

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON WOMEN'S POSITION IN DIFFERENT ERA

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a social issue, not a legal one. The need of the hour is for a shift in society's current mindset. Women empowerment is required because of the demand for natural justice and as a tool for country building. Empowering women entails creating an environment in which women may freely use their rights, both inside and beyond the family, as equal partners as men. This study seeks to elaborate the position of women and how empowerment women are in India since ancient times to modern times, highlighted the concerns and obstacles of women empowerment. Women had equal status with men in the early Vedic period. However, the standing of women continued to decline later on. Women's empowerment is now one of the most pressing issues of the modern times. In practice, ironically women empowerment can still said to be an illusion in the real world. In our daily lives, we see how women are affected by a variety of social ills. Women empowerment is fundamentally growing as people become more conscious. The purpose of this research is to highlight women's position in India since the ancient to modern eras. This research paper is based on secondary data. The paper is divided into three parts. The first portion discusses the Vedic viewpoint of women's status, the second section describes medieval status of women, and the third section discusses women's current position in modern times.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Ancient India, Medieval India, Modern India.

Introduction

The best thermometer to the progress of nation is treatment of women.

~Swami Vivekananda

Any analysis of society can be said as incomplete until unless the prominence, function, or even role of women is examined. Women at once were the pillar within the arch of Indian civilization. The females as described in Rig Vedic, in India had complete faith over their social standing; it resulted in an improvement in their circumstances. Women have also granted the opportunity to advance their intellectual and spiritual lives. In ancient India there were said to be sati system, and early marriage. However, after holding powerful and upheld position in Rig Vedic society, women began to face discrimination in schooling and centers from the Later-Vedic period (Nandal & Rajnish, 2014). Indian civilization is predicted on the idea that men are the reason why women exist; they rise or fall together, are little or immortal, and are restricted or freed. There is no doubt that the history of women is currently experiencing a magnificent transformation. The evidence is all around us. Women's voices are becoming more and more heard in the legislature, courts and streets (Shreenivasa, 2006). The constitution of India has provided women with equal rights similar to male from the start, but on the contrary women in the west had to battle for it more than a century to obtain some of their basic rights, such as the ability to vote etc.

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Women's in Ancient Times

यत्रनार्यस्तुपूज्यन्तेरमन्तेतत्रदेवताः।
यत्रैतास्तुनपूज्यन्तेसर्वास्तत्राफलाःक्रियाः॥

(ManuSmriti 3.56)

This signifies where women are honored, there the deities are pleased, where on the other hand, they are not honored, there all rites are fruitless.

Women were highly respected in ancient India. At the period, ladies were referred to as 'JANANI' (The Mother). "Where women are honored, their lives the Gods," stated Manu, the great lawmaker, many ages ago. Women are referred in Hindu texts as DEVI and SHAKTI, the most ideological symbols of love and creation. The Vedic period is particularly remembered for the freedom it offered to women. Women have the advantage of being educated. The wives of Rishis participated in spiritual efforts alongside their husbands, earning the name "Ardhangini" for them (better half). They are given not just a significant role but also a position of equality with males. Unfortunately, women were not treated equally to men during the later ancient times. They were mostly avoided (Dhar, 2017). Women had an important part in India's ancient history. Rig Vedic women in India held great social rank. They were in good health. The women were given the opportunity to advance intellectually and spiritually. During this time, there was several female Rishis. Through monogamy were the most popular, the wealthier members of society practiced polygamy. There used to be no sati system, and no early marriages. However, after this time, in the latter part of the vedic period, women began to face discrimination in term of education and other rights and amenities, while holding free and prestigious roles in the Rig-Vedic society (Rout, 2016). Below, we've covered each of the rights and privileges obtained by women individually:

- **Freedom:** The level of liberty granted to women so as to contribute their presence in public events reveals the nature of women's standing throughout the Vedic period. Purdah was never practiced by women. They were able to attain education. The widows were also granted with the right to get remarried. Divorce, on other hand, was not considered to be an option for them. Even males were denied the right to get divorce with their spouses. Women were at that period of time treated as "Ardhanginis" and granted unlimited independence in issues related to family. Vedic women had financial independence. There were some women working as teachers. The location of production was the home. Clothes were made by spinning and weaving at home. Women supported their husbands' farming practices in addition to males.
- **Equal Education:** Although male children were preferred over female children, daughters were never mistreated. They went through the "Brahmacharya" discipline, including the "Upanayna" ceremony, and got the same education as males. Like males, women studied the Vedic literature, and several of them, like Lopamudra, Ghosa and Sikata-Nivavari, are credited with writing some of the songs found in the Vedas. Up to around 300 B.C., many females from prosperous families received a decent education.
- **Marriage:**

३८२२. युवंभगंसंभरतंसमृद्धमृतंवदन्तावृतोद्येषु।

ब्रह्मणस्पतेपतिमस्यैरोचयचारुसंभलोवदतुवाचमेताम्॥३१॥

The aforesaid Sukta emphasizes the need of harmony and tranquilly in marriage. It says that both the husband and wife should treat each other with respect. It also instructs the women to respect her husband. Thus, it may be said that wives enjoyed an equal standing in marriage. In the Atharveda, a property acquired by a female during her marriage is referred to as *Kanyadhan*. The bride receives presents from friends and family at the wedding, known as *Kanyadhan*.

३८६७.

संकाशयामिवहतुंब्रह्मणागृहैरघोरेणचक्षुषामित्रियेण।पर्याणद्धविश्वरूपंयदस्तिस्योनंपतिभ्यःसवितातत्कृणोतु॥१२॥

The Sukta demonstrate that Kanyadhan was not imposed on the parents to the bride, but rather was viewed as a gift given to the bride. It also anticipates the love and acceptance of the bride and groom's family. As a result, the bride's family had complete discretion over how to present Kanyadhan, while the groom's family made no expectations.

- **Religion:** According to *Atharveda*, males should require their wife to engage in Yagya and other rites.

३८३७. जीवरुदन्तिविनयन्त्यध्वरं दीर्घामनुप्रसितिदीधुर्नरः।
वामपितृभ्यो यद्दंसमीरिरेमयः पतिभ्योजनयेपरिष्वजे ॥ ४६ ॥

The Sukta makes it quite clear that women must participate in religious ceremonies. In absence of the wife, the yagyas were seen as being insufficient. Women had a significant role in Vedic period customs and rituals. Husbands were supposed to treat their wives with respect and to provide for all of their needs. The Atharveda teaching refers to women as Saraswati and Laxmi instead of weak sex (Thakur, 2017).

Women's in Medieval Times

शोचन्तिजामयो यत्र विनश्यत्याशुतकुलम्।
नशोचन्ति तु यत्रैतावर्धते तद्धिसर्वदा ॥

(ManuSmriti 3.57)

Where female relatives suffer, the family quickly collapses; yet, a family where they are content always flourishes.

The position of women declined as a result of the numerous foreign conquests that occurred in Medieval India. Due to the impact of Muslim culture, women's status continued to diminish in the past era. Women were denied their rights to equality with males throughout the Muslim era. They were required to remain inside the four walls of the dwelling. Islam has an impact on this. In reality, there are still many limitations on women in several Islamic nations today. Indian women began wearing "Pardah" (a veil), which conceals the body, to protect them. In the manner it limited their freedom. All of this led to the development with several new social evils, including child marriage, Sati, Jauhar and prohibitions on girls' education.

- **Jauhar:** In Rajput communities where mass suicide occurred, a practice like this was called Jauhar. Rajput women committed suicide when their husband were still alive according to this tradition. While their husband engaged in the final, definitive combat, known as "Shaka" with the enemy. Rajput Sainik women would construct a big pyre and light themselves on fire, safeguarding the honor of the women and the clan as a whole.
- **Sati:** Sati is the custom of sitting on the husband's funeral and being burnt to death. Women, who die as Sati, according to some Hindu texts, go immediately to paradise. Sati was seen to be a better alternative than widowhood. Some texts, such as a "Medhatiti", had opposing viewpoints. It is said that Sati is equivalent to suicide, hence it should be avoided.
- **Child Marriage:** In medieval India, it became the standard. Girls between the ages of 8 and 10 were married off. Tulsidas mentions in one of his shlokas that the hardship of women can be imagined "ढोल, गवार, शुद्र, पशु, नारीसकलताड़नके अधिकारी" This indicates that animals, illiterates, inferior castes, and girls must be beaten. As a result, females were also been treated as animals as a result were married at a very young age. Marrying child at a very early age also caused additional issues such an increase in birthrate, poor women's health, and high rates of child and female motility.
- **Women Education:** In Hindu society, particularly in Medieval India, girls were not provided with a formal education. They have received instruction on how to do home duties. However, a well-known Indian logician named "Vatsyayana" said that ladies were presupposed to be the finest in sixty-four skills, including cooking, spinning, grinding, and knowledge of medicines, among many other things.
- **Purdah System:** The veil, also known as the "Purdah", had a wider usage in the medieval Indian society. It was used to shield the ladies from the gaze of foreign emperors who invaded India while in the medieval period. This arrangement resulted in limiting girls' freedom.
- **Restriction on Widow Remarriage:** The condition of widow in medieval India was really terrible. They were objectified as a material and had to face several restrictions. They were not permitted to remarry. Being a Hindu widow was considered a misfortune in medieval India.

Women's in Modern Times

अतुलंतत्रतत्तेजःसर्वदेवशरीरजम्।
एकस्थंतदभून्नारीव्याप्तलोकत्रयंत्विषा॥

(Devimahāmyam 2.13)

The infinite light that originated from all gods and filled the three cosmos gathered in one spot and became the shape of a woman.

We will now begin our examination of the evolution of women's empowerment in the contemporary era. We may rely on specific names from British India, when women shown incredible bravery that many men could not match. One such woman was Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. She was, in sense, the leader of the 1857 revolution. Women's standing in modern India is rather paradoxical. Women in current times have accomplished much in comparison to the past, but they still have a long way to go. Their route is littered with potholes. They encounter a variety of issues, including;

- Lack of Education
- Lack of power
- Maternal Mortality
- Poor Health
- Malnutrition
- Mistreatment
- Dowry
- Overwork
- Female Infanticide
- Crime Against Women
- Trafficking
- Child Marriage
- Divorce

Conclusion

Therefore, in respect to the research undertaken, in light of the position of women from past to the present era, we see that women's standing in Indian culture was contested. The status of women in India has always been precarious and requires significant improvement in many areas of life. If women are educated, knowledgeable and capable of making decisions, then the concept of women's empowerment will be more relevant. For the aims of empowerment to be met, equality based on gender regarding power sharing and decision-making at all age groups must be assured. She needs to be treated with true respect for her uniqueness. Women have equal role in human development. She is partly human and half alien. However, she is lacking in society. Women are not regarded with the same dignity as they were in old Indian society. In today's world, the criminality in the mindset of opposite gender is at its peak against women. The constitutional provisions can alone not provide women with a respected standing in society. Therefore, certain modifications in both women's and men's mindset are necessary.

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