

CRITICAL REVIEW ON WOMEN IN INDIAN CIVILIZATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

The goal and nature of social reform movements in the nineteenth century were changed in the early twentieth century by the critical outlook that educated Indians developed, who imitated western societies and made arguments using western cultural norms even though they had little application to India and her civilization. Due to the ease with which a woman can obtain a divorce at her whim and pleasure, people in the west have put themselves up as ideals in front of Indian women in an attempt to highlight the injustices meted out to Indian women in comparison to the freedom experienced by women in the east. In this article, review on women in Indian civilization with special reference to ancient and medieval India has been discussed.

Keywords: Women, Indian, Civilization, Ancient, Medieval.

INTRODUCTION:

Movements for Women's Liberation, which progressively arose in nearly every city and town in the nation, reinforced these trends by encouraging women to engage in combat with males and criticize national traditions and conventions that they believed had given men the authority to oppress them. She is therefore currently in a combative mood with him, her husband, in an effort to reclaim her former place and status, much like a left-handed duelist fighting a right-handed duelist. Some poets and poetesses who vowed to free women from their husbands' "slavery" started to create poetical garbage to sing the praises of a few female characters in the epics and puranas, whom they believed had rejected the morals imposed on women and denounced the injustices to which they were subjected in the dharmasastras and itihasa-purana literature. Their cynicism keeps them from realizing that the exaggerated and frequently mythological depictions of ideal women in those bodies of literature and conduct were only impossible ideals set before women and could not have been

factual realities. As a result, their creative works came to serve the purpose of mocking the concept of dharma, the ideal conduct prescribed for her, which is technically known as *pativratya*.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

According to G.K. Saxena and P.K. Sharma (2018), both men and women are vital parts of human society. Life can only be sustained if there is a balance between these two elements because we are all interdependent. We need both men and women for human progress and the continuation of humanity. Therefore, we can all agree that neither one is greater nor better than the other. Nevertheless, we have seen cruel, dishonest, and immoral treatment of women. In India, we have witnessed gender inequity for a long time, but where does it begin? You can read a thorough analysis of the social standing, position, and way of life of women in the Vedic, post-Vedic, British, and modern eras on this page. Numerous anthropologists, feminists, sociologists, and other academics have attempted to evaluate the status of women. They track how their status evolves over time. Their research has produced both stunning and illuminating results. As the wheels of a chariot, men and women are both necessary for optimal motion. According to Hindu scriptures, there should be equality between men and women; therefore, why do we still see incidences of rape, dowry, harassment, and other issues of this nature? All of this will be covered in this post. We need to examine both the present-day and earlier legislation in order to comprehend the answer to this issue. You can learn about how laws have evolved through time in the second section, as well as whether they have fought against or supported gender inequality. We have examined the status of women in India in light of a number of factors, including education, legal rights, economic circumstances, social ills, etc. We wrote this essay to provide a thorough overview of the changes in the status of women in India after taking all of these and many other aspects into account. [1]

According to S. Bharti (2018), the male-centric structure of Indian society resulted in the overall exclusion of Indian women from the open or political movement in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Generally speaking, women were now seen as inferior to men, and the majority of their responsibilities were related to the house and family. However, some women were able to transcend traditional expectations and become notably prominent women in mediaeval culture. It was evident from non-government domains that women handled state affairs in a similar manner to male sovereigns. The most prominent female ruler of Delhi was Razia Sultana. In the 1590s, Chand Bibi protected Ahmednagar from the formidable Mughal powers of Akbar. Nur Jahan, the partner of Jehangir, successfully used absolute power and was

regarded as the real force behind the Mughal throne. Jahanara and Zebunnissa were two Mughal princesses who were prominent writers and had an impact on politics. Jijabai, Shivaji's mother, served as a ruler's official due to her abilities as a director and a warrior. Mughal women displayed a great deal of pride in their energetic endeavours. Bakhtunnisa had been appointed by Akbar as Kabul's legislative leader. She successfully ran the zone for a very long time. Even outside of the variety of mistresses, there were various women who were incredibly dominant in the governmental endeavours under the great Mughals. The Chandel princess of Gondwana, Rani Durgavati, ruled her country with great power and restraint. Over Akbar the Great's, her country was better run and had greater prosperity. Even if it's only a tiny portion, like a pinch of salt in flour, the political fervour of the Mughal women demonstrates the beginning of destroying the man-controlled society's-imposed separation of public and private, from which western protowoman's rights developed. The purpose of this essay is to emphasize women's political status during the Middle Ages. [2]

According to A. Mahapatra (2018), this study illustrates the idea of gender equality, its nature, and the position of women in traditional Indian society. In order to be considered, respected, and preferred equally, men and women must behave differently and have different needs and objectives. But women held a respectable standing in society in ancient India, namely in the Indus Valley civilization. There were several goddesses for women to revere in the early Vedic period. Women took part in religious ceremonies and tribal gatherings in Vedic civilization. Child marriages were unheard of in society, and widows were free to remarry. However, as the Vedic period went on, women's status slowly declined. The growing desire to divide society along gender lines has been evident throughout this time. Women's political rights were taken away. During the later Vedic period, the system of Sati—which forbade child marriage—emerged as a formal custom. But women were treated with respect and given their proper place in society in the Buddhist and Jain cultures. [3].

According to A. Majumdar (2018), women in India have experienced inequity in society since the Middle Ages. While the ancient Indian Vedic period mentioned women as the holy mother, intersectionality is currently in full swing. One factor in the transformation of Indian society and the view of women as either slaves or personal goals was the Muslim dynasty's dominance. Hindu discrimination, such as sahamaran, sati, and purdah (veil), decimated the group of women, leading to the creation of norms requiring them to be quiet and accept their course as fate. In ancient India, in the Indus culture, and in Vedic India, women had

the status of being everyone's mothers. It is about a type of masculinity, a culture in which a woman's spouse or other close companion controls her. The social reformation process that has occurred since India's independence has had a significant impact on its diaspora but is also contradictory because abuse has continued unabatedly. Female foeticide and female infanticide, forced eviction and exclusion, sexual harassment at the workplace, and other forms of violence against women include dower death, domestic violence (beating by a spouse, partner, family members, etc.), child marriage, and societal violence (isolation from society, untouchability, recognition as unlucky, witches, etc.). Finding information about their battle from the midlevel to the present and government efforts to re-establish their rights in a legal manner is the paper's main goal. The purpose of the article is to successfully gain knowledge of women's historical resistance, not just in India but also globally. How is the meaning of women correctly understandable by society? is the main query of the essay. The purpose of this paper's future work is to help communities ensure that women do not object to institutions that rely on future citizens who are conceived in women's wombs. Inelegancy must be eradicated as a result. In order to better comprehend women and their place in the Indian diaspora and global society, this study makes an effort. [4]

According to S. Lata (2018), the paper focuses on the caste system's existence in mediaeval India. The position of Shudras during that time is primarily highlighted. Untouchability was a social construct that was evident in Muslim civilization. The untouchable group included castes like the Chamars, Bhangis, Parwaris, Mazhabis, Hindu Lal Begis, Muslim Balashais, and Dhanuks, among others. These castes were seen as untouchable and treated unfairly; their shadows and touches were viewed as polluting. The Bhakti saints' role in ending untouchability and caste rigidity is also mentioned in the article. [5]

According to D. Sharma (2018), the social standing of women in early mediaeval northern India shows the development of society. Women are typically treated with respect and reverence in Indian society. But occasionally, societal perceptions about fair sex might change. Currently, marriage is viewed as a significant and sacred social institution that binds men and women together in both social and religious ties. In ancient India, women weren't seen as independent. Manus asserts that a woman should never be autonomous and should always be a subject to her father as a kid, her husband as an adult, and her son as a grandmother. In the early years of their lives, the women were known as Kumari, Kisor, and Kanya, according to Panini's Ashtadhyayi. When these ladies reached old age, they were referred to as Vriddha Kumari, Janat

Kumari, etc. Some women who stayed single their entire lives (Kumaryamvayasi) were still known as "kumari." When an unmarried girl gave birth, the child was known as a "kanina," which signifies the offspring of a Kanya who is not legally married. When Kumari got engaged, people started calling her Vritya. If a girl remained unmarried until they reached adulthood at this time, she had the freedom to choose her husband, and they were now referred to as "Patinvara" (choosing her husband by herself). The newlywed bride was referred to as "Sumangali." [6]

According to P. Dhar (2017), this study aims to analyse the situation of women's empowerment in India from antiquity to the modern era and underlines the problems and difficulties associated with it. In early Vedic times, women and men were treated equally. But over time, things got worse for women. One of the most pressing issues of the 21st century is the empowerment of women. Practically speaking, women's empowerment continues to be a fantasy. We see in day-to-day life how numerous social ills make women victims. Women's empowerment is fundamentally growing as more and more people become aware of it. Women who are empowered are more politically engaged, economically successful, and autonomous. It entails protecting kids from all sorts of assaults. The study only used secondary sources for its data. Despite numerous government initiatives, the study shows that women in India still have a somewhat lower status than men and are comparatively underpowered. It has been discovered that women continue to accept gender standards that are not equal in society. The study's conclusion states that women's empowerment is only made possible by changes in social structure, access to education, and employment. [7]

According to N. Rout (2016), women are a gift to society. Women were very important in India's ancient history. A Rig Vedic in India, women had a high social rank. They were in good shape. The women were given the chance to reach a high level of intellectual and spiritual development. Throughout this time, there were a lot of female Rishis. Although monogamy was typically the norm, polygamy was practised by the wealthier members of society. Early marriage and the sati system did not exist. However, women began to face discrimination in education and other rights and facilities starting in the Later-Vedic period after enjoying free and respected roles in Rig-Vedic society. The purdah, polygamy, child marriage, and widow burning all made the situation for women worse. The Puranas and the Epics equated women with possessions. Even Buddhism didn't do much to help women. Despite frequently using female bodyguards, spies, and "Striadhyaksha mahamatras," the Maurya rulers' reputation was still quite poor. Ladies of the upper

caste had to embrace the purdah. Men were polygamous at this time, and widow burning was a common practise. As Kautilya disregarded women's liberty, the Arthashastra further stigmatized them by stating that they were not even free to leave the house without their husband's consent. During the Gupta era, their situation deteriorated. The Smritishastras mistreated them; Manu prescribed that a woman would be dependent on her husband in her youth, her father in her upbringing, and her son in her old age. Along with sati and child marriage, the Devadasi system and prostitution also spread. [8]

According to R. Kumar (2016), this article opens up a vast amount of space for analyzing the poetic power and divinity of mediaeval women in the context of literature and nature because their poetry depicts a significant amount of human struggle within the social environment, which in and of itself is a part of nature. As poetesses of divinity, Mirabai and Gulbadan-Bano-Begam were the first to recognise the diversity and discord between men and nature. They were also the first to meditate on people, nature, and God in creative oneness. They felt sympathy for human rules, conventions, and traditions as well as for how humans violate the law of nature, which sings songs of sublimity, nobility, and joy. The research fosters intellectual debate, simulation, and importance not only in relation to gender and voice, but it also offers an alternative viewpoint for rethinking and reinventing Indian history in relation to the natural world, ecological harmony, and the cosmos. [9]

According to R. Baboo (2016), the concept of a human right was not created by ancient Indians, but the gurukul and ashrama educational systems did incorporate lessons on present-day human rights. The supreme importance of moral instruction in human life was acknowledged in ancient India. Ancient philosophers believed that ethically educated people were necessary for a good community. They carefully and thoughtfully designed an educational programme with the goal of promoting the harmonious development of the intellect and body. Students and those who are becoming adults are obligated by moral education to live their lives in accordance with the guidelines set down and made available by gurukulas, ashramas, and communities. [10]

According to V. Singh (2016), the current paper examines the position of women in mediaeval Indian society. Regarding the status of women, the paper is written as an excerpt and includes the opinions of several historians. In India, the position of women is crucial and important. The word "status of women" is frequently used, but according to Mr. Sudan, it still does not signify the same thing to everyone involved in the development process. We can all

agree that there is no place in the world where men and women have equal standing, despite the fact that a term we can all agree on eludes us. No society gives women a higher status than men or even more importance in the overall development plan. The academics contend that the standing of women in the family and society is influenced by social, economic, and demographic factors like educational attainment, economic activity, and fertility rates. Despite their varied value exchanges in many societal sectors, these also demonstrate the level of national progress, and even more glaring differences through time are shown. [11]

The researcher A.K. Biswas (2016) is interested in the growth of education in India during the Middle Ages. The Muslim educational system had an impact on the mediaeval educational system. Throughout this time, the educational system underwent a number of changes. People started to understand the value of education. They even started enrolling in colleges and universities. Primary education and higher education were the two divisions of the educational system. Mastabas and madrasas were used to deliver primary education and higher education, respectively. Modern and creative techniques were introduced to the processes of teaching and learning. [12]

According to M.A. Bhat (2015), India is a nation that takes pride in its rich heritage. Women have not only had equal rights there, but they are also described in the scriptures as being more than the better half, a status that she lost over time. Currently, it is necessary for the government to enact special laws and enforce them strictly in order to provide this underprivileged group with the desired social and economic status. In fact, the issue is deeply ingrained and can be seen in any patriarchal society—India is a prime example—where men typically hold the majority of power while women trail behind in a subordinate position despite carrying the heaviest burdens. Through the elimination of the injustice and imbalance they experience in society, efforts must be made to restore their glory and honor. [13]

According to P. Gautam (2014), the social and cultural fabric of India contains a body of ideas that aim to create a strange social and cultural order that not only strengthens gender hierarchy but also socially conditions women to accept such subordination. The entire system is set up in a way that encourages male dominance over women. Strong religious and legal sanctions support the right of men to rule over women. Therefore, it becomes essential to recognize these forces at play at different points in time in order to effectively comprehend the true nature and character of the evolutionary process of forming various social structures and institutions. [14]

No one can dispute the significance of women in history, according to S. Das and M.M. Dhalayat (2013), no matter how the world changes or what nation or social system people are in. However, this does not imply that women always receive favorable treatment, as women's roles throughout history have changed significantly. In the recent past, women were viewed as part of the wealth and property class. She used to be bought and sold like any other piece of property or livestock. Women were treated differently in the past, "depriving" them of their rights while "reminding" them of their obligations. But as times have changed, women's roles in India have evolved from childrearing to wage-earning. They must therefore confront the new reality in contemporary Indian society due to the new cultural environment. This article aims to shed light on the current and historical status of women in India. Additionally, it makes an effort to justify women's status in relation to socio-economic and political empowerment. The double standard for women's status has been present throughout Indian history. Indian literature and religion place a high value on women. However, women have a lower status and are more likely to experience discrimination and exploitation in the contexts of the domestic, political, and economic spheres. Over time, women's roles in India have changed, and they are now beginning to emerge. [15]

According to M. Chattopadhyay (2013), theatre was a significant form of communication in ancient India. In ancient India, many dramatists, including Kalidasa and Bhasa, produced a large number of plays. They produced a number of dramas that cemented their legacy in the minds of Indian viewers. Richard Salomon mentioned that we can find references to drama in the literary inscriptions when he was talking about his typological analysis of inscribed objects in Indian epigraphy. It demonstrates that drama was well-liked in historic India. Because of this, it can be said that drama was also mentioned in inscriptions, making it a significant ancient mass-communication tool. There is a query here. Who gave the drama such a huge following? Herein lies the performers' significance. They had a significant impact on the rise of drama in ancient India. What were their philosophies? What was their intended course of action? How did they make an effort to engage the audience? How did they attempt to analyse society? We are unable to find answers to these questions in any text because they only mention the plays and the playwrights, not the actors who made the plays popular. The *Natyasastra* is a text that attempts, for the first time in Indian drama history, to portray the performers' thoughts. This essay will make an effort to comprehend the mind and mentality of ancient Indian theatre performers in the context of the *Natyasastra*. [16]

According to R. Choudhary (2013), over the past few millennia, India's status of women has undergone numerous significant changes. The history of women in India has been turbulent, from their early days of equality with men through the low points of the mediaeval era to the promotion of equal rights by numerous reformers. This essay attempts to analyse the position of women throughout history, from antiquity to the modern era. It makes an effort to explore various topics like education, the legal age of marriage, property rights, widow remarriage, and sati pratha that may have an impact on women's status. It focuses on how the status of women in India changed with the arrival of Muslim rule and later British rule. [17]

According to D. Halder and K. Jaishankar (2008), Hindu women have been denied the legal right to inherit property since the beginning of Indian culture. A woman is never fit for independence, according to Manu, who states in the ancient text Manusmriti, "Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old age." Women weren't always prohibited from inheriting real estate from their biological and marital families, though. However, compared to their male counterparts, they held a much smaller share of the property. Hindu women's property rights have historically been subject to different restrictions, and modern laws governing these rights are more lenient than those of traditional Hindu society. The term "stridhan" (literally, "women's property or fortune") refers to the property that was given to women in patriarchal Hindu society (clothes, jewelry, and in some rare cases, landed properties). Women, however, had limited control over the succession of the landed family property and were not granted property rights to marital or ancestral lands. The idea of stridhan began to expand its literal and legal meaning with the emergence of various schools of Hindu law, granting women more rights to specific types of property. Later, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a number of pieces of legislation were passed with the aim of removing even more obstacles to Hindu women's full and equal property rights. The most recent Hindu succession largely ended sexual discrimination in Hindu succession laws [18].

CONCLUSION:

Theoretical research of the socio-economic and cultural circumstances of the time was required since researchers and poets were unable to grasp the causal context that may have required the prescription of such strict and even impractical aspirations for women. The geographical and popular background must have caused and conditioned the socio-economic aspirations, which form the root to the civilization and culture of people, of a time and territory, taken up for special study. The

socio-economic and cultural conditions set the aspirations for individual as well as collective in a social system, the patterns of their lives, the moral code that would be governing their pattern of life.

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