

STATUS OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL AND MODERN PERIOD OF INDIA

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Abstract

India is a land of values, morals, heritage culture and traditions. As the word said by Mahatma Gandhi, "We call our nation as mother India and earth as mother earth because the genesis of all rituals, holiness existed in the compassion of a women". So, in our early Vedic culture there was matriarchal system where the women were the head of the family. So, at that time there was a scope for existence of peace, harmony, happiness and prosperity. But the status of women declined from the later Vedic period where the tradition of kinship only vested to the male heir and prince of that kingdom. Then the same type of typical culture flourished in all regimes of kingdom. So, it led to a patriarchal system, where the family head will be the male but not the women. So, from that time a theory developed that said women were very weak, feared, threatened and mentally sensitive from their birth. Later by the entry of Persian and Muslim ruler from central Asia the women were treated as the people created by the God to fulfill their sexual feelings. Then they destroyed the holy pilgrim temples, monuments, stupas by examining the term there is only God in this world but not goddesses. From that women were habituated to live in the darkness of rajmahals, forts, kitchens, etc., They were caged with the POLYGAMY, PURDHA SYSTEM, ZENANA, JAUHAR, SATI, DOWRY Systems which turns them as a playing doll in the society.

But today women were the largest working force in the Nation. They turned to be a productive force for the inclusive and sustainable development of the nation. Today from school to space in each and every field the leading personalities are woman. Today in our nation there are women Politicians, Professionals, Social Workers, Scientists, Soldiers, Teachers and CEO's. So the modern world is targeted to the women progress and empowerment. In spite of these advances there are some cases regarding women Harassment, Violence, Sexual Attempts, Discrimination, Inequalities in each and every corner of the society. It's time to create the equal status to the women in our hearts, home, society, livelihood and representation.

Key words: *Matriarchal. Patriarchal Qadha. Purdha, Manusmriti, Social Empowerment, Sati, Dowry, Upanishads, Sasthras, Brahma Marriage, Gandharva Marriage, Zina, Zenana, Widow Remarriage, Polygamy, Jauhar, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Islam, Dalai lama.*



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INTRODUCTION

“Where the women were respected there the divinity, spirituality exists”- Holy Vedas

India is a land of values, morals, heritage culture and traditions. As said by Mahatma Gandhi “We call our nation as mother India and this earth as mother earth because the genesis of all rituals, holiness existed in the compassion of a women”. So, in our early Vedic culture there was matriarchal system where the women were acting as the head of the family. So, at that time there was a scope for existence of peace, harmony, happiness and prosperity. But the status of women was declined from the time of later Vedic period where the tradition of kinship only vested to the male heir and prince of that kingdom. Then the same type of typical culture flourished in all regimes of kingdom. So, it led to a patriarchal system, where the family head will be the male but not the women. So, from that time there a wide theory developed that said women were very weak, feared, threatened and mentally sensitive from their birth. Later by the entry of Persian and Muslim ruler from central Asia the women were treated as the people created by the God to fulfill their sexual feelings. Then they destroyed the holy pilgrim temples, monuments, stupas by examining the term there is only God in this world but not the goddesses. From that women were habituated to live in the darkness of raajmahals, forts, kitchens etc., They were caged with the POLYGAMY, PURDHA SYSTEM, ZENANA, JAUHAR, SATI, DOWRY Systems which turns them as a playing doll in the society.

But today women were the largest working force in the Nation. They turned to be a productive force for the inclusive and sustainable development of the nation. Today from school to space in each and every field the leading personalities are woman. Today in our nation there are women Politicians, Professionals, Social Workers, Scientists, Soldiers, Teachers and CEO's. So the modern world is targeted to the women progress and empowerment. Still there are some cases regarding to women Harassment, Violence, Sexual Attempts, Discrimination, Inequalities at each and every corner of the society. Its time to create the equal status to the women in our hearts, home, society, livelihood and representation.

Position of women In Ancient India:

Women in Ancient times were held high in self-esteem. The position of woman in the Vedas and Upanishads was that of a mother or goddesses. In the MANUSMRITI, woman was considered as a precious being to be projected by her father, then by her brother and husband

and finally by her son. They were possessing many great honors and positions in the Society.

They are:

- i) Having freedom to have Liberal thoughts and practices,
- ii) They were involved in the Religious and Social Matters,
- iii) They have a choice to choose their Life Partner and there was access to widow re-marriages,
- iv) They were having rights to choose their fields of work in their Life,
- v) They were placed in very High Positions to control and solve various problems in the Kingdom,
- vi) They were having high involvement in Spiritual matters at their regimes,
- vii) They were highly educated in the fields of environmental protection, cattle rearing, agriculture, wars, handlooms, handicrafts etc.,

Position of Women in Hindu Society:

The women were considered the most powerful and empowering in some HINDU texts such as upanishads, sastras, puranas, particularly DEVI UPANISHADS, DEVI MAHATMYA, DEVI BHAGAVATA PURANA. In MANASMRUTI, the position of women in Hinduism was mixed and contradictory because a woman should obey and seek protection from her father, as a young woman her husband and as a widow to her son. These texts recognize eight kinds of marriage, ranging from the father finding a partner for his daughter & seeking her consent (BRAHMA MARRIAGE) to the bridegroom finding each other without parental participation (GANDHARVA MARRIAGE). ARTHASASTRA described women as a person who had received the military education and served to protect the king, the text also mentions female artisans, mendicants and women who wandering ascetics.

Position of Women in Islamic Society:

Islam law says that both men and women are equal. Islam basic view of women & men postulates a complementary of functions, like everything else in the universe, the humanity has been created in a pair. Islam differentiates the greater role of women who believe in Islam and those who do not. The Muslim males right to own slave women, seized during military campaigns and slave women would be sold without their consent, expected to possible concubinage, required permissions for their owners to marry, and the children born to them were automatically considered muslim under Islamic law if the father was muslim.

Position of Women in Buddhist Society:

Although Buddha taught that wives should be obedient to their husbands, he also taught that husbands should respect their wives. Feminist scholars have also noted that even when a women's potential for spiritual attainment is acknowledged, records of such achievements may not be kept or may be obscured by gender, neutral language or mistranslation of original sources by western scholars. Motherhood in early Buddhism could also be a valued activity in its own right.

The Dalai Lama spoke at a Conference on women in Buddhism at the university of HAMBURG in 2007:

“Warfare has traditionally been carried out primarily by men, since they seem better physically equipped for aggressive behavior. Women, on the other hand tend to become sensitive to others discomfort and pain. Although men and Women have the same potentials for aggression and warmth. Thus, if the majority of world leaders were women perhaps there would be less danger of war and more cooperative on their basis of global concern although of course, some women can be difficult, I sympathize with feminists but they must not merely shout. They must exert efforts to make positive contribution to the society.

In 2009, at the National Rights Museum in Memphis Tennessee said, “I call myself a feminist. Isn't it that what you call someone who fights for women rights.”

Position of Women in Sikhism and Judaism

Judaism:

Greater is the reward to be given by the almighty to the women than to men. Women are light on raw knowledge, they possess more intuition. A man without a wife lives without joy, blessing and good, a man should love his wife as himself and respect her more than himself. A man must be careful never to speak slightly to his wife because women are prone to tears and sensitive to wrong. Women have greater faith than men and are especially well hearted.

Sikhism:

A woman is the favorite in her parental home, loved by her father and mother. In the home of her in laws, she is the pillar of the family, the guarantee of its good fortune. Sharing is spiritual wisdom and enlightenment and with Nobel qualities endowed a woman with the other half of man, escorts him to the door of liberation. The Society will respect the ideas, views and the essentialities of a women at all times.

Status of Women in Medieval Period:

In medieval period the matriarchal System was turned into patriarchal System, where the head of the family would be a man. They used to consider women as weak minded, fickle, threatened and dedicated them completely to the household works, kitchen and treated as a slave. The act of child marriages, killing female infants, sati sahadama, predominantly prevailed at this time. New systems came to existence such as:

PURDAH SYSTEM:

Purdah is wall which divides the women quarters from the rest of the house. Interestingly an important feature of the purdah system is that the women who are secured as per Muslim rule of law.

ZENANA SYSTEM:

It is literally referring to the part of a house belonging to a Hindu or Muslim family in the south Asia which is reserved for the women of the households. This is because they are trained for the generations to think that it is a mark of responsibility and dignity.

JAUHAR SYSTEM:

This Practice was historically observed in North-West regions of India, with most famous Jauhars in history occurring during wars between Hindu Rajputs Kingdoms in Rajasthan and the Muslim armies.

POLYGAMY SYSTEM:

For their enjoyment and happiness each king used to marry more than three women. He used to exploit them sexually and physically. This system is most prevalent from the Persian and Delhi sultanate rule in India. After the death of the king they all turned to be slaves for the successor. Then they were sexually harassed and sold in markets.

ZINA PRACTICE:

In Islam, sexual inter course between a woman and any man to whom she is not married is ZINA, a religious crime. This includes extramarital sex, premarital sex and rape.

QADHA SYSTEM:

Marriage customs vary in Muslim dominated countries. Islam law allows polygamy where a Muslim man can be married to four wives at the same time, under the restricted conditions, but it is not widespread.

SATI PRACTICE:

Sati is absolutely Indian funeral custom where a widow burns herself on her husband's pyre or committed suicide in other fashions shortly after her husband's death.

Position of Women in Modern Period:

Modern era of Indian history would be an era of women progress and development in all aspects such as education, science, freedom, equality, Rights, reservation, Entrepreneurship, professionalism, etc., In this time from Home to Space in all sectors the explorers and inventors were women. They are holding all respectable positions in the modern world.

Growth of women Literacy:

After the independence the literacy rate of women in our nation was only 15.3% but today it raised to 65.8% due to various developmental schemes which were initiated by the central and state governments. Today the school dropouts are controlled and gross enrolment ratio is very high. Many scientific health protection schemes, nutritious food, lodging, residential facilities are majorly provided to the SC's, ST's and BC's.

Rights, Equality and Freedom:

Today a woman gets protected from dowry system, domestic violence harassments, trafficking, commercial sex working homes, etc. Government is providing equal employment, opportunities and freedom to work in their fields of interest in any corner of the nation with safe and secured environment.

Reservation to All:

Reservation is provided in all social, economical and political bodies. Where as in our parliament nearly 33% of seats are dedicated to the women representatives. In democratic India today, speaker of lower house was a woman and we have women IPS officers, presidents, MPs, Scientists, Olympians, etc.

Entrepreneurship:

In this modern world from commerce to commencement each and every sector is filled up with the women professionals. The governments were providing high incentives, loans, support to especially women entrepreneurs in banking, MSME, Agro Industry, handicrafts, textiles, service sectors and educational institutes.

Conclusion:

The status of women was gradually changing from period to period. But the main things that required to the women in the society were personal identity, proper education, social empowerment, financial independence, freedom in decision making and need reservation not only in political, judiciary, executive bodies but they need real status in hearts of every human with equal priorities and opportunities.

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