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WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY: A STUDY OF TRADITION AND TRANSITION

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The position of women in Indian society has shifted from time to time. Their position has been variously estimated and diametrically opposite views exist regarding her place in different stages of civilization¹. Any broad statement about women's status must be treated with caution since there is so much variation in how women interact with society². She has always been a wonderful benefit to her spouse in life and has, to a large degree, been defined by her utility, ingenuity in domestic life, refreshing company, and affectionate care of children.

Men and women are fundamentally the same. Their issues must all basically be the same. Both have the same soul. Each is the other's complement. Without the other's active assistance, one cannot survive. Both, though, are fundamentally the same. Women choose to become mothers, which necessitates traits that males lack. She has a remarkable talent for raising the young members of the race. The race will go extinct if she doesn't take care of it. City-dwelling women with talent are leaders in industries like entrepreneurship, education, health, and sports. Indian rural women are compelled to perform daily household duties indoors. The participation of rural women is significant for the expansion of the Indian economy.

Women's empowerment starts at home and with appreciating the worth of their domestic tasks. The social interactions between boys and girls in the household as well as the carrier orientation offered to girl children as opposed to male children have a significant impact on women's empowerment at the family level. The majority of women who work are seen to be consulted by family leaders either frequently or occasionally regarding the

majority of decisions made at home³. The marriage of family members and the income, savings, and investment of family property are not discussed with somewhat literate women workers as frequently as other domestic matters. However, the overall results are quite encouraging for women workers, who are the family member with the highest level of education, and their participation in family decision-making is welcomed⁴. Their opinion is valued and heard.

It is evident that the men make the majority of the decisions in the homes of married literate women workers, whereas husbands do so in the homes of single literate women workers. There are working women who are single but are the household decision-makers. In some families, the mother-in-law makes the choice at home. In certain homes, the fathers-in-law make all the decisions. Despite the fact that some families have female decision-makers, the majority of families have male decision-makers⁵.

It is evident that the decision-makers in smaller families are literate women employees or their husbands, whereas the decision-makers in bigger families are the parents. Literate female workers make decisions for four out of ten small families. In some households, the spouses work away from the home in cities and other locations. Additionally, there are employee

¹ A. S. Altekar, *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, The Culture Publication House, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras, 1983.

² Kiran Devandra, *Status and Position of Women in India: With Special Reference to Women in Contemporary India*, Shakti Books New Delhi, 1985.

³ Seema Pandey, *Women in Contemporary Indian Society*, Rawat Publications, Delhi, 2015.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ghazala Jamil, *Women in Social Change: Visions, Struggles and Persisting Concerns*, SAGE Publications, 2021



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fathers who maintain their wives and children in towns for the sake of their children's education while living at their places of employment. Women are doing a great job in that area of decision-making in all areas. They have better opportunities to participate in decision-making in nuclear households. Women in nuclear households have more freedom to make decisions when there are no male family members around. Women are reported to play an important part in at least 25% of the homes of women who work in literacy⁶.

For the members of women's self-help groups who need market support, the Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) offers a seven-day training course. Women Self-Help Group (WSHG) members are taught a variety of business skills by Ma-Thi, including computer training, mushroom cultivation, ready-made clothing manufacturing, electronic assembly work, housekeeping, lab technician work, community health work programmes, sari craft work, office management, secretarial procedures, jute goods manufacturing work, bookbinding, soft toy manufacturing, earth worm production, natural manure production, herbal plant maintenance, and house hold item repair⁷.

The issue is stated as follows: India's socio-economic history underwent significant changes during the British era. In the years leading up to and following the achievement of independence, the process, which had its beginnings in the 19th Century, gained additional

momentum⁸. This time period saw changes that were not only more quick but also more pronounced. A novel idea in the history of human cognition is social progress. In India, the social awakening that gave rise to the social reform movements varied by region. Indian philosophy was stationary until it came into contact with the west, which caused a ripple effect. The religious roots of India were impacted by rationalist views. The British mentality was extremely important in the people's social transformation. Evil customs and handicaps among Indian women were eliminated thanks to social awareness and broad-mindedness⁹.

The status of women in India varies greatly depending on the cultural context, family structure, class, caste, property rights, and morals¹⁰. In Indian tradition, the representation of women has been an odd fusion of deification, ceremonial notion, and low position.

Kasturbha was the first woman to answer Gandhi's call, and she was joined in the national movement by a large number of other women, including Madam Cama, Sister Nivedita, Annie Beasant, Pandita Ramabai, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, Mobin Patel, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani, and Prabhavati Devi¹¹. One of them, Madam Cama, began her crusade in India in 1907 alongside Sardar Singh Rana. She had the moniker "Mother of the Revolution". Generally speaking, women in Indian society have been softer. In the twentieth century, women obtained positions in the police, department, military, and forest departments, became pilots, Olympic athletes, and international mountaineers¹². The only people who can guarantee women's liberation from exploitation, degrading, injustice, subordination, and superstition are women who are still in patriarchal authority and who have a long-term objective of social transformation.

According to Neera Dasai, women were socially kept in a state of complete subjection, denied any rights, oppressed, and further branded as basically lacking the ethical fiber. Ideologically, women were seen as a completely inferior species,

⁶ S. P. Agrawal, J. C. Aggarwal, *Women's Education in India*, Concept Publishing Company, Delhi, 2002.

⁷ Mudumuri Lakshmi Raju, *Women Empowerment: Challenges and Strategies*, Regal Publications, 2007.

⁸ Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India*, Margaret MacMillan, New Delhi, 2017.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alaka Malwade Basu, *Culture, the Status of Women, and Demographic Behaviour: Illustrated with the Case of India*, Clarendon Press, 1992.

¹¹ Radakrishna Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform and Indian Women*, Janaki Prakashan, New Delhi, 1981.

¹² Ibid.



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inferior to men, having no significance, and no personality. All of these factors – early marriage, widows’ suicides or states of permanent widowhood – have stifled women’s ability to develop freely. Thus, it would seem that the neglect of women’s education, in combination with child marriage on the one hand and the practise of polygamy, isolation, and *purda* on the other, led to a significant decline in the status of women¹³.

Rajaram Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) started the nineteenth-century wave of reformist thought, which was continued by Iswarachandra Vidhyasagar (1820-1871), Dayananda Saraswati (1827-1833), Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), and others. These changes had a significant impact on legislation and social and educational reform¹⁴. The vast emancipation of Indian women in the 20th century was ultimately brought about by M.K. Gandhi and the Indian National movement. Rural women have the opportunity to remarry even when they lacked an education. The widow was permitted to remarry, although even in rural places, divorced and remarried women were seen unfavourably by wealthy caste families, not by low caste *sudra* families¹⁵. The greatest holy thing on earth is when a husband and wife bless their offspring, and the development of civilizations and the rise of their diverse nations today is a sign of a happy couple’s enrichment and success. The lowest castes and *sudras* are explicitly allowed to divorce in the 17th-century text known as the *Sudrakamalakara*.¹⁶ Women often participated fully in their husbands’ agricultural and artisan work. Additionally, they were free to sell milk, vegetables, toddy milk, all household and agricultural labour, as well as the products and outcomes thereof. Women wake up early in the morning and continue to perform household duties to this day. Hundreds of women could be seen leaving their villages with loads of different goods to sell in the cities and at the vegetable markets. Women had complete freedom of movement and were welcome at religious celebrations, fairs, and other events. Women also put forth a lot of effort in that area, tending to children’s needs for bathing, cosmetics, clothing, shoes, combing their hair, and meal preparation. Polygamy and child marriages have almost completely disappeared today. Additionally, inter-caste unions were frowned upon in both the rural and the cities.

Social empowerment and education: The member with the highest level of education, excluding women who are literate. It is clear that 82 percent of literate women employees have a best qualified member who isn’t them and who is literate and educated just to a primary level and who is significantly more empowered. The effectiveness of literary programmes in women is felt by nearly 70% of female professionals¹⁷. More than 19% of educated workers think that literary programmes inform women about diseases. More than 20% of working women believe that literacy programmes help them read, write, and count since doing so increases their knowledge and qualifies them for better jobs. Nearly 12.5 percent of literate female employees say that being read has given them the tools to manage their homes learn how to save money, assert their independence, and lead fulfilling lives.

But the real breakthrough came when the machines were made available for production. In the factories, women worked. Up to 3,68,000 women were employed in factories, mines, and plantations as early as 1901. In the factories in 1951, there were 0.30 million women employed. However, the most spectacular growth in employment has been seen among middle-class women who work as secretaries, administrators, stenographers, clerks, telephone operators, salespeople, and receptionists. About 15% of elementary and secondary school teachers in the field of education were female. Around 10% applied to college students¹⁸.

Approximately one third of the world’s labour force, or 27 out of every 100 women, are employed globally, according to reports from the International Labour Organization (ILO). We also note that due to illiterate women, the percentage of

¹³ A. S. Altekar, *op.cit.*

¹⁴ Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2011.

¹⁵ M. A. Indra, *The Status of Women in Ancient India*, Minerva Bookshop, Delhi, 1980.

¹⁶ Ram Sharan Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India: A Social History of the Lower Order Down to Circa A.D. 600*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Limited, New Delhi, 2002.

¹⁷ S. P. Agrawal, J. C. Aggarwal, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Susan Horton, *Women and Industrialization in Asia*, Taylor & Francis, 2002.



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women employed in the agricultural sector increased from 75% to 82 %, but educated women were more eager to enter the tertiary sector of trade, commerce, transport, communication, teaching, higher professions, etc. The important development is the expansion of women's employment opportunities outside of agriculture¹⁹.

The Dowry Prohibition Bill, also known as Act 28 of 1961, was approved during a joint session of both Houses of Parliament and became The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, after receiving the President's approval in May of that year. This Act's goal has been clearly unsuccessfully pursued. During the discussion over the Dowry Bill, it had been argued that social conscience awakening rather than legislation was required to address this issue, and that the evil will be diminished with the expansion of pathways for women to pursue education, work, and other opportunities. The Act allows for some latitude in establishing a cap on wedding gift amounts. All groups spoke out against the wrong kind of presents. The Indian government responded to these demonstrations by passing the Dowry Prohibition Amendment Act (63 of 1984), which went into effect on October 22, 1985. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and the 1984 and 1986 Amendments are now merely historical documents. From an early age, the youth should receive proper education on the Dowry issue²⁰. All institutions of higher learning should create a separate curriculum on women's issues, and education should also shield them from activities that are dehumanising. The media can effectively spread awareness about the negative features of the system of dowry. The messages may be disseminated widely through short tales, novels, plays, group discussions, wall writings, posters, and TV serials as well as other programmes on TV, in theatres, and on the radio could be very beneficial in the fight against the dowry threat.

According to recent research findings, working women make up 20% of the families of women employees. In more than 80% of families, the women at home are not employed. Families with agricultural backgrounds make up 70% of the families of women who work in literacy, and operating a farm on one's own is not regarded as a productive economic activity. Only 20% of women who work in literacy have jobs outside of agriculture²¹.

It is clear that farm labourers make up 50% of women workers. Women who work are over 40% students. An additional 10% of workers are female and work in the private sector as balwadi teachers, tailors, day labourers, and other jobs (shops). Women who work in literacy make up more than 60% of the workforce and perform a variety of tasks, including domestic and home chores as well as agricultural and non-agricultural duties.

Women handle financial matters for more than 25% of the families. This discovery is positive. Literate women employees are managing household finances, including saving and spending, in 12.5% of families. These families are led by women, and the male members are either minors or elderly, according to a close observation of these families. They occasionally travel away from home. Some of the families have widowed women who make decisions. Indian women have historically served as the cornerstone of the household and society at large. She gives life, nurtures it, protects it, and gives it strength. She is committed to serving the family as a wife and mother and performs an important role in her position as a mother. She is the conduit for culture and tradition at the societal level. The society will inevitably fall apart if this foundation is compromised²².

Thus, it can be concluded that Indian women have excelled in every field a woman could possibly imagine. In India, men and women are not treated equally. They are legally and biologically equivalent to men. However, there is a social barrier that genuinely separates individuals, so as long as women's difficulties are treated as such and not as social issues, efforts to resolve them are not progressing quickly.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mohinderjit Kaur Teja, *Dowry: A Study in Attitudes and Practices*, University of Virginia, Virginia, 1993.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alfred De Souza, *Women in Contemporary India: Traditional Images and Changing Roles*, Manohar Book Service, 1975.