક્તિને એક દેવી નારી રૂપે રજૂ કરવામાં આવે ત્યારે જાણે આ દેવી પરમેશ્વરથી જુદી દેખાય છે, પણ સુક્ષ્મ દ્રષ્ટિથી જોતા ખ્યાલ આવે છે કે આ 'શક્તિ' પરમેશ્વરથી જુદી નથી, જેવી રીતે અગ્નિ અને અગ્નિની શક્તિ જુદા નથી. ભગવાન શિવનું 'અર્ધ નારીશ્વર' રૂપ પરમેશ્વરના એક સ્વરૂપનું દર્શન કરાવે છે.

'દ્વાયર્થ શિર્ષ' માં દેવી કહે છે 'હું જ પરમેશ્વરી શક્તિ છું કે જેમાંથી સૃષ્ટિ સર્જન થયું છે'.

'દેવી ગીતા'માં દેવી દેવોને કહે છે, 'હે દેવો ! હું એકલી જ વિશ્વેશ્વરી છું અને આખા વિશ્વનું સર્જન, પાલન અને સંહાર કરું છું'.

જેમ નાના બાળકોનું પોષણ શિક્ષણ અને બધીજ અભિલાષાઓ એક માતા પૂરી કરતી હોય છે અને બાળક માટે માતાનો ખોળો રક્ષણાર્થી છે તેમ એક ભક્ત માટે દેવીના ચરણો જ સર્વસ્થ હોય છે.

આ કારણેજ ધરજીવન અને સાધારણ રીતે સમાજની પ્રવૃત્તિમાં સ્ત્રી ઘણું સામર્થ્ય અને આગવું સ્થાન ધરાવે છે.

શ્રી પ્રજાપતિ સમાજમાં મહિલા કાર્ય

તા ૨૭.૦૭.૧૯૭૫ ના રોજ શ્રી પ્રજાપતિ સમાજ (યુ.કે.) ની સ્થાપના થઈ ત્યારથી જ મહિલા કાર્ય શક્તિની અને તેના અધિકારની વ્યવસ્થા કરવામાં આવેલ છે.

જે મહિલા સ્થાનિક અને પ્રતિનિધિ સભામાં હાજરી આપવાનો સંકોચ અનુભવતી, તે હવે ત્રીસ વર્ષમાં તેમનામાં જાગૃતિ આવી ગઈ છે અને કાર્ય કરવાની આવડત, હોશિયારી અને હિંમત તેમજ શિક્ષણને લઈને મહિલા



સંમેલનો, મહિલા મીલન, પ્રતિનિધીત્વ તેમજ સ્થાનિક અને કેન્દ્રીય કાર્યક્રમોમાં વિવિધ પ્રકારની જવાબદારી ઉઠાવી લીધી છે.

૧૯૮૭ સુધી વર્ષોમાં એક વાર મળતી મહિલા સમિતિ હવે વધુવાર મળે છે. ૧૯૯૧ માં ઓલ્ટનમાં મળેલ મધ્યસ્થ સંસ્થાની સભામાં મહિલા સમિતિને મધ્યસ્થ સંસ્થાની એક સહકર્મીટી તરીકે નક્કી કરવામાં આવી અને તેમની ચૂંટણી મહિલા સંમેલન દરમિયાન થવી જોઈએ એમ ઠરાવ્યું અને ત્યારબાદ મહિલા 'પ્રમુખ' ને 'કન્વેનર' તરીકે સંબોધે છે.



કેન્દ્રીય મહિલા સમિતિનું મુખ્ય કાર્ય વાર્ષિક મહિલા સંમેલન હોય છે. તેમાં સાંસ્કૃતિક, ધાર્મિક, સામાજિક અને મનોરંજન થી ભરપૂર કાર્યક્રમ થાય છે. હરીકાઈઓ (રંગોળી, ગીતો, કેશકલાપ, ફેનસી-ડ્રેસ, વેણી ગુંથણ, ગુજરાતી ભાષાની જાણકારી, વગેરે), ચાલુ રીતરિવાજો અને ધાર્મિક તહેવારો વગેરે પર ચર્ચા વિચારણા થતાં. છેલ્લા થોડા વર્ષો થયા કોઈ ખાસ વિષય જેમકે હિન્દુ લગ્નો, મરણ પ્રસંગ, શિક્ષણ, ડીપ્રેશન, ડ્રગ્સ, વગેરે ની રજુઆત થઈ ચૂકી છે.



સાધારણ રીતે સંમેલનની શરૂઆત આરતી, પ્રાર્થના અને શ્રદ્ધાંજલીથી થાય છે. ત્યાર બાદ સ્થાનિક અને કેન્દ્રીય હોદ્દેદારોના આવકાર ના બે ઓલ અને સ્વાગત ગીત રજૂ થાય છે. બપોરના સ્વાદિષ્ટ ભોજન બાદ મહિલા સમિતિની ચૂંટણી, રેકલ-ડ્રો અને આભારવિધી હોય છે. વચ્ચેના સમય દરમિયાન નક્કી કરેલ વિષય અને મનોરંજન કાર્યક્રમ થતો હોય છે.

સંમેલન વિશે વધુ વિગતો, સંમેલનમાં શું શું સુધારાની જરૂરીયાતો તેમજ મહિલા મિલન, બાલમેળો અને 'ક્રીંગ્લબરી વોટર પાર્ક' વિશેની જાણકારી અંગ્રેજી હેવાલમાં આપવામાં આવી છે.

સ્થાનિક મહિલા કાર્યો

સ્થાનિક મહિલા કાર્યક્રમોમાં બાળકોની પાર્ટી, ભજન-સત્સંગ, પીકનીક, સંગીતના વર્ગો, કસરતો વાર્ષિક ડીનર-એન્ડ-ડાન્સ, પચેટનો, વગેરેનો સમાવેશ થાય છે. દિવાળી, નવરાત્રી વગેરે ધાર્મિક પ્રસંગો તેમજ સમાજના અન્ય કાર્યોમાં ખાસ કરીને રસોઈમાં મહિલા ખૂબ ઉત્સાહ અને ખંતથી ભાગ લે છે.

છેલ્લા થોડા વર્ષોથી સ્થાનિક તેમજ કેન્દ્રીય સમિતિમાં મહિલાઓ હોદ્દાઓ સંભાળતા થયા છે, દા.ત. તારાબેન (પ્રમુખ, ટેમસાઈડ શાખા ૧૯૯૦), રેવાબેન (મંત્રી, રગ્મી શાખા ૧૯૯૨, પ્રમુખ ૨૦૦૧), ઉર્મિલાબેન (ખજાનચી, ઓલ્ટન શાખા ૧૯૯૧), વધુ વિગત માટે અંગ્રેજી હેવાલ જુઓ.

પ્રજાપતિ મહિલાઓને સમાજીક કાર્યો કરવા મધ્યસ્થ સ્થાનિક સંસ્થા તેમજ પીઠ કાર્યકરો તરફથી ઘણું પ્રોત્સાહન



આપવું પડયું છે અને અપાતું રહે છે. લગભગ બધીજ મહિલાઓ કામઘંઘે જતી હોય છે અને ઘર જીવનના કાર્યો ને સંભાળતી હોવાથી તેમજ શિક્ષણ અને નોકરી ક્ષેત્રે આગળ વધવાની ભાવનાથી સામાજિક કાર્યમાં જોઈએ એટલો રસ લેવાતો નથી.

આજ-કાલની લગ્ન પદ્ધિતથી વ્યક્તિગત, કુટુંબ અને સમાજ પર ઘેરી અસર પડી રહી છે. આજના જીવન જોતા ઘણી મહિલાઓને સ્ટ્રેસ થતાં જાતજાતની બીમારીઓમાં સપડાય છે. કોમ્પ્યુટર, ઈ-મેઇલ અને મોબાઇલ ફોન ના વાતાવરણમાં પ્રૌઢ મહિલાઓ ગુચવાય ગયા છે. ગુજરાતી ભાષાના અભાવે, તેમજ ધાર્મિક અને સાંસ્કૃતિક ક્રિયાઓની પૂરી જાણકારી ન હોવાથી યુવાન મહિલાઓને વિવિધ કાર્યોમાં તકલીફ પડતી નજરે જોવામાં આવે છે.

પ્રાશ્વાત્મિક વાતાવરણમાં રહી આપણી હિન્દુ સંસ્કૃતિ અને ધર્મને કેમ સાચવવો એ ફક્ત મહિલાનો નહી પણ આખા સમાજનો પ્રશ્ન છે.

આવી હાલત હોવા છતાં આજની મહિલાઓમાં જાગૃતિ, ઉત્સાહ, ઉમંગ અને હર્ષ જોઈને વિવિધ કાર્યક્રમોમાં મોટી સંખ્યામાં તેમજ આગળ પડતો ભાગ લેતા જોઈ એવું દૃઢ પણ માની શકાય કે પ્રજાપતિ મહિલાઓનું કાર્ય ક્ષેત્ર ઉજળું છે. પોતાના હકો મેળવવા માટે મહિલાઓએ હકારત્મક વલણ રાખવું જોઈએ.

કોઈપણ કાર્યની સફળતા પૂરા ખંત અને લગ્નથી તેમજ એકબીજા સાથે સંપર્ક સાધી પાર પાડી શકાય એમ છે. જીવનના કોઈ પણ કાર્યને વિકસિત કરવા પુરૂષ તેમજ સ્ત્રી સાથે રહી સિધ્ધ કરી શકે છે. પૂર્ણ જીવનને માટે પોરુષની સાથે સતત કાકરુણ્ય હોવું જોઈએ. અંતે.....

યા દેવી સર્વે ભૂતેષુ, માતૃરૂપેણ સંસ્થિતા

નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમો નમઃ

યા દેવી સર્વે ભૂતેષુ, શક્તિરૂપેણ સંસ્થિતા

નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમો નમઃ

યા દેવી સર્વે ભૂતેષુ, લક્ષ્મીરૂપેણ સંસ્થિતા

નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમસ્તસ્ત્યૈ નમો નમઃ

Prajapati Association (UK)



'Prajapati Mahila'



"The ideal of womanhood in India is Motherhood - that marvelous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever forgiving mother. If the women are raised, then their children will, by their noble actions, glorify the name of the country. Then will culture, knowledge, power and devotion awaken in the land"

Swami Vivekanand

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of Prajapati Mahila activities and involvement especially within SPA(UK). The content has been gathered by looking through the past issues of the *Prajapati Sandesh*, input from Branches and many individuals. This article is by no means a comprehensive and complete but only a brief overview of the information obtained forming a consolidated summary under the following headings:

1. Naru Tu Narayani - Our Hindu Scriptures perspective
2. Introduction - Mahila involvement in SPA(UK) from the beginning
3. Mahila Committee - Formation of the Mahila Committee within SPA(UK)
4. HQ Mahila activities - Some of the many mahila activities
5. Branch Mahila activities - highlights of SPA(UK) Branch activities
6. Mahila issues - What are the issues?
7. The future
8. Conclusion
9. Our Appreciation (Thank You)

"NARI TU NARAYANI"

The Hindu scriptures have given a very high place to the woman.

All the great thinkers of the world have agreed about the existence of a Supreme Power behind nature or the Universe. When the Almighty power is presented in the form of a divine female, then it seems that the Goddess is different from the Supreme. But, minute observation shall make it clear that *Shakti* [the Devine Mother] is not apart from the Supreme, like the burning power of fire is in no case different from the fire. The *Ardha-Narishwara* [or half male and half female] form of Lord Shiva also indicates the oneness of the Almighty. For all the material gains and Spiritual progress, the Mother is worshipped all over India.

In "Dvyatharva Shirsha", the Mother says, "I am the Almighty power from whom comes the Universe." In "Devi Gita", the Mother says to the Gods, 'Listen, O Gods! I am the only Supreme Being, who creates, protects and destroys the whole world'.





'Prajapati Mahila'



In this world it is noticed that the mother is more kind to her children. She fulfils all the desires of her children by supplying the desired objects. The mother nourishes the child in early age and teaches them to speak and to do every thing. A child is always happy in the lap of the mother. As the mother's lap is the safe-refuge for a child, so the lotus feet of the Almighty Mother are the safe-refuge for a devotee.

The woman has a powerful influence on the activities and general life of home or the society at large. She, being the 'first teacher', has a greater (nowadays, 'equal' - sic) responsibility to the upbringing and guiding her children and, thus, the society. This is one of the reasons why it is appropriately said that the 'hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world'. We also say 'Matrudevo Bhava' and then 'Pitrudevo Bhava'.

Mahila had the primary function of upbringing of the children and looking after the home life, while the men were the breadwinners

INTRODUCTION

When the *Shree Prajapati Association (UK)* was formed on 27th July 1975, the role of the Mahila was not forgotten. Due to the traditional social structure and circumstances, the Mahila had the primary function of upbringing of the children and looking after the home life, while the men were the breadwinners. This concept led to the main aim of the Mahila Sub-Committee to understand and to educate the Hindu culture, Hindu Dharma and Customs in the family. These thoughts were evolved in the programme of the Mahila activities, particularly evident in the Mahila Samelan in the early years.

SPA (UK) Executive Committee planned, organised and arranged the Mahila Samelan in the early years in order to provide a platform for the Mahila to become more involved. At that time, participating Mahilas were few, confidence was low and the know-how of organising the working of the Mahila activities was not recognised. Western materialism and ideologies started to place heavy demands on the family and to influence the social outlook. Mahila began to earn a livelihood in order to support the family, and together with more education and public experience, they are now competing with men in terms of work, career, earning, intellect and skills. With this evolution and encouragement the involvement of Prajapati Mahila has increased in number and activities at Branch Level as well as Headquarters Level.

It therefore took over ten years for the Mahila Committee to establish the current structure and style of management within SPA(UK) Clearly this precept has been gradually changing, more so over the last decade.

In 1980 there was an SPA(UK) gathering in Ashton-under-Lyne held by Tameside Branch. The programme was for two days and consisted of a variety of events including the annual general meeting. Before that year, the mahila programme was included as a part of the annual general meeting. However, at this time, the Mahila announced their desire to hold a Mahila Samelan from then onwards would be organised and managed by the Mahila themselves. This was a big step forward.

MAHILA COMMITTEE

Until 1987, the Mahila Committee used to meet only once a year, which was at the Mahila Samelan. However, at the 12th AGM of the SPA (UK) on 14th May 1988 held in Bradford, the Mahila Committee announced that for the first time they had held two meetings during the year. The Mahila Committee even suggested that in the future Pratinidhi Meetings they are allocated half a day to discuss Mahila Issues. Furthermore, at the SPA (UK) AGM held in Bolton on 12th May 1991, the Mahila Committee again sought clarification of their roles and responsibilities within SPA(UK) in order that they could perform their role far better. The issue was debated and re-confirmed that the Mahila Committee is a sub-committee of SPA (UK) with recognised posts of



'Prajapati Mahila'



Mahila Secretary, Convener, Assistants, and that they would be elected at Mahila Samelan from among the Branch Mahila representation and be endorsed at the SPA (UK) AGM. The title of Mahila 'President' was also replaced by 'Convenor'.

HQ MAHILA ACTIVITIES:

MAHILA SAMELAN

The main event of the HQ Mahila Committee has been and continues to be the annual Mahila Samelan. In the early years, the Mahila Samelan was based around the Cultural and the Religious aspects and learning domestic skills together with entertainment. For example, Rangoli Competition, demonstration to children of rolling rotis, practical guide to Gujarati food preparation, 'Miss Prajapati' competition, Hair Dressing and Make-Up. This was the only HQ event where Mahila had its own gathering. From early 1990's, the Mahila Samelan began to focus on specific themes such as Indian weddings, Education, Bereavement, Health and Fitness, Depression, Cervical Cancer, Drugs, Aids. A summary of all the Mahila Samelan held since 1979 is shown at Table 1. The Mahila Samelan has been so successful that it now has a following and has become popular for the whole family.

The basic format of the Mahila Samelan has not changed over the years. The host Branch takes responsibility for co-ordinating the various volunteer duties, whereas the HQ Mahila Committee manages the overall programme. Each Branch Mahila contribute to the event. The programme begins with aarti, prayers and shradhanjali. Thereafter, welcome addresses by the HQ Mahila, the host Branch and a Swagat Geet. The format for the rest of the programme depends on the theme decided upon. After a lunch break, and following the conclusion of the theme, the Mahila Committee election proceedings take place. There is always a raffle draw to add to the fun and customary vote of thanks and prayers to conclude the day's event.

The Mahila Samelan over the years have been extremely successful and audience always full to capacity. However here are some of the suggestions received to consider for the future:

- To rotate Samelan among Branches. This will enhance the unity among the members, provide an opportunity for the host Branch





'Prajapati Mahila'



to apply its organisational skills, have a better knowledge and understanding of the Branch as well as of SPA (UK).

- To hold the event on a Saturday as opposed to on a Sunday as has been the practice
- To improve communication between the HQ Mahila and the Branch Mahila
- To improve the budgeting and Plan
- To increase audience participation and interaction instead of listening to speakers
- To ensure that the Hindu Culture and Religious aspects are incorporated into the event. The concept of theme appear to be moving us further away from our culture and religion
- To encourage the use of Gujarati speaking and writing



MAHILA MILAN

The first Mahila Milan of UK was held on 25 September 1988 at Belgrave Road Neighbourhood Centre, Leicester. About 150 Mahila from five branches were present - Walsall, Bradford, London, Rugby and Leicester. The Mahila Milan was a whole day programme, which consisted of Deep lighting; Prayers; Samooh Garbas; antkadi; bhajans; songs in Gujarati and English; musical chair for children who had come with their mothers; fancy dress; Kathak dance and Kathak steps; ways of doing make-up; hairstyles; ended with samuhic prayers.

In November 1990 HQ an initiative to encourage the Youth participation developed into the Mahila and Youth organising a "Get Together" which consisted of live music, three-course dinner, fancy dress competition and games.

BALMEDO

The Mahila Committee organised the children's annual Christmas Party, targeting the activities for 5 to 13 year children. This has been another event successfully carried out by the Mahila over the years. The Children's Christmas Party took the form for Children's Summer Party (Balmedo). On 5th December 1993,



'Prajapati Mahila'



some 450 children attended the party in Leicester. Apart from the children, adults too enjoyed the music and the food. In 1998 it was held in Coventry. Games, quiz on Hindu festivals, disco dance, face painting and competitions were the focal attractions with prizes being given to the winners. At one stage, the adults forgot it was a children's party and took over the stage with garbas and bhangras with lollypops in their mouths! The third Balmedo was at Birmingham.

However, the children's party as a HQ programme involving all the Branches lasted for a few years. Nowadays, individual Branches hold its own local children's party and therefore this HQ event is no longer held.

KINGSBURY WATER PARK OUTING

The Mahila Committee organises a 'Family Day Outing' at the Kingsbury Water Park in the Midlands. The first outing was on 7 July 2002 in place of the annual children's party. The outing, now an annual event, has proved very successful, being enjoyed by the young and the old alike. The park located centrally in the UK and easy for all Branch members to visit has ample space for activities, nature walk, bird-life and bicycle rides. It is an event and attraction not to be missed. Members from all the SPA(UK) Branches join in and meet-greet-socialise with members from all over the UK. Meeting is scheduled for early to mid-morning and by lunchtime, the barbeques sizzle away and many play games like rounders, cricket, antakshri or gossip. It is family event with everyone 'chilling out' for the day in a very relaxed pleasant surrounding.

BRANCH MAHILA ACTIVITIES

The branch activities have been varied. At this level the work of the Mahila in the early years has been limited to the mainly children's party, Mahila Samelan participation, religious programmes such as Bhajan-satsang, and preparing and performing cultural items for variety shows and programmes.

Over the recent years the experience, education and enthusiasm of the Mahila together with active encouragement of the senior members of SPA(UK) and the membership generally has enthused the the Mahila members to take up various posts in the branch executive committee. Among these Taraben (President, Tameside Branch 1990), Revaben (Secretary, Rugby Branch 1992, President 2001) and Urmilaben (Treasurer, Bolton Branch 1991) are among the many who have taken on the challenges of senior posts at Branch level. These individuals have held the senior posts at Branch level for more than one year.

The Branch and HQ programmes over the years have demonstrated the talents of the Mahila and their organising prowess. The experiences gained during the working at branch level have given a boost in the active participation during the HQ meetings.

One of the most important activities the Mahila have taken up and is still performing without which any function or event would not be successful is the preparation and serving of meals at Branch and HQ functions and events. Cooking is an art which is arguably the birth right of the Mahilas. With delicious menu's who can deny this fact. Hats off!!! However, the 'new social order', career, western influences and life style changes mean that increasingly catering is now bought in rather than the Mahila making it as in the past.

The support from the main Branch and HQ committees and of the members at large has been outstanding at virtually all of the functions. The Mahila clearly now feel they actively and fully participate contribute to the aims, objectives and activities of SPA(UK)

The Mahila volunteers are always there at any of the religious activities and functions. Bhajan programmes have been zealously undertaken by the Mahila. With their emotional voice, they have been in the forefront for the success of such functions. No Diwali programme can be complete without the rangoli, delicious food, and decorations. The Mahila put in a lot of hard work and



'Prajapati Mahila'



effort in all the variety programmes of the Diwali functions. Each branch undertakes different types of religious programmes and the Mahila are in the forefront at each of such function,

Below are some of the many types of functions the Mahila have organised for local Branches with undoubted success:

- ladies day/night outs,
- music classes,
- exercises with music (e.g. bhangra style),
- annual dinner and dance,
- children's events,
- picnics,
- day trips,
- elderly mahila trips,
- discussion on women's issues, etc.

The SPA(UK) and the Prajapati Mahila are also very active within the wider community. In particular, they participate and take a lead in local 'Mahila Mandal Group' where all community Mahila work together.

MAHILA ISSUES

Few Mahila come forward voluntarily to take up responsibilities of participating in the community work. A lot of persuasion is required. In spite of the training and knowledge being passed on by the experienced workers, there is resistance or seemingly a lack of general interest in samaj sewa work. It is not clear why.

Almost all the Mahila now are in employment and have a 'second shift' at home in the tasks like cooking, cleaning and looking after children. Most of the younger Prajapati Mahila members are encouraged to study at colleges or universities and make extra effort to enhance their career path. A majority of those studying at universities are away from home. Due to the difficulties of time for education and career the number of Mahila coming forward to participate and take up committee posts at branch or headquarters level is not encouraging.

The Prajapati Mahila must recognise that samaj sewa with SPA(UK) or any other voluntary organisation, although not directly financially rewarding, has many benefits. In particular, samaj sewa work provides opportunity to use, practice and demonstrate many skills we all need to succeed with career and in life. Inter-personal, man-management, communication, writing, public speaking, organisational are some of the many skills we have to use in doing the work of SPA(UK).

Juggling professional duties and social responsibilities is an uphill task for many Mahila. Hence, there has been severe effect on home life as well as in the efficiency of community working.

Marriage is another issue, which has affected not only the individuals, who get married, but also the whole family and the community at large. Nowadays, the youngsters want to find the partners of their own choice, more mixed marriages take place and the cost of marriage has risen. There is a more western outlook in all the functions. Whether all these are for better or worse, only the time can tell. However, a lot of concern has been experienced

- By the parents;
- In our traditional values being eroded;
- In placing the identity of the children born from mixed marriages;
- In the acceptance in our society of the mixed married partners.

As the way of life in this country has changed, there has been increased stress on all, but arguably

'Prajapati Mahila'



more so on the Mahila. Heart problems, diabetes, cancer have also increased amongst the Mahila. The concepts of traditional food and cooking methods have been questioned. Though more information is being available from samelans, discussions, media, etc, further education is required to tackle these problems.

More and more Mahila are using new technology, e.g. computer; e-mail, and mobile phone. Normal postal correspondence like with all societies is eroded to insignificant amount. Elderly Mahila have found difficulties in adjusting with this new concept. Some Mahila do not have access to these facilities. One major factor appears to be lack of confidence in the Mahila and in some case lack of encouragement from family members for the Mahila to gain these skills.

With different types of benefits and facilities being provided by the government, some of the Mahila have become more independent, and the elderly Mahila want to be looked after in their own right and traditional ways.

It has also been found that mostly the same faces of children participate in the cultural activities. The Mahila Committee and members have tried to approach other parents to allow and encourage their children to take interest in these activities, but more persuasion is still needed. 'Time' is a major factor deemed to prevent many parents to encourage their children participating in cultural and religious activities. Is this really the case? Is there a perception that such involvement is of no benefit? Many of the new young generation of Prajapati born in the UK have parents who themselves have not had the traditional upbringing, knowledge and training in Hindu religion and our culture. Therefore difficulties and misunderstanding are encountered, and the true benefit of knowledge and understanding of Hindu religion and our culture is not recognised by the parents and children alike.

Though well educated, Mahila workers have started to give their services to the community, but lack of Gujarati language expertise has hindered their working. Ability to read and write Gujarati enable one to get facts information and understanding of religious and cultural activities from material already available. Lack of Gujarati language hinders communication with the elderly members of the Prajapati and Gujarati community.

There is a perceived concern that at HQ level the Mahila are still not being given enough time and recognition at meetings and other events. Is this so? A lot has changed in the recent years, however, there is no doubt room for improvement.

How to maintain our traditional way of life while living in the western society is not only the problem of the Mahila, but the every family member and samaj as a whole.

MAHILA IN FUTURE

The Prajapati Mahila active involvement has gone from strength to strength within SPA (UK) at HQ and Branch level. All of the recent Mahila and other functions have been major successes and it is hoped that this will continue.

Women have done equally as well or even surpassing men in almost every walk of life - women presidents and prime ministers, astronauts, etc. Mahila has a prominent place in the Samaj and it should get stronger and they must move up and take on senior positions within the Branch and HQ. Two shining examples are firstly Smt Hansaben Kantibhai Mistry from Bolton who became the first SPA(UK) Secretary in 2001 and another historical position of SPA(UK) President in 2005. Hansaben was previously the Assistant Secretary of SPA(UK) from 1998 to 2001.

Secondly, Jasuben Mistry of London became the General Secretary of SPA(UK) in 2005. Jasuben was previously the Assistant Secretary of SPA(UK) from 1992 to 1998 and 2001 to 2005.

Women should be strong-minded, move forward in life and career, and not be afraid to express their views and feelings. The Mahila should be more assertive at Branch or HQ level to bring in improvement in the running of the society and solving problems of the Mahila and members at



'Prajapati Mahila'



large.

The Mahila have an equal and important role to play with men in facing the current issues and challenges of today's society and world we live in. Today's Prajapati Mahila and Bhai is the role model for the next generation to follow.

CONCLUSION

The success of any activity or event has always been because of a few dedicated members; let it be with the Mahila, youth or any other. A few members spend days in and days out working at long and odd hours for the smooth running of an event, a group or an organisation. At times these members have been holding an organisational post and at other times they don't, yet these dedicated people are always there to carry out any duty allotted to them. And because of such dedication, the event, group or organisation ticks and succeed in its aims. The same is the case with the Mahila. It's a wonder how or from where these members get their inspiration and motivation.

Communication is the key for the success of any activity or event or, for that matter, to build up a strong bond amongst the members of a family, group or community. Hence, everyone has to make an effort to adhere to put into practice this simple act for an improved situation.

The Mahila have come a long way considering that some thirty years ago a Mahila would not have thought of attending a local or HQ SPA(UK) meeting lest organise a function on a national scale bringing many women under one roof in a single day. However, the Mahila must work hand in hand with the HQ and Branch executive committees and the men folk - after all we are a stronger unit when we work together. Even during the marriage ceremony, one of the Saptapadi recited to the couple is to celebrate their true friendship and remain in life long companions.

*Ya Devi Sarve Bhutesu, Matrurupena Sansistha,
Namastasye Namastasye Namastasye Namoh Namah;
Ya Devi Sarve Bhutesu, Shaktirupena Sansistha.
Namastasye Namastasye Namastasye Namoh Namah;
Ya Devi Sarve Bhutesu, Laxmirupena Sansistha,
Namastasye Namastasye Namastasye Namoh Namah.*

RADHA'S PRAYER

Radha surrenders gloriously
to Sri Krishna in a beautiful prayer

"Every thought of my mind, every emotion of my heart, every movement of my being, every feeling and every sensation, every cell of my body, each drop of my blood - all, all is yours, yours absolutely, yours without any reserve. You can decide my life or my death, my happiness or my sorrow, my pleasure or my pain. Whatever you do with me, whatever comes to me from you, will lead me to the Divine Joy."

Contributed by Uttambhai Mistry, Bolton





'Prajapati Mahila'



SAMELAN	YEAR	PLACE	MAIN ACTIVITIES
1st	3/10/1978	Ashton-U-Lyne	Prajapati Sandesh Vol 4, Issue - April 1979. 250 Attended.
2nd	1980	Bradford	Information obtained from 4th Prajapati Sandesh - August 1979. Report in Vol 4, Issue 3 - Diwali Issue
3rd	18/4/1982	Bradford	Report in Sandesh Vol 7, Issue 1 - 1st Half - Discussions / Q.A. - Dharma and Sanskruti, Mother Tongue, Education, Prajapati Sandesh - 2nd Half - Competition introduced for the First Time.
4th	20/3/1983	Wednesbury Town Hall, Walsall	- Attendance : 85 - Talk and discussion: Hindu Religious Festivals -importance and celebration; Religious ceremonies during wedding and their importance; - Quiz, Q & A; Saree competition; variety programme
5th	29/4/1984	Indian Community Centre, Ashton-U-Lyne	- Competitions - Gujarati writing for 12 - 16 years; Memory test for 7 - 12 years; Hairstyles - Talk on Ceremonies during Wedding - Pravachan on Religion and Culture - Importance of mother tongue - Mahila Branch representatives were suggested
6th	21/4/1985	Neasdon High School, London	- attendance -170ladies from 240 (first time 170!!!) - 8 branches - Mahila reports from various branches - Discussion on various activities mahila mandal can undertake - Mehandi competition - Discussion on how mahilas can control on the increasing rites and rituals in the samaj (A samelan for three days of all Surat Jilla Prajapatits was held at Bardoli in 1948 to discuss about how to control social rites and rituals. A booklet was published about the rites and rituals which were passed. No changes have been made since then.) - Three competitions - Sweet meals; Mehndi; Aarti.
7th	11/5/1986	Ben Town Hall, Rugby	- Discussion - What has been done regarding putting into practice the discussion being held about customs and rituals: Importance of mother tongue to safeguard Hindutva, culture and religion
8th	1/3/1987	Holt Centre, Birmingham	- Various competitions like flower arrangement for 12 - 18 yr olds - Garba Competition for over 18's, Geet Comptition for u12'S, - 300 - 350 attendance - Report in Sandsh Vol 12, 1987
9th	13/3/1988	Crown Hills Community College, Leicester	- Sandesh Vol 13, 1988 - Mother's Day - Introduction of Mahila Presidents and Secretaries and mahila reports from branches, Reading and discussion, Relationship between Mother and Child; Children's circumstances and environment - Donation towards Royal Commonwealth Society for Blinds - £550 - Fancy dress for children 5-12 yrs; veni gunthan (13 - 21 yrs of age); dandia raas competitions for over 21's
10th	9/4/1989	Alperton High School, Wembley	- Mahila presidents,vice presidents, secretaries, asst secretaries of the last 10 years - introduction and gifts given (bahuman) - Competions on Food to preserve good health of the family; religious festivals - importance and reasons of celebrations; advantages and disadvantages of living with in-laws ---comedy drama. 400-500 attendance



'Prajapati Mahila'



SAMELAN	YEAR	PLACE	MAIN ACTIVITIES
11th	25/3/1990	Hindu Mandir, Bradford	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Theme - Wedding- Mother's Day- Topic - Marriages --- Shree Ranjeetbhai Mehta, a distinguished Brahman from the Mandir explained different ceremonies and why they are celebrated during the marriage ceremony; discussion, Q&A- Competition of wedding songs
12th	21/4/1991	Shree Ram Mandir, Walsall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cultural Fair - The aims and objectives were to portray to our association mahilas, young & old, of our cultural & social values through displays or demonstration of talent from each branch:- Bridal make-up & hairstyles; cake decoration; flower decoration; tips on herbal medicines from kitchen; needlecraft & embroidery; calligraphy & hairstyles; gujarati teaching;- Video on accupressure ; information bureau for senior citizens- Humorous play on how we came by our surnames of Mistry, Prajapati, etc.- History of the Prajaptis and our forefathers going back before the times of the Mahabharata
13th	5/4/1992	Star light 2001, Leicester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Instrumental Music Competition for 6 - 14 years children (Use of harmonium, tabla, flute, violin, etc)- Problems of present day Indian wedding ceremony i.e. how it is performed with constant noise, no-one listening to the priest, backsides of photographers and video recorders, constant chattering, etc; comparing it with the weddings of other cultures (English, Jewish, Greek, Sikh);and how our ceremony can be improved i.e all graceful, attentive, silent and enjoyable.- Open floor discussion - "Are the British Mahilas meeting the challenges and/or progressing into the 1990's? Do they face obstacles - if so, what?"- Attendance - over 600
14th	21/3/1993	B P M, Birmingham	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mother's Day- Main Theme : Education- Presentation of the National Curriculum in a simple form. Emphasis on the parents' involvement, particularly mother's role in the early years of learning. English, Mathematics & Science were the basis of good education as well as to know more than one language.- How to assist children who are bright to gain places in private/grammar schools. Route for entry to Universities like Cambridge and Oxford ; filling UCCA forms appropriately; Need of outside interests such as in sports, social and samaj activities.- Education for the mature students.
15th	24/4/1994	Shree Prajapati Community Centre, Leicester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Attendance about 1700- Cultural variety programme and grand raffle draw.- In total 34000 raffle tickets were sold, out of which 24000 were sold in Leicester and 10000 in other parts of the UK. A donation of approximately £1000 would be made to the Royal Society of Blind and £20000 towards Leicester Building Project.- The Variety programme included raas-garba, folk dance, play, film song, group dance, gopi dance, 84 participant from 10 branches



'Prajapati Mahila'



SAMELAN	YEAR	PLACE	MAIN ACTIVITIES
16th	2/4/1995	Bolton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health and Fitness - The subject still remains a taboo for open discussion amongst some of our Mahilas and we need to break this barrier. Sensitive and delicate issues as aids, breast cancer, menopause to discuss frankly as can be possible without generating a feeling of shame or guilt.
17th	1996	Leicester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theme - Women's Role in Society
18th	1997	Copland Community School, Wembley, London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop - Mixed Marriage, Women working away from home, teenager expectations, education, career, changing attitudes
19th	18/4/1998	Bradford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indian Weddings - Traditional and Modern. - Debate on how should a wedding be arranged - to make the youth of today aware of the possibilities of having an organised wedding or have more say and for parents to understand their children
20th	11/4/1999	George Lawton Centre, Mossley, Tameside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funeral Rites (Bereavement) - Dramas and explanation. The main emphasis was on WHY we go through the required rituals. - A booklet entitled Hindu Funeral Rites produced and published by the Hindu Council of Temples was sold.
-		Shree Prajapati Community Centre, Leicester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being the Silver Jubilee Year of SPA (UK), the Balmedo, Mahila Samelan and 25th Silver Jubilee programme were merged together. - On 26th - morning - Balmedo, Afternoon - mahila samelan, Fashion show, Various stalls, Handycrafts
21st	1/4/2001	Loughborough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cervical Cancer
22nd	14/4/2002	Nicholas Chamberlain Comprehensive School, Bedworth, Coventry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vivid talk on Depression - Depression for the elderly - Mental strain and bereavement - Discussion and Q & A
23rd	6/4/2003	Shree Ram Mandir, Walsall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drugs Awareness - A sensitive issue - a subject that is taboo amongst the Asian community - Discussion on the independence of children
24th	9/5/2004	Copland Community School, Wembley, London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attendance - about 900 - Arthritis - Research and Therapy; importance of exercises - Lively question and answer session on arthritis - Hindu Forum represented
25th	10/4/2005	Radhaswami Rasila Satsang Centre, Birmingham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Silver Jubilee Celebration of Mahila activities - Variety Programme of dances, garba, drama, health, fashion show, etc - Talk on depression - Awareness of Progress by the mahilas in the last 25 years