



STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

***"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing."* — Swami Vivekananda**

The worth of a civilization can be judged from the position that it gives to women. Of the several factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture, one of the greatest is the honoured place ascribed to women. Manu, the great law-giver, said long ago, 'where women are honoured there reside the gods'. According to ancient Hindu scriptures no religious rite can be performed with perfection by a man without the participation of his wife. Wife's participation is essential to any religious rite. Married men along with their wives are allowed to perform sacred rites on the occasion of various important festivals. But in the later period the position of women went on deteriorating.

According India's constitution, women are legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men. Because of lack of acceptance from the male dominant society, Indian women suffer immensely. Women are responsible for bearing children, yet they are malnourished and in poor health. Women are also overworked in the field and complete the all of the domestic work. Most Indian women are uneducated. Although the country's constitution says women have equal status to men, women are powerless and are mistreated inside and outside the home.

India is a society where the male is greatly revered. Therefore women, especially the young girls, get very little respect and standing in this country.

As per the latest census carried out by the government of India, there are 933 females for every 1000 males in our country. Male dominance is everywhere. We can find superiority of men in every phase of our lives. When we are born, we have our fathers to look after us, our brothers then share the responsibilities of the father when we enter our teenage years, then we have our life partners who decide everything in our married lives, lastly our sons enter the bandwagon in our old age days. To a very large extent, lives of women in our country are decided and controlled by the men in their lives.

This scenario is slowly changing in recent years. We can see a slow and steady rise of women in all fields of importance. Women of today are not just restricted to cooking and taking care of their households, they have stepped out of their comfort zones to create their own images in the outside world as well. This in short, can be termed as women empowerment. Society has now changed its stand and the way it looks at women, due to the progress achieved by women in all spheres of life. Men of today are more understanding towards the women in their lives, yet we hear many cases of harassment against women. Let us look deeper into the topic perspective by perspective.

Women in the traditional times

Traditionally, women were considered to be care takers of the home. They had to look after the running of the family smoothly, they had

to manage the expenses in the most economical way possible, they had to look after aged in-laws, nurture the children etc. They were judiciously kept out of decision making matters as the primary role of women was not that of ruling the family. They were expected to obey orders of the husband, the elders of the family but kept in isolation when it came to major decisions related to the family.

Women were not too educated in the bygone eras. They would be married off one day to their in-laws place and hence would not need too much of knowledge was the previous thinking. Women, who were still part of families that thought otherwise, saw some respite in this narrow minded approach. There were women in olden days too, who were well educated and led paths of success in many spheres of life because of support from their families. It is these women who led paths of change and brought about a transformation in the way people viewed women in the society.

Modern Indian Women

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armored with their talent. They had proven themselves. But in India they are yet to get their dues. The sex ratio of India shows that the Indian society is still prejudiced against female. There are 933 females per thousand males in India according to the census of 2001, which is much below the world average of 990 females. There are many problems which women in India have to go through daily. These problems have become the part and parcel of life of Indian women and some of them have accepted them as their fate.

Women Education in India

Education is the one and most powerful instrument of social change and social development. Every and all sectors of social development is largely depends on its human capitals. As an independent group in India, women constitute nearly (48.72%) of the total population. They not only constitute valuable human resources of the country but their development in the education and socio-economic arena also set pace for sustainable growth of the economy. If the society neglect or not nurture properly of the women population, the complete development of the society remain dream forever. Therefore, the education of the women in India plays a significant role in improving the living standard in the country. A higher women literacy rate improve the quality of life both at home and outside home, by encouraging and promoting education of children, especially female children and in reduce the infant mortality rate and soon.

In spite of the forceful intervention by a bastion of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 69 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms of education is still in the

state of an enigma in India for several reasons. The 2011 Census report indicates that literacy among the women as only 65.46 percent. It is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women in India is even much lower to the National average, i.e., 74.04. The growth of women's education in rural areas is very slow. This obviously means that still large womenfolk of our country are still illiterate, the weak, backward and exploited. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14 of men as per (Census, 2011).

According to government data, more than 24,000 cases of rape were reported in 2011. Most are never reported because of the stigma surrounding rape, but after the gang rape what was a taboo subject in India is now on the front pages and leading TV news.

Indian women, in some ways, have also made some strides. Literacy rates have gone up, maternal mortality rates have gone down, and millions of women have joined the workforce. Leaders like the President of the National Advisory Council and the widow of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi are role models who show that women can rise to great heights. But they are the exception.

Authorities acknowledge that action is needed and say they are taking steps to try to better protect women. The Home Minister said India plans to recruit more female police officers. Currently only 7% of the Indian police force is female. Helplines have been set up and at least one state, Haryana, is soon putting up a website naming and shaming convicted rapists. A government task force has been set up to look into what more can be done to make Delhi safer. A number of fast track courts have also been established because of the December 16 gangrape, exclusively for cases of sexual assault and rape. But women's rights activists say that when discrimination begins even before birth, change will not come easily.

Constitutional Provisions For Empowering Women In India

- 1- Equality before law for all persons (Article-14)
- 2- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(l))
- 3- However, special provisions may be made by the state in favors of women and children Article 15(3).
- 4- Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16)
- 5- State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); (v) equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).
- 6- Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).
- 7- Promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e).
- 8- Reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(d)).

CONCLUSION

Women play many roles in their lives, that of a daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, friend, colleague, professional and the list is never ending. With addition of roles, comes addition of responsibilities and women have to handle everything in a very dignified manner. The modern day woman is more aware of the society around her and believes in her strengths, handles her weaknesses with grace, identifies the goodness in things and is socially responsible towards her duties. Women do many roles and handle them with grace. There is no profession that does not have women enrolment.

The government has put together many schemes especially for the empowerment of women. Many seats are reserved in parliament to

encourage women participation. Education of girls is made free and compulsory in government schools to encourage women to join different institutions and render their valuable services. Our armed forces have seen a rise in women enrolment and it's a matter of pride for the nation to have great daughters in the country.

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