

## WOMEN STATUS IN ANCIENT INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The main purpose of this study is to understand the status of women in ancient India. In ancient times, women were treated with respect and dignity. During this period there were female rishis and they were highly regarded. In the royal family, women were treated with respect and even made important contributions in decision making and administrative affairs. They were sensitive in all areas and played an important role in politics. In the economically weaker segments of society, the birth of girls was not valued and boys were preferred. The role of women in ancient India, the Hindu dharma, the idea of female infanticide and female foeticide, the male to female ratio, ancient women and education, and ancient women and politics are the primary topics that have been considered in this research paper.*

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**Keywords:** Ancient India, Education, Family, Politics, Society, Women.

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### Introduction

In ancient India, women were revered and contributed greatly to the well-being of families and society. Women were given a high position in society and felt contented and satisfied. They were given the opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standards. During this period, there were many female rishis. The wealthy class believed in polygamy, but monogamy was widespread. The system of sati and child marriage was not prevalent. Women were respected and valued in Rigvedic society, but discriminated against in the late Vedic period. Discrimination was observed primarily in relation to access to education and other rights and benefits. The status of women was further degraded by the prevalence of child marriage, sati, polygamy and the Parda system. In epics and Puranas, women were primarily identified with possessions

Even in Mauryan times, the status of women was poor. Although the king employed female bodyguards and spies. Women belonging to the upper castes should accept the Parda system. During this time men were polygamous and sati was seen as the accepted norm. Arthashastra stigmatized them further, not being allowed to go anywhere without her husband's permission and deciding for herself. I was not allowed to put down. During the Gupta era, their status declined again. They experienced abuse and mistreatment at the hands of his Smritishastras. Manusmriti dictated that she would depend on her father in her childhood, her husband in her youth, and her son in her old age. Aside from child marriage and the practice of sati, other aspects that negatively affected the status of women were prostitution and the devadasi system. These systems are now comprehensive

Like many classical societies, Indian society was patriarchal in nature. The most important aspects considered in patriarchal societies were sexuality, reproduction and social production. Women were admitted because their role in performing these functions was considered important. On the other

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hand, rules and guidelines were developed that denied women the exercise of certain rights and opportunities and considered them subordinate to men. A more subtle expression of patriarchy was symbolism that conveyed messages about the disadvantage of women. This was conveyed through legends that emphasized self-sacrifice. By sacrificing a woman's pure image and dominating rituals and norms, a woman was given importance because she fulfils her two important roles: wife and mother.

### **Women's Position in Ancient India**

After the Vedic era ended, women were deprived of their social and religious rights. They were not allowed to participate in social, religious or cultural events. Gradually, over time, the position of women deteriorated to such an extent that the birth of a girl was considered a misfortune within the family. The birth of a girl was believed to be a major obstacle to the welfare of the family and community. Although boys were considered assets. A common view among individuals was that men are assets, elevate status, and promote the well-being of families and the wider community (Mohapatra, 2015).

Women's roles and status in ancient India are determined by many factors, including social structure, cultural norms, values, and social expectations. Changes in social norms, values, principles and standards are not happening at the same pace as changes in social structures due to the advent of technology, modernization and globalization. In Indian society, practices such as giving up daughters upon marriage and sending them to the marital home after marriage are among the most common aspects associated with women. It is considered important because Also, the practice of procreation is seen as inferior to men (Mohapatra, 2015).

From Manu's perspective, women are seen only as wives and mothers. As a mother, she is responsible for the implementation of the tasks and functions necessary for the child's development. As a wife, she is responsible for performing all duties and fulfilling all responsibilities. Widows were not honoured. They were in many ways neglected and were not allowed to play a significant role in social, cultural, or religious functions. It was also believed that the appearance of a widow would be an obstacle to achieving goals. On the other hand, widowers have no such restrictions. In Islam, women cannot be priestesses or perform clerical services such as preaching. B. Constant prayer. Women are denied participation in religious groups. Also, in Buddhism, male monks are given a higher status than nuns (Mohapatra, 2015).

### **Position of Women in the Hindu Dharma**

Hinduism has its roots in the patriarchal Aryan society. The family unit was considered the most important. In ancient times, the common family system was dominant. A family system in which two or more nuclear families live under one roof is called a joint family system. This family system consists of grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. In the Aryan family, the birth of their son was warmly welcomed. Individuals believed that male children would make an effective contribution to promoting the well-being of families and communities. Women, on the other hand, were given freedom. The dominant position in Hindu dharma is that male and female represent her two aspects of her one person. According to the scriptures, Lord Shiva consists of his two halves of the body, one male and one female. Women are considered to be more powerful and are considered the Goddess of Shakti (strength). Society was governed by certain established norms and practices.

Religion was very important in ancient India. The training also focused on religious scriptures. It was believed that individuals could enrich their lives by instilling moral and ethical qualities. Women were recognized in society and participated in all activities and functions alongside men. In the field of spirituality, women were not considered inferior to men, were not discriminated against, and were given equal opportunities. Yajunvalykyia endowed Maitre with divine knowledge, not only was she able to comprehend advanced philosophies, but she also acquired divine knowledge. In addition, there were many labour duties to be performed by women. They were even bought into slavery by setting obligations. They were employed as servants in palaces and in the houses of the wealthy classes, and also served as ministers. At the same time, women were protected by their fathers before marriage and by their husbands and sons after marriage.

The main reason women were dependent on their fathers, husbands and sons was because they had no ownership rights. They were no longer self-reliant and became dependent on a male-dominated society. Thus, the social, cultural and religious backbone of Indian society is based on patriarchal structures. Patriarchal structures gave women a secondary status. Women should obey the rules and follow the instructions of their men's family members. The patriarchal family philosophy is based on the principle that the family tree grows with the man. This gives him importance and protection

within the family. Another important aspect of this philosophy is marriage, in which women are given subordinate status. A woman in her subordinate position has to go through a range of negative emotions. They were not allowed to say anything about their rights, and the practice of killing female fetuses and infants was also widespread.

### **Concept of Female Infanticide and Female Foeticide in Ancient India**

Family planning has long been considered an important aspect. Both men and women are married at a young age, mostly under the age of 18. As a result, child marriage was widespread. Women were adversely affected as a result of child marriage. They were married and sent to the marital home. In conjugal homes, their lives were centered mainly on taking care of the needs and demands of the family and doing household chores. In some cases, girls and women are being abused and mistreated by their husbands and in-laws. Family planning was considered an important aspect, but the main problem was the widespread practice of female fetal murder and female infanticide. The slaughter of women was also widespread in ancient India. For the most part, individuals covet a male child, and this view has led to feticides and femicides. Families have adopted various methods of fetal abortion. This was common in tribal communities. A woman who aborted a fetus against her will was severely punished. Women of higher castes who performed abortions with the help of slaves were also punished. At that time, only religion and community did not condone abortion. They believed that those involved in abortions should punish themselves. Certain abortion methods were introduced in ancient times. Various means chosen by individuals include the use of herbs, creating abdominal pressure, or serious weaponry.

In the 19th century, Britain declared an infanticide-prone area. In 1805, they discovered that female infanticide was highly prevalent among the Rajputs of Saurashtra. There was a village in the eastern state of Uttar Pradesh where the daughter could not be found. In 1808, Baroda's supreme authority, Alexander Walker, assembled all community leaders to find out why the girl was murdered. In 1870, the British government passed the Infant Murder Prevention Act. In the early stages, it was to be enforced only in the north western states of Punjab and Oud. After the 1872 census showed that women made up 40% of her population, some areas were reported to be prone to infanticide. Female infanticide was recognized as a crime in 1898, and a government decree was enacted to make the crime legal. However, within eight years of her 1906, the Female Infanticide Act was repealed as the government claimed that infanticide was no longer practiced in the community.

The 1901 census showed that there were only 832 women for every 1,000 men in Punjab. This law was withdrawn for several political reasons. Thus, in ancient times, the female fetal system was common. At that time, there were no medical institutions, and the awareness of medicine was low. Therefore, when individuals engaged in these practices, they had to use traditional methods that were inconvenient and unfavourable. At the same time, the murder of a female fetus was a crime and perpetrators were subject to disciplinary action. So we can say that this concept was embedded in our roots from our ancestors.

### **Male Ratio Adverse Female Ratio**

The decline in the proportion of women in society is related to the status of women in antiquity, as well as the religious and cultural influence of communities. Boys were preferred over girls in the Hindu community, as in other communities. Individual perspectives and perspectives are responsible for giving more importance to boys. Girls were considered primarily responsible. By the time they got married, it was believed that they would only claim wealth and financial resources and not get any return from their investments. It was also assumed that girls were destined to do only household chores and had lower skills and abilities compared to men. They have been discouraged from getting an education or engaging in any form of employment opportunities.

Men's longing for children was strong in families and communities. Individuals performed ceremonies, religious ceremonies, offered prayers, worshiped gods, and their main purpose was to satisfy their desire for a boy. A man's desire for a child was common to both men and women. However, due to her family background, she desires a son in order to lead the family line and raise the status of the family. With advances in medicine, doctors are using ultrasound equipment. For this reason, it has negatively affected the sex of children. Ancient times are evidence that the importance of women was recognized. Similarly, the individual was also a proponent of a male-dominated society. People mainly believed that women's role was limited to childbirth, improving the family line, and performing all important household chores. It is clear that within her community the practice of female infanticide was not common, nor was the individual an advocate of the women's community. Women were considered inferior to men, and the practice of female fetuses was also considered illegal.

### **Ancient Women and Education**

The religious environment was considered the most effective way of influencing education in ancient India. Indian education can be viewed primarily as a product of the Aryan spirit. In addition, the aesthetic and professional aspects were primarily stimulated by the emotional and material nature of the Dravidians. The education of women and girls in antiquity moved from the Vedic (2000 BC to 1000 BC) to the post-Vedic (1000 BC to 200 BC). In Vedic times, the status of women was high. In ancient times, education was thought to contribute greatly to the maintenance of living conditions. Individuals primarily held this view that education enables them to achieve the desired goal of a prosperous life (Roy, 2017). To improve living conditions, it is essential for individuals to raise their awareness of various aspects such as morality, ethics, academic concepts, culture, religion, norms, values, standards and principles.

Women were encouraged to get an education as they were solely responsible for the welfare of their families and communities. They have made significant contributions in areas such as fulfilling household responsibilities, health care, child development, meeting the needs and requirements of older family members, and protecting the environment. Women were given the responsibility of imparting moral and ethical knowledge to individuals. Therefore, it is imperative that women acquire knowledge and develop their skills and abilities in order to perform all these tasks and functions in an organized manner. Education has enabled women to live lives of dignity and respect. Scholarly and knowledgeable women were treated with respect and respect in society. Education has empowered women to be confident in themselves and to protect themselves from all forms of abuse and injustice.

The status and conditions of women in Vedic times were far superior to those of any other time. If a woman wanted an education but did not agree to marry, she was allowed to marry without restriction. Most girls from wealthy families had the privilege of being educated. Upanayana or initiation ceremonies were organized for both girls and boys. It is no exaggeration to say that women's education was recognized during the Aryan period, also called the poetic age. There was no prejudice in girls' education. People were concerned with the justice of women within the social order. Through the Vedas it was established that the entire Aryan race was cooperatively conscious of promulgating norms and laws to improve the living conditions of women. She contributed greatly to the collective creativity of the general public. It wasn't just the politics and conflicts of gender her power at the time that Aryans were conscious of. The reason is that society was still developing at that time (Roy, 2017).

Vedic times saw many female scholars. They had good knowledge of Vedas and texts. These women not only composed hymns, but also learned music and dance. Women belonging to the lower classes or castes also mastered the arts of spinning, weaving, embroidery and needlework. There were many female poets and philosophers in Vedic times. During the Vedic period, we witnessed able women such as Aparā, Gosha and Visvavala performing their labor duties of creating mantras and rising to the ranks of sages and clergy. Lopā Mudra was one of her female teachers of this period and is believed to have preached her 179 hymns along with the sage Agastya, the first book of Rig Her Vedas. Therefore, it can be said that women, like male teachers, were given equal educational opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. This was true not only for education, but also for social conventions and rituals (Roy, 2017).

In pre-Vedic times, women participated in religious ceremonies and offerings with their husbands. When girls and women received formal education, they had to recite mantras and scriptures clearly and efficiently. Many female scholars in Vedic times overcame many constraints. During Vedic times, equal opportunities were given, especially in terms of getting an education. Notable scholars of this period include Apala, Atleand, and Gosha. In wealthy families, some teachers were hired to teach students arts such as dance, music, wreath-making, painting, patching, sewing, magic, poetry, and toy-making. In some well-educated households, girls were also able to listen to younger students and gain information. In other words, it can be said that there was authority in society, and women were in awe. When there were religious, social, or cultural events, they attended with their husbands. Social morals were of a high standard and social relationships were cultivated with mutual spirit and good faith (Roy, 2017).

In ancient India, women were educated and had a high level of knowledge and information. Learned women fell into her two categories. A Brahnavadini, a woman who has never been married and has acquired Vedic knowledge throughout her life. Brahnavadinis was a lifelong student of philosophy and theology. Another category was Sadidvaha, who studied the Vedas until he was married. These women continued their studies until they were married at the age of 15 or her 16. Women who studied the Vedas were known as paninis. Her teacher was called Upadhyaya or Upadhyay. Buddhist nuns composed hymns. Women wrote Sanskrit plays and poems and excelled in other fields such as art, music and painting. It has been widely demonstrated that rulers and kings are aware of women's education and provide education to their children regardless of whether they are male or female (Rout, 2016).

### **Ancient Women and Politics**

Women played an important role in politics. Megasthenes mentioned a Pandian woman who performed administrative functions. Ancient India spans a vast Period, 2500 BC to 250 BC. Archaeology, ancient documents, and artifacts . we reconstruct the lives of women. The earliest material found in archaeological excavations focuses on goddess worship. The earliest recorded religious text (1500 BC) evokes the life-giving power of the Goddess who gives life and effectively nurtures and sustains it. After the Aryan invasion and the development of Hinduism and Buddhism, the surviving Indian written texts have contributed greatly to the knowledge of the people. However, it was women in general who experienced deprivation, shame and disability (Rout, 2016).

It centers around the Indus Valley, India's oldest known civilization, dating from 2500 to 1500 BC. In its present existence, most of these cities of archaeological interest are in Pakistan due to its independence and partition in 1947. The old city-state of Lothal is located in Gujarat. Extensive ruins at Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, and Lothal show well-organized and prosperous societies. Agriculture was the main occupation of the individual. The individual was involved in transactions with other organizations in the Middle East. The most famous ancient artefact is that of a slender girl in a confident pose. The many toys found convey a widespread awareness of the importance of family life in society. The engraving has not been deciphered, so the actual meaning cannot be determined. Extensive images of women have been discovered, suggesting that the goddess played a central role. Goddesses who contribute to increased productivity are known as fertility goddesses (Rout, 2016).

Apparently, this civilization experienced a natural disaster that changed the course of the Indus River. The invading Aryans were thought to have conquered the indigenous peoples, but the Indus civilization was already in decline. Especially when nomads came from Hindu Kush. These Aryans over time enslaved and dominated the indigenous peoples, leading to the emergence of the caste system (Rout, 2016).The caste system dominated in ancient India It was a target. The upper caste was the Brahmins, who were chiefly teachers and priests, the second, the Kshatriyas, rulers and warriors, the third, the Vaishyas, the merchants and merchants, and the fourth, the Sudras, the sweepers. and sweeper. Women belonging to the ruling class were primarily engaged in the political and administrative functions of the state. They were well informed and involved in the decision making process.

Simple instructions were voiced through the Varna and caste systems through the system of satisfaction, with the primary aim of assessing the role of women in politics and the status of women in ancient societies. Varna's principles of classifying society consist of her four groups of Brahmins, Kashtriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Brahmins occupied the highest positions of power and authority, both ritually and ideologically. The principle of stratification gained normative importance and justified Brahmin suzerainty. Varna schemes have been empirically expressed through various caste groups. These groups represent the adjustment of the system to the needs of society. Much controversy about the caste system revolves around its origins. Scholars have divided perspectives and perspectives on the emergence of systems of social stratification. This system has influenced both religious and secular activities, which are an integral part of Indian society. The most popular and widely held theory relates to the origins of the Aryan invasion of India, in which the invaders subjugated the indigenous peoples and created a stratified society as farmers and slaves. It ties in with the process by which they were able to integrate. Thus, castes born twice are considered of non-Aryan descent (women's status in India, n.d.).

The policy function can organize and operate necessary information from various aspects. These include decision-making, leadership skills, management, control, organization, and coordination. Women belonging to wealthy castes and monarchies were held in high esteem. The wives and mothers of rulers were held in high esteem. Men played a key role in the implementation of policies and the proper performance of administrative duties. However, their wives and mothers could give them ideas and suggestions. I've been They were allowed to not only provide ideas and suggestions, but also implement methods. In some cases, women were believed to be more adept and shrewd than men in performing administrative or political functions.

Many of the ideal female roles can be identified from her Vedic maiden and bride images. Daughters and Maidens were valued for their brilliance and attractive ornamental qualities. Young Virgos meet the right men when organizing events and festivals. And finally, with the consent of my parents, we had a wedding. When women married, they were instructed by their parents to display signs of morality and ethics in the marital home and not to offend anyone (Rout, 2016). Therefore, when exercising political functions, it was imperative that women contribute significantly to the common good and national progress by making correct decisions and properly performing administrative functions.

In ancient India, the economic contribution of women was considered important. Since ancient times, agriculture was considered the main occupation of an individual. Women supported men in carrying out seasonal activities. Women's participation in various occupations and their contribution to income generation are seen as one of the key aspects in securing the livelihoods of women. As of today, more than 70% of her people in the country are found to live in rural areas. The family was seen as the basic unit, and in addition to professional or political commitment, child development and family well-being were seen as essential professional tasks for women. Women must have the necessary skills and competencies to be able to carry out their professional duties. For them, adequate knowledge of various aspects such as leadership skills, decision-making skills, managerial functions for planning, organizing, directing and managing, health care, environmental protection and household responsibilities, child development and attention to needs and it was important to have information. demands of family members, especially the elderly.

### Conclusion

In ancient India, women were given recognition, importance, and restrictions. Women from upper castes and wealthy families contributed significantly to improving the welfare of families and communities. They have access to education and have acquired the skills and abilities to enter teaching professions and to perform administrative and political functions. One of the main reasons for the decline in the number of girls is the spread of girls and the practice of killing them. Over time, these practices were considered criminal activity and policies and programs were developed to prevent them. Women have experienced many factors that adversely affect their health. These include illiteracy, parda system, forced child marriage, polygamy and sati. They were not allowed to make their own decisions and were dependent on their male family members.

The status of women in ancient India experienced both positive and negative influences. They were given opportunities and discriminated against. There was a relationship between women's status and economic status. This depends on the rights and opportunities to effectively contribute to economic activity. Most of India's population was engaged in agriculture. In addition, men and women were employed in trade such as textiles, handicrafts and pottery. Therefore, as a rule, women were supposed to marry early, be denied education, perform household chores, and take care of the needs and needs of the family. Women mostly stayed at home, as they were mainly devoted to household chores. Apart from that, they were involved in the manufacturing and production process to supplement their family's income.

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