

Status Of Women In Ancient Indian Society: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The historical trajectory of women in ancient Indian society reveals a paradox of empowerment and decline. During the Vedic age, women were respected as philosophers, educators, and participants in religious rituals. They enjoyed access to education, inheritance, and decision-making. However, with the rise of rigid patriarchal norms, economic changes, and foreign invasions, their freedoms gradually declined. Practices such as child marriage, dowry, and purdah further restricted women's autonomy. This paper critically examines the evolving status of women through doctrinal, literary, and historical sources, situating these within feminist theory and contemporary frameworks like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5. The study argues that reclaiming empowering traditions from India's past can inform modern reforms aimed at gender equality.

Keywords: Women, Ancient India, Gender Equality, Vedic Society, Empowerment, Feminism.

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Women played a significant role in Indian society since ancient period. Women enjoyed high status in India during Vedic period. Their condition was too good. The women were provided equal opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were also many female Rishis during this period. In the two famous scriptures of India, the Mahabharata, and Ramayana, women are shown as having more freedom and competency than in the religious and legal literature. In the Mahabharata, there is evidence of both polyandry and polygamy. Events in these stories demonstrate women's managing and problem-solving skills. Concept of monogamy was mostly common, only the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy. There was no sati system, early marriage or purdah system like social evils in that period. But from enjoying independent and high status in the Rig-Vedic period, the degradation of women started since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Gupta kings were big mentors of education. Many universities were built by Gupta's king during this period, some of them famous all over the world i.e. Nalanda and Taxila universities. However, education was allowed for women. The condition of women became worse off after Gupta period due to entry of foreigner's and their invasion. As a result, Purdah system, child marriage and sati, prostitution and Devadasi system like immoral evils became part of Indian society.

In our ancient Indian culture women was very much honored rather than other cultures. In the recent years, global concept like gender equality and Women empowerment is mostly discussed issue. Most of the discussions on women are centered around human resource development. Fortunately, women empowerment issues had more concern in the our Indian ancient which are deliberate in Sanskrit literature and educating women was the approach even in ancient time. To empower women, specific roles to women in Indian traditions are assigned to manage the households. Indian

ancient data provides a direction through a value system for gender equality and women empowerment so that women can be comfortable and in welfare. Women in India have been experiencing different status since the inception of the civilization. Indian Women during the ancient times was very high status to men. The women in that period were given significance and they held a prominent position in the Indian society. Access to education was easy for the women in ancient.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual and physical features of men and women are different. The community also dictates some of the different characteristics of men and women at the social and religious level. It is mainly based on that women are coward, men are brave, women are weak, men are strong, women are tolerant, men are aggressive, women are emotional, men are capable, women are acquiescent, men are governing and determined. People are not creator of the nature. This is based on the term gender. Society believes that men and women to behave differently. Similarly, the society has decided certain things about that a woman should do, how she should behave, mainly household, cooking, child rearing are related to women, while men are believed to do hard work outside the family. There is a system of self-determination. In the nomadic, Gana society, women not only did the work of construction the framework of Yajna, laying bricks, etc., but also had the right to issue the role of Gana. Later on, new agriculture technology; traditional farming ideas were overtaken by the use of plows and livestock for agriculture. At the same time, the place of man in parturition became clear. As a result, the idea of feminine came to an end and motherhood was replaced by patriarchal culture in the society. The Brahmanical literature viz, Manu smriti, Yajnavalkya smriti, Arthashastra, Ramayana and Mahabharata and focuses largely upon the private women uses in this paper.

CONCEPT OF GENDER EQUALITY ANCIENT ERA

Gender biasness in Indian society shows that in ancient India, women were not right to education. And their role was presumed only limited to childbirth, upbringing and household affairs. But the principal sources of ancient Indian history four Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata show that women in ancient India were well educated. In Hindu dharma and culture, women were equal to men, and there was no discrimination on the bases of gender, caste, race instead of that women were honored by society, and society at the time considered women as Janani which means mother, even in Hindu scripts women are considered as Devi. Early Vedic women were right to freedom in choosing their life partners. This system was known as "Swayamvar". In some cases, they freely interacted with young men. Marriages were performed after puberty.

The status and conditions of women were much better in the Vedic period than any other period. If any women interested to acquire education and did not render their consent in getting married, then too, they were allowed without any restrictions. Most of the girls, belonging to upper class families had the privilege of acquiring education. Women were encouraged towards attainment of education, because, they were the only, who were merely an obligation for the well-being of the family and community. They played an important role in terms of areas such as, fulfillment of household liabilities, health care, child development, taking care of the needs and requirements of the elderly family members, preservation of the environment and so forth. The women were the responsibility of making provision of knowledge in terms of morals and ethics to the children. Hence, to complete all these jobs and functions in a well-organized manner, it is vital for women to acquire knowledge and upgrade their skills and abilities. The acquisition of education enabled women to live a life of

dignity and respect. Educated and scholastic women were attaining respect and appreciation within the society

The Vedic period has witnessed of many great women scholars. They possessed tremendous knowledge regarding the Vedas and texts. These women contributed to composed hymns and also learnt music and dancing. The women, belonging to lower community or caste also mastered the skills of spinning, weaving, embroidery and needlework. In this period women and men were treated equal in many aspects. There are various provisions of equal rights of women in property in our scriptures. Beliefs that postulated in Vedas that is continue to be revered today by the Hindus. The Rig Veda is oldest of these texts, composed mostly by priests, but a few women too. The first ancient Indian writing with decipherable information about their various gods and goddesses in oldest text known as the Rig Veda. It composed mostly composed by priest, but few were women too. There is a famous old creation story, where the goddess Aditi gives birth to the earth, also personified as a goddess, Prithvi. Mother Earth's role was to be tender to the dead and Aditi was to be prayed to for release from sin. Women participated in the public sacrifices alongside men. In 'Hindu Puranas' women power was treated as Sakti which destroyed the invincible Mahisasura. Even God Rudra is regarded as half-man and half-women, i.e., as Ardha-Narishwara. 'Manu', the Hindu law giver, also dictated

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः ।

यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः ॥

i.e., where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased, where they are not honoured all works become fruitless.

There were sixty-four arts has mentioned that should be learned by both men and women. According to him, these arts were Arithmetical puzzles, Knowledge of Chemistry and mineralogy, Reading and composing verses, Singing, Playing Musical Instruments, Dancing, Dancing with playing music and singing Get training in martial arts and practice with a bow and arrow, stick and sword, Logic and reasoning, Carpentry, Architecture, etc. Apart from this, It is also believe that women invented agriculture. Due to this major achievement of women, the primitive society became steady to some extent. So, the problem of water was solved, the society became steady and only after this matriarchal system came into existence in the society. The following are some of the rights of women in Vedic times:

Women had had rights to form their own army

Right to take part in war;

Court rights;

Marriage allowed after celibacy methodical study;

Only send daughter in the law with intelligence & education that was the tradition of giving knowledge;

A well-known economic historian R.C.Dutt published a book in 1889 titled A History of Civilisation in Ancient India. He narrated the achievements of the ancient past, beginning with the 'Vedic Age'.

He mentioned that the unique feature of ancient Indian civilization was the better status of women. He wrote: 'Still more [appealing] to us is the picture of cultured ladies who were rishis and composed hymns and performed sacrifices like men. There were no unhealthy restrictions against women in those days.'

RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

The role of women in Ancient Indian Literature is vast. Ancient India had many intellect females. No restriction to learn sanskrit, grammar, yoga, tantra, civil laws (dharma smriti-s), philosophical contents of vedas (upanishads) and any other form of art. The scholarly women were categorized in two – the Brahnavadinis, or the women who never married and enlightened the Vedas throughout their lives; and the Sadyodvahas who studied the Vedas till they married. Panini mentioned of female students studying Vedas. Women were at the forefront of martial arts, Ayurveda and statistical philosophy. Anarya culture was feminist. And Aryan culture was patriarchal. Shurpanakha, Tarika and other non-Aryan women Ganadhipatis appear in the Ramayana. These women were the head of the family. They were respected in the society and their family. Aryan culture had female student's studying Vedas. There is evidence of two learned women participating in philosophical discussions. Women in India were also doing theological inquiry. Unfortunately, current Indian scholars have criticized about these two women. This presumption is inaccurate. The most famous woman scholar in Vedic period was Gargi, who lived in the 7th century BCE. She was a learned philosopher and a great scholar of the Vedas. She participated in philosophical debates at that time and strongly challenged the views of the male scholars of that time. Gargi additionally participated in debate with Yajnavalka on philosophical issues. Lilavati the daughter of great mathematician Bhasker Acharya became a remarkable mathematician of historic India after her father. Thus, it is proved that historic society became now no longer conservative to offer training to ladies and that a lot of them attained to terrific proficiencies in learning. Similarly, to Gargi, there were other women scholars in ancient India who made significant contributions to education and scholarship. For example, Lopamudra, who lived in the 3rd millennium BCE, was a Vedic poet and philosopher. She composed hymns that are still recited in Hindu ceremonies. Another example is Maitreyi, who belonged in the 6th century BCE. She was a scholar of the Vedas and participated in metaphysical debates. Apart from these eminent women scholars, there were also other women who received education in various fields. For example, women were trained in music, dance, and other performing arts. Women were also trained in medicine, and there were female physicians who treated women's health issues. Women were also trained in warfare, and there was female warrior like Kaikai the wife of King Dashrath who fought against asura (Devils).

Even Buddhism also allowed the entry of women into the Sangha for the purpose of education. In the Mauryan era women employed as bodyguards, spies and 'Striadyaksha mahamatras,' but their status was still not good. Upper class female had to accept the purdah. During this period polygamy was common and widow burning was an accepted norm. Arthashastra imposed more stigmas on women as Kautilya dismissed women's liberation and they were not free even to go elsewhere without husband's permission. Gupta kings were big mentors of education. There were many universities built by Gupta's king during this period. Nalanda and Taxila universities were famous all over the world. There was education allowed for women. The condition of women became worse off after Gupta period due to entry of foreigner's and their invasion. As a result, Purdah system, child marriage and sati, prostitution and Devadasi system like immoral evils became part of Indian society.

In present time, it is surprising that on one hand there is a western civilization where women were denied equal rights to that of men in the ancient times but today enjoy equal rights with men in all sections of the society. And on the other hand, in our culture during the early Vedic civilization provided equal rights to men and women, and today some people advocate who want to deny the very same Vedic education and sacraments to women. During Shankaracharya period, 9th Century AD. It was the period when Muslim invaders had not come to India, he came to Mithila for a Shastrarth with Mandan Misra, in which Mandan Misra got defeated by Shankaracharya, that time Mandan Misra's wife (Bharti) was the first female judge of any society all over the world, came in front and said Mandan je only half defeated because you have not defeated me. A new Shastrarth took place between Shankaracharya and Bharti, wife of Mandan Misra. In first round Bharti was on the upper hand in the Shastrarth on Kama, Sankaracharya took time he got knowledge about Kamasashtra and only after that he defeated Bharti. That Shastrarth took more than 1 year. It shows that women were highly educated till that time.

The women played an important role to our make society glorious in ancient times. There is clear proof from the study of Vedic texts that women had freedom and equality in various fields like education, sacrifice, knowledge etc. She voluntarily participated in scholarly and rational debates with men. They had equal opportunities as men and participated in every field. From household chores to agriculture, administration and yajna rituals to spiritual practice, no field was left untouched by the imprint of his distinctive personality, talent and skill. Women were important contributions in the field of economic, in ancient India. Keeping in view the economic status of women, their property rights have been accepted in the society, but there were some special circumstances in which they used to their share in the property. India is always remaining an agricultural country; women were participated to assist the men folk in the various seasonal activities.

Women are not supposed to learn authentic chanting of veda-s as learning veda-s is a full-time job. vedic mantra-s have specific vibrations which when properly pronounced cleanses our energy body, chakra-s and nADI-s. Hence to master them, one needs to completely dedicate himself at the feet of a guru for many years. Since women is entrusted with other responsibilities, protecting veda-s, which can only be done by orally reciting them in presence of an accomplished AchArya is left to male brAhmins. Books cannot teach one how to recite. Even svara-s and diacritical marks cannot teach us proper chanting. Verification of verses cannot be done via reading a book.

Katyana called female teachers Upadhyaya or Upadhyayi .Ashoka got his daughter, Sanghamitra, inducted into preaching Buddhism. From the Jain texts, we learn about the Kousambi princess, Jayanti, who remained a spinster to study religion and philosophy. Often, Buddhist nuns composed hymns. Women had educational rights write painting, excelled in music, Sanskrit plays and verses and other fine arts, freedom of decision.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOERMENT IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Today, in the 21st century, the attitude of society who call themselves modern is exceptionally modern in the case of women. The majority of society look at women from a customary point of view. Their attitude towards women is the main cause of many problems. Not only that, but in the patriotic society, men are very superior to women, they are inferior, so there is a view they need the protection of men. Therefore, this gender-bias attitude originates in the society is causing problems in the lives of women. Women and men are two wheels of society and society looks at them from different perspectives without looking at them equally. It also attains them differently without

attaining them the same way. That is, society distinguish between men and women. E.g. Women should behave like this, men should behave like this, and society discriminates in many aspects like women's dress, women's standard of living, men's standard of living. The term gender is used to denote the differences between men and women in society.

As compare the women occupied a very important position, in the ancient Bharat Varsa, in fact far superior position to the men of that time. So many literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were demolished because the rulers troubled a single woman. For example, Valmiki Ramayana teaches us that Ravana and his entire kingdom were wiped out because he abducted Sita. Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata teaches us that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public. In addition to political power, women also enjoyed economic power in ancient India. Women were involved in trade and commerce and were known for their business acumen. Draupadi and Kaikeye, Sabitri, Satyabhama, and Rukmani were famous and well-educated, courageous and as best warriors who know to use weapons in ancient era. Apart from them Queen Ahalya Bai and Razia Sultana for good administrative ability and daring warriors like Rani of Jhansi, Laxmi Bai have become immortal in our medieval history.

In religious matters, Hindus have raised women to the level of Goddess. One of the things most misinterpreted about India and Hinduism is that it's a male dominated society and religion. But it is not true. It is only religion of the world that has imputed the words for the strength and power to feminine. "Shakti" means "power" and "strength". All male power comes from the feminine. The Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) are all-powerless without their female counterparts. Rigvedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband.

In Mauryan, period women often enjoyed notable roles in politics. For example, the city of Pataliputra, which was the capital of the Mauryan empire, was known for its women traders. Women also had a right to speak in social and cultural matters in ancient India. Women were had decision-making power and had a right to speak in the affairs of the family and the community. Women were also engaged in the arts and literature and were known for their creativity and artistic talent. Megasthenes a Greek historian came to India around 305 BC mentioned in his book "Indica" the Pandya women running the administration. The Satavahana queen, "Nayanika ruled the kingdom on behalf of her minor son. So did Pravabati, daughter of Chandragupta II, on behalf of the minor Vakataka prince. A little after the Gupta period, queens used to rule in Kashmir, Odisha and Andhra. Princess Vijay bhattacharika acted as the provincial ruler under the Chalukya King; Vikramaditya I. Women were provincial and village administrators in the Kannada region.

CONCEPT OF FEMINISM IN ANCIENT SOCIETY

It is generally assumed that the concept of feminism modern and it reached us from the west and we generally known the feminists like Helen of Anjou, Laura Cereta, Sophia Elisabet Brenner, Anne Knight, Mary Wollstonecraft, Susan Anthony, Annie Basant, Laura Borden, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Brownmiller; along the list of the western feminists who started feminist movement. But people do not know that ancient Indian literature like Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata, it will be evident that the concept of feminism is inherent in it and it is completely differ from the west, in keeping with cultural traditions. Therefore, it is important to search for the nature of our feminism in ancient Indian literature.

In present scenario, feminism is a highly debatable issue across the world from the view point of gender-inequality and women empowerment as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. (THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development, n.d.) Education, art etc. capture the societal matrices of contemporary time. Hence, we can't deny the importance of ancient Indian literature for identification of cultural heritage on any matter. Here, the stories of Ghosha, Lopamudra, Gargi and Maitreyei from Vedas as well as the two heroines Sita and Draupadi of the two epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively need to be taken into account. From the analysis of the main women characters in the selected ancient Indian literature, the cultural tradition of Indian women can easily be derived. The famous female figures of Vedic India are Ghosha, Lopamudra, Gargi and Maitreyei, who were the epitomes of intellectual and spiritual attainment. They both complimented and supplemented their male partners. (The Famous Female Figures of Vedic India, n.d.) Educational and intellectual attainment of a women can empower her in the voyage of her life. All the famous women in ancient society had made themselves famous through their educational and intellectual attainment These ancient Indian women were feminists and their ideals move today's Indian women towards the educational and intellectual attainment.

In the epic – the Ramayana written by Valmiki; Sita is feminist icon even to today's women. She was devoted in taking resolution during her life from the exile to the trial by fire to prove her innocence, to the taking up the responsibility of twin sons as a single mother and to the returning to her mother-Bhumi as a protest against patriarchy when she was asked again to prove her purity through the trial by fire. While some of these seem to reflect her submissive nature, however if we set our mind to enter into her decisions and activities, they reflect courage, rigidity and dignity and an ability to stand up against injustice in society. Thus, she is feminist icon for women even in the 21st century's India.

The Mahabharata is an another epic and it is the longest epic in the world. Draupadi, who is also feminist icon for today's women because of her fearlessness and self-respect. When Yudhistira lost her in the game of dice, she raised her voice for her rights. There was only one woman, Draupadi in a court full of the most powerful kings and males of that time. This pioneer of feminism, Draupadi dared to take action for herself and raised her voice against male perpetrated injustices. Draupadi asked some burning questions about their Dharmas towards the most powerful kings of that time in the court. Her questions were a great challenge to the knowledge of right and wrong of the kings. It was beyond imagination of that time. From the view point of feminism, it was of course a strong voice against patriarchy. These Indian legendary women in ancient literature raised their voices and arguments against injustice; but they did equally accept that men and women are harmonious to each other, should done their duties in spite of a lot of sufferings and hardships in the voyage of their life. This is the advanced nature of feminism that has largely been flowing in the heart of most Indian women since the time immemorial.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN RESERVATION IN POLITICS

In our ancient society women played a prominent role in politics also. Megasthenes mentioned the Pandya women carrying out the administrative functions. The women, belonging to upper classes, deeply were engaged in political and administrative affairs of the state. They were well educated, knowledgeable and even participated in the decision-making processes. They performed political functions in a well-organized manner, by possessing the essential information in terms of number of aspects. These include, decision making, leadership skills, managing, controlling, organizing and coordinating. Women, belonging to rich castes and ruling states were the ones, who were held in high level. The mothers and wives of the rulers were intervening to a major extent. In the imputation

of politics and accomplish the administrative functions appropriately, men were the ones, who played an important role. But their wives and mothers could give them advice and suggestions. For instance, in case of making of major decisions or when one has to put into practice the strategies and approaches, women also contributed significantly. They were not only allowed to give their advice and opinion, but also executed the methods. Sometimes, it was believed that women were more skilled and wiser as compared to men in the implementation of managerial and political functions.

COMPARASION OF ABOVE CONCEPTS WITH GLOBAL LEVEL

The concept of women empowerment has largely been started in early feminist movements in the 19th century. The first wave of feminism demand of women's political rights, such as the right to vote. The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s demanded women's social and economic rights, such as equal pay for equal work and right to access education. The third wave of feminism in the 1990s demanded the disparity of women's experiences and the intersectionality of gender, race, and class. Women empowerment is a multidimensional concept that includes a wide range of issues related to gender equality, women's rights, and social justice. In recent years, there has largely been a growing interest in the academic literature on women's empowerment, and numerous studies have been conducted to explore different aspects of this phenomenon. One significant aim of women's empowerment is economic empowerment. A key factor of women's participation in the labor force is widely recognized as in promoting economic growth and reducing poverty. According to a study by Kabeer and Mahmud (2004), women's economic empowerment can lead to increased income, improved nutrition and health, and greater decision-making power within the household. In addition, women's economic empowerment can also have a positive impact on the broader community, by promoting gender equality and reducing gender inequality. Women's empowerment is critical to achieving sustainable development goals, such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and inclusive economic growth. Women's empowerment leads to increase productivity and economic growth. American women played important roles during World War II, both at home and in uniform. Not only did they give their sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers to the war effort, they gave their time, energy, and some even gave their lives.

Unwilling to enter the war when it started in 1939, the United States quickly committed itself to total war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. They made commitment to included utilizing all of America's assets—women included. The Axis powers, on the other hand, were slow to employ women in their war industries. Hitler derided Americans as degenerate for putting their women to work. The role of German women, he said, was to be good wives and mothers and to have more babies for the Third Reich.

When the war began, quickie marriages became the norm, as teenagers married their sweethearts before their men went overseas. As the men fought abroad, women on the Home Front worked in defense plants and volunteered for war-related organizations, in addition to managing their households. In New Orleans, as the demand for public transportation grew, women even became streetcar “conductometers” for the first time. When men left, women “became proficient cooks and housekeepers, managed the finances, learned to fix the car, worked in a defense plant, and wrote letters to their soldier husbands that were consistently upbeat.” (Stephen Ambrose, D-Day, 488) Rosie the Riveter helped assure that the Allies would have the war materials they needed to defeat the Axis. Women in uniform took office and clerical jobs in the armed forces to free men to fight. They also drove trucks, repaired airplanes, worked as laboratory technicians, rigged parachutes, served as radio operators, analyzed photographs, flew military aircraft across the country, test-flew newly repaired

planes, and even trained anti-aircraft artillery gunners by acting as flying targets. Some women served near the front lines in the Army Nurse Corps, where 16 were killed as a result of direct enemy fire. Sixty-eight American service women were captured as POWs in the Philippines. More than 1,600 nurses were decorated for bravery under fire and meritorious service, and 565 WACs in the Pacific Theater won combat decorations. Nurses were in Normandy on D-plus-four.

At the war's end, even though a majority of women surveyed reported wanted to keep their jobs, many were forced out by men returning home and by the downturn in demand for war materials. Women veterans encountered roadblocks when they tried to take advantage of benefit programs for veterans, like the G.I. Bill. The nation that needed their help in a time of crisis, it seems, was not yet ready for the greater social equality that would slowly come in the decades to follow. In contrast concept of women empowerment, gender equality and feminism were inbuilt in Hindu scriptures about 5000 to 8000 BCE.

CAUSES FOR DECLINATION OF WOMEN STATUS IN OUR SOCIETY

The Aryans came in India between 3,000 BC and 2500 BC. The Aryans conquered the matriarchal non-Aryan culture that existed in Indian society. And they established discrimination in the Indian system by establishing caste. However, there were no harsh practices such as child marriage and sati till the time of marriage. There are two streams of thought regarding women in India. One stream supports gender equality, while the other stream believed women only inferior. According to, Apastambh that "when a woman is walking down the street, everyone should wait for her, this shows his liberal outlook, while pre-Manusmriti" period is determined by the cultural matriarchal family system of the Anaryas, which provides women a degree of equal status with men. According to, Prof. Ram Ahuja, during this period, women were not earning money but were seen working in the field of agriculture. The woman used to get her share of patrimony. The mother's wealth was shared equally among the sons and daughters. there was constant conflict between Arya and Anarya. Therefore, women were responsible for the home. Dr. Aaltekar" says, that; Aryan men established unnatural marriages with non-Aryan women, but Aryan theologians opposed the participation of non-Aryan women in religious activities. Therefore, women were barred from entering the religious life. Due to the strong caste system, child marriage was sanctioned due to fear of cross-breeding. Women from the aristocratic classes enjoyed education and other privileges but the common woman still suffered ignominy, deprivation and hurdles.

From 1200 to 1818 AD is considered as the medieval period in India. During this period, Indian life was a life dominated by inequality, injustice, ignorance due to outsiders came to India and they were dividing people and criticized Hindu literatures. They misinterpreted the religious literatures. Due to this transformation verna system into caste system in the medieval period, this period of women's life is considered to be a dark period. The biggest victims of this caste system were women. Because women have a big challenge to maintain the purity of the caste. For this, many limitations were decided for women. For this, women were denied to education and women were confined in four walls of house. By associating the chastity of woman with religion, God-religion, vrat-vaikalya was engaged. The practice of child marriage came into existence so that a girl should not have inter-caste marriage. Widow Remarriage was banned so that widows should not have interracial marriages. At the same time, the practice of sati came into existence. Women were glorified and imprisoned by things like ideal mothers, ideal wives.

Islamic rule over India began in the medieval period also. Consequently, the interaction between Hindus and Muslims affected the tradition. There were efforts made to protect Hinduism and women from Islam. These efforts degraded the status of the woman and the status of the woman who was already subordinate became even more secondary. As a result, Hindu women were confined within four walls. The condition of Muslim women was already very pity. She was deprived from any rights; she had to live her life under a burkha. As a result, their quality of life was extremely poor. That is why the social, economic, political, cultural and educational status of women has largely been degraded even in modern times. In contrast, the Medieval period had several competent and powerful women who control the politics of their times. This women played a significant role in the affairs of politics. These include Sultana Razziyya of the Delhi Sultanate and many women in the Mughal period, such as Rani Karnavati, Rani Jodha Bai, Rani Durgavat, Rani Rupmati, Chand Bibi, Nur Jahan, Nur Jahan's mother Asmat Begum, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara, Roshanara, Jebunisa, Jija Bai (mother of Shivaji) and Tara Bai (wife of Raja Ram). During the Mughal period, Noor Jahan played a vital role in the administration. She is said to have formed a 'Janta' along with other nobles and wielded strong influence in administration during the rule of Jahangir.

Women were educated in the British education system initially. Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde were shared their thoughts on the truth-seeking rebellious legacy. A small number of women participated in the freedom struggle. Also, the participation of women in the political, social, economic and educational spheres began to increase. But in the male-dominated system, the status of women has degraded. Therefore, the woman became ignorant, childish, and ignorant of religious practices, only a means of procreation and sexual gratification. Different rules were made about the character of men and women. Marriage became mandatory for her. Some of the ladies of kings and palaces enjoyed exceptional freedom. The status of women was deplorable due to entry of non- Aryan woman as wife in Arya family and invasion by foreigners.

In ancient India, women enjoyed a high status in society and were given equal importance to men in terms of education and empowerment. Women were rights and support to pursue higher education, and many of became scholars, poets, and philosophers. Women also played a significant role in politics and economics and had a right to speak in social and cultural matters. The contributions of women scholars such as Gargi, Lopamudra, and Maitreyi are still valuable and relevant in India today. It is important to learn from the ancient Indian civilization's that they emphasis on education and women's empowerment and continue to work towards gender. They had the right to own property and inherit from their fathers. Women were equal rights to participate in religious ceremonies and perform rituals. In fact, there were many female priests who officiated at religious ceremonies. The role of women was also remarkable in politics in ancient period. There were many dynasties in which queens and princesses ruled kingdoms. For example, the queen of Magadha, Nandini, ruled the kingdom after her husband's death. The princess of Ayodhya, Shanta, was a renowned scholar and philosopher. Similarly, to political power, women also had economic power in ancient India. Women were also carried trade and commerce and were known for their business acumen.

CONCLUSION

Ancient Indian society celebrated women's contributions, granting them equal access to education, politics, and economic activities. Scholars like Gargi and Lopamudra, and figures like Sita and Draupadi, highlight women's intellectual and moral strength. Women held property rights, officiated religious ceremonies, and ruled kingdoms, as seen with queens like Nandini (Altekar, 1938). The decline in women's status due to invasions and patriarchal shifts underscores the need to revive

ancient India's emphasis on gender equality and empowerment. By learning from this heritage, modern India can advance toward true gender equity.

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