

# Contemporary Women against Modern Indian Society

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**Abstract:** *The status of women in Indian society is dynamic It has been ever changing. There were those days of hardship when a women had her whole world inside four walls, a girl never knew schooling and an infant was unsure weather she would be able to witness an adolescence. In early days a female birth was never glorified rather subjected to gender biasness, gender stereotypes, disparity and inequality. Infanticide, female foeticide, maternal mortality and female infant mortality were a common phenomena. However with the advent of educational opportunities and women empowerment the status of women in Indian society is experiencing progressive improvement. Still the curse of stereotypes and gender roles has taken a toll in the Indian society.*

**Key Words :** *Gender Stereotypes, Gender Biasness, Infanticide, Foeticide, Maternal Mortality, Infant Mortality.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Culture and heritage are the inveterate part of Indian society. Every magnitude of Indian civilization is acclimatized with tradition. Thus more or less every men and women are subjugated under some sorts of ethical consequence. The society that witnessed a journey of five thousand solar years, has been, amended, reconstructed and inspired numerous times and men and women both underwent a cycle of recurring cachet. Every aeon has evidenced a changed equation of women and society. A modern Indian society also runs on its very own norm. A nation where westernization and age old tradition exists hand in hand, bears a very diverse and paradoxical eminence for female population. A modern Indian society knows that educating a girl child is advantageous but harvesting the proficiency of education is not much desirable. In the scenario of new flanged India, women has earned enough dignity and self autonomy as compared to ancient and middle ages, but the issue of equality is still a question. Is the contemporary Indian society, providing equal opportunity for both the genders? Or an anguish of biasness is neatly veiled under the shroud of leading edge society.

## 2. Women in ancient and medieval India:

To analyse the status of women in present day India, one must discreetly study and realise the social standard of women in the by gone ages. As present and past both are interlinked and do hold priceless key of the future. 3000 B.C marks the dawn of one of the earliest civilization known to the mankind; the Indus Valley Civilization. The domineer extending from present day Balochistan to Uttar Pradesh, left the earliest imprint of culture in South-East Asia. And this culture had a very reputable seat for the female members of the society. The civilization was matriarchal in nature, where female population were given the priority. Highly urbanised, this community envisaged a very organised administrative system.

The early Vedic period which began from 1500 B.C also maintained similar reputation regarding women. Though having male heir was more important than having a female offspring, yet women enjoyed a better social life with lesser restriction on public appearance. The position of 'Ardhangini' provided them with complete independence in family life. Equal opportunity for education was also another wonderful feature of an early Vedic life. Girls were given good education along with the boys. Some of the contributors of Vedic hymns were women, as Lopamudra, Ghosa, Sikata, Nivavari etc. Women with greater social status received equal and fair scope of learning.

In Vedic culture marriage was considered divine, but it was never roughly imposed. A woman could stay spinster if she has chosen the life for her. Child marriage was uncharted. An educated woman was given right to choose her own partner, only after attaining puberty. Love marriages or the 'Gandharva Vivah' were allowed. Monogamy was only conceded. Even widow re-marriage were approved through the practice of 'Niyoga', with the acknowledgement from the elders, mostly for the purpose of bestowing a heir to the family. Rig Veda never mentioned the existence of the practice of 'Sati'. Father's property was never approved to a married daughter, but a spinster was promised one fourth of the inherent fortune. In economic field, women has a partial determination regarding spinning, weaving and agricultural work.

In the field of religion women had enough bona fide to read sacred text, jointly perform homage and sacrifices with their husbands and attain all kind of religious discourses. Except 'Sabha' women had no restrictions in entering public assemblies. Whereas their presence were very much desired, paving them an convenience to excel as a debater. Even in the epoch of Epics; Ramayana and Mahabharata, women had the space to shine in their own glory. In the Hindu we find reference of many prominent and strong will women such as *Sita, Keikei, Kunti, Gandhari* and *Draupadi*.

Hence the later Vedic period and the age if *Puranas* evidenced a sheer fall of women prominence. The women status declined and liberty was curtailed to very extent. Education was refused, and were rejected from learning Vedas and scriptures. In the domain of religion women were completely barred. In the field of economy too they were absolutely barricaded. Property share were totally refused and some malpractices such as *Sati* and forced Dowry started swelling. All this represented women as a burden to a society. As '*Manusmriti*' clearly designated females to be in their father's custody earlier to marriage, husband's dominion after marriage and son's responsibility in the absence of husband. Women were treated like a transferable property not more than any live stock. The reason of such repression can be considered of rising Bramhanical austerities that impeded equality and promoted cast system.

The Medieval era also further stonewalled women's right and privileged. The Muslim invasion changed the course of spontaneous indigenous spontaneity of events. However foreign invaders and old laws both proved to be extremely hostile for the female population.

### 3. Women in modern India:

In modern India, women are excelling in the society which denied them of their civil identity. The British Rule is considered as one of the vital phases of India history which altered the constancy of fortuity. As British people became the governing body, they changed many age old practices and customs which appeared barbaric in their perception. Not only this, they also have given validation to many more social reforms induced by many Indian social activists and apostles. With the approbation of British government many social inequalities were abolished. Men and women were given equal opportunity for studies, work and acclaiming social rights. Social misdemeanours such as *Sati*, Child marriage, Devadasi system, Purdah system, exclusion of widow re-marriage were all abrogated. With suitable legislative support all these hindrances of women empowerment were dissolved. Thus British era opened the conduit for the women for a brighter upcoming future.

In the post independent decades the autonomous Indian government too followed a similar pathway towards women progress. After the end if foreign rule, India too realised the unnecessary of recurring the transgressive ancient prejudgements that would nothing but degrade India's noble facet in front of the world. The status of Indian women radically changed after compromising with some old antique cultural norms that hurdled the development of female population. Slowly women started regaining the once happened social repute that she deserved in every era. Liberation of education, work and social and political participation unlocked the very side of Indian women which were shut down with the '*Manusmriti*' principles.

The judiciary and legislation has given fair support for to uplift the marginalised women population. *The Hindu Marriage Act 1955* prevents polygamy, polyandry and child marriage. *The Hindu succession Act, 1956* makes the daughter the rightful heir of parental property. *The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956* enables them to adopt children and claim alumni or maintenance from divorced husband. *The dowry prohibition Act, 1961* makes dowry unlawful, repealing the daughter's status as a burden for her father. *The suppression of immoral Traffic of women and Girls Act 1956* protects the right if women against trafficking and exploitation.

There are many other laws that indirectly bolsters women's right such as *The Medical Termination of Pregnancy: Act 1971* legalises abortion on the ground mental and physical health. *The criminal Law Amendment Act 1983* conserves the women from the abuse of different type of crimes. *The Family Court Act 1984* cushions the women from all kind of domestic violence and family related disputes. The legal system also defends women against inequality. The laws which confirms equality for the women in the field of profession includes; *The Maternity Benefit Act 1961*, *The Equal Remuneration Act 1976* and *The Factories Amendment Act 1976*.

However 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen an improving women development in India. As the said inferior gender is excelling in various field of activity. Studies informs that participation and achievements of women in higher education is always greater then men. Specially after 1980, the admission of female candidate for medical and engineering on the basis of merit became a sheer fact. In language studies and creativity too the women are leaving mark. Such as Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Mahadevi Verma, Amrita Pritnam left their precious work in the section of literature in vernacular languages. Political sector also has seen legendary female personal such as Smt. Indira Gandhi, Sucheta Kripalani, Padmaja Naidu, Nandini Satpathay. Similarly on resent days we have seen the first female president Mrs Pratiba Patil, Chief minister of West Bengal Smt Mamata Banerjee, who was also previous union cabinet minister. In the area of sports we have seen Arati Saha and P.T. Usha. And now Saina Nehwal, M.C Mary Kom, P.V Sindhu and Mithali Raj are inspiring the millennials.

#### 4. The paradoxical part:

Yet India has so much instances to present on women empowerment. But the social sets a big enigma. This is a country where women are regarded as goddess, again this is a country which is infamous for sexual assaults. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2013, about 24923 women were sexually abused in a whole year duration of 2012. According to a survey India is ranked as most dangerous country for women in 2018. The issue is not about how much safe a girl is in Indian society, but the how much is she allowed to contribute for nation development. An unsafe outdoor and indoor life poses constriction to a spontaneous social involvement.

The parental love can be equal for a daughter and a son, a share to the property can also be similar, but their is a huge discrepancy in the upbringing of a male and a female offspring. The days are much recovered when a typical Indian family used to lament over a born of female child. But the parents of a girl new born are much concerned in saving money for her marriage. As still now girl are considered burden to her father, and a transferable property which has to delivered to the spouse at the earliest. This is reflected prominently at the work participation rate. In 2013, the International Labour Organisation ranked India's Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) 121 out of 131 countries. Economists in their research paper 'Precarious Drop Reassessing Patterns of Female Labour Force Participation in India', published by the World Bank in April 2017, claimed that the FLFP rate dropped by 19.6 million women from 2004–05 to 2011–12. Till now educational degrees are considered a parameter and a merit for getting married to a suitable groom. There are many communities in North India who still now maintains the doctrine of '*Manusmriti*' where women liberation is a new world order that must be despised. From early childhood girls are trained to be submissive and sublime. Subjected to gender stereotypes, a women is often forced for a profession that typifies her gender. A proud parent of a girl child can hardly visualise her being teacher or nurse. Till now an athlete housewife or a engineer daughter working outdoor is least expected.

Thus an Indian society is a multi faceted ambiguity, that nurtures and hostiles the women development in both hands.

#### 5. CONCLUSION:

India is a country of multiple cultures, heritage, customs and provisions. And every cultural overseeing has their very own prejudices. Hence the scenario is dynamic. The Indian cultural panorama is rapidly changing. Many factors plays the role on this phenomena, where education is the primary one. The light of knowledge makes every oddity comes to a conclusion. Westernization that is so cursed by the advocates of orthodox society, proved to be the key which unchained the gender that was once enjoyed a supremacy ages ago. Like Prometheus the education system challenged the paradigm of ancient belief system. The society of India is under transformation, as it always had been and women are bravely fighting their way for a better tomorrow.

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