

## Role of women through ages: A study of Indian women

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### Abstract

The status and role of women has been an important aspect of study in every era. In ancient times women were portrayed as chaste, enduring, sacrificing, self-denying benevolent...on one hand while there existed another class of women called Deva- Dassin on the other. Conditions of women have gone through different phases. Each phase has wounded them deeply. Inequality and discrimination have been vital issues in the life of most of them since ancient past. In modern times the role of women in India has changed drastically in the past decade under the light of globalisation and commercialisation. Today's woman is playing important and top roles in almost all sectors of life along with men. This paper is an attempt to investigate the status of women in modern society regarding Education, Health, Equality, Family life, Job and above all the respect earned by them. It also explores the factors which can be attributed for deteriorated status of women in Indian society inspite of progress achieved by them at various levels.

**Keywords:** Status, Commercialisation, Globalisation, Discrimination, Patriarchy, Equality

### Introduction

The study of civilization is incomplete without studying the status and position of its women. Acc. to Swami Vivekananda "a country and a nation which did not respect women have never become great nor will ever in future". Swami's words bring us to a conclusion that the status assigned to women in any society reflects the nature of its cultural richness and the level of its civilization standard

The historical background of Indian society reveals that in Vedic times women were given a high status. As it was believed that "Where women are honoured, gods reside there." She was known as Ardhagini- No religious ceremony performed by the husband would bear the fruit without her participation. As a mother, wife and sister she occupied an honoured place. However during the course of history women lost their honour due to social, economic and political factors. Woman has broken the chains of social evils. The shift of woman from the past to present is worth mentioning. Woman who was considered being the master of home making is now considered to be the forces that shape a country.

"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." -Albert Einstein.

There is no field which remains unconquered by Indian women yet the status of women in modern India is paradoxical. Their path is full of roadblocks. India offers a lot of opportunities to women, but Indian society is still a male dominated society. Women are still considered subordinate and inferior to men. Though India is moving away from the male dominated culture, discrimination is still highly visible in rural as well as in urban areas, throughout all sections of the society. Women are guaranteed equality under the constitution but legal protection has limited effect or no effect where patriarchal traditions prevail. The sex ratio of India shows prejudiced against female. There are 917 females/1000 males in India according to the census of 2011, which is much below the world average of 990 females/1000males.

### The problems which women in India have to go through stems from patriarchal traditions and ineffective legal machinery operating in the country:

#### 1. Dowry System

Much of the discrimination against women arises from India's dowry system. Dowry is considered as a means to climb the social ladder, to achieve economic security, and to accumulate material wealth by all sections of the society. The common model used to calculate the dowry takes the bridegroom's education, future earning potential, family's name and status in the society while the girl's education and earning potential are only relevant to become a better wife and mother.

#### 2. Women considered a Liability

The Indian constitution has granted equal rights to women, still they are considered inferior and subordinate to men. Men are regarded an asset for a family.as they are capable of earning money, carry on the family line, able to provide for their aging parents, bring a wife (domestic helper) into the family and lastly play an important role in death rituals which ensure, that the soul is released from the body and can go to heaven. It is rightly said by A. Cripps "Educate a man and you educate an individual.

Educate a woman and you educate a family."

#### 3. Discrimination in Education

Indian constitution guarantees free primary education for both girls and boys up to the age of 14. This discrimination is evident from the data given below. This illiteracy is the root cause of all the evils against women. The female literacy rate has improved from 8.9% in 1951 to 65.5% in 2011 yet it is much below 79.9% world average.

**Table-17: Level-wise Enrolment**  
**A: All Categories of Students**  
(in lakhs)

Level/ Year	Primary (I-V)			Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Secondary (IX-X)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1950-51	133	54	192	26	5	31	NA	NA	NA
1960-61	235	114	350	51	16	67	NA	NA	NA
1970-71	357	213	570	94	39	133	NA	NA	NA
1980-81	453	285	738	139	68	207	NA	NA	NA
1990-91	570	404	974	215	125	340	NA	NA	NA
2000-01	640	493	1138	253	175	428	116	74	190
2005-06	705	616	1321	289	233	522	145	105	250
2006-07	711	626	1337	299	246	545	149	110	259
2007-08	711	644	1355	311	262	573	159	123	282
2008-09	706	647	1353	314	270	584	165	130	294
2009-10	697	639	1336	317	278	595	169	138	307
2010-11	701	646	1348	327	292	619	175	143	319
2011-12	726	672	1399	331	299	630	186	155	341
2012-13(P)	681	639	1321	329	314	643	181	162	343
2013-14(P)	672	623	1300	337	320	657	195	175	370

**4. Custom of child Marriage**

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) bans marriage of a girl below 18yrs and a boy below 21yrs. As 80 % of Indian population live in villages where family, caste and community pressures are more effective than any legislature, child marriages are common. According to UNICEF's "State of the World's Children 2009" report, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.

**Reasons for child marriages**

Financial benefits. And also marrying off girls at an early age was to ensure their safety and family's honour. In some rural areas they have religious myth that the goddess Parvati had decided to marry god Shiva when she was only eight, girls

were married off as young as eight or nine years old.

**Consequences**

1. Girls between 15 and 19 are twice as likely to die of pregnancy-related reasons as girls between 20 and 24.
2. Child wives are inclined to experience domestic violence, marital rape, deprivation of food, and lack of access to information, healthcare, and education. Thus, the vicious cycle of illiteracy and abuse is likely to be continued and passed on to their own daughters.
3. Children born are not healthy and die before reaching age of 1

**5. Poor legal frame work**

Effective legislation and quick justice is the ‘foundation stone’ of preventing violence.

**Table 1: Crime Head - Wise Incidents of Crime Against Women During 2009-2013 and Percentage Variation in 2013 over 2012**

Sl. No.	Crime Head	Year					Percentage Variation in 2013 over 2012
		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
1.	Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	21,397	22,172	24,206	24,923	33,707	35.2
2.	Kidnapping and abduction (Sec. 363 to 373 IPC)	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	51,881	35.6
3.	Dowry Death (Sec. 302 / 304 IPC)	8,383	8,391	8,618	8,233	8,083	-1.8
4.	Cruelty by husband or his relatives (Sec. 498-A IPC)	89,546	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	1,18,866	11.6
5.	Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (Sec. 354 IPC)	38,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	70,739	56.0
6.	Insult to the modesty of women (Sec. 509 IPC)	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	12,589	37.2
7.	Importation of girl from foreign country (Sec. 366-B IPC)	48	36	80	59	31	-47.4
A.	<b>Total IPC crime against Women</b>	<b>1,94,832</b>	<b>2,05,009</b>	<b>2,19,142</b>	<b>2,32,528</b>	<b>2,95,896</b>	<b>27.3</b>
8.	Commission of Sati Prevention Act, 1987	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
9.	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	2,579	0.6
10.	Indecent Representation of Women (P) Act, 1986	845	895	453	141	362	156.7
11.	The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	10,709	17.9
B.	<b>Total SLL crime against Women</b>	<b>8,969</b>	<b>8,576</b>	<b>9,507</b>	<b>11,742</b>	<b>13,650</b>	<b>16.2</b>
	<b>Total (A+B)</b>	<b>2,03,804</b>	<b>2,13,585</b>	<b>2,28,649</b>	<b>2,44,270</b>	<b>3,09,546</b>	<b>26.7</b>

Source: Crime in India-2013

### States not implementing the Police Act.

States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, [Madhya Pradesh](#), Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and West Bengal have been laggards. The apex court in its September, 2006, judgment had come out with seven key suggestions, including prescribing minimum tenure of two years for state police chief and officers on operational duties, separating investigation and law and order functions of police and several other measures to insulate police personnel from political interference in discharging their day-to-day duties. Even the Model Police Act - submitted by an expert committee a month later - could not be translated into legislation, with the home ministry failing to put it before Parliament. The Act, incorporates several suggestions including creation of state police board (for deciding on promotion and transfers of cops), ensure fixed tenure of police chief and other key functionaries, earmarking dedicated personnel for crime investigation and improved service condition of policemen.

*Source-<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Police-reform-measures-gathering-dust-thanks-to-Centre-states-apathy/articleshow/17849308.cms>*

### Conclusion

Today women are coming up in all spheres of life. Despite progress, they are expected to fulfil their roles as wives, mothers, prioritizing home against anything else. This point of view hasn't changed much. This imbalance of role is creating mental stress for working women. There is still a large section of women who are uneducated, married before the age of 18. Statistics indicate that close to 245 million women in India lack basic capability to read and write. Only 13.9% women are employed in the urban sector, and 29% in the domestic and agriculture sector, where too a majority of women are exploited by the men. The sex ratio of India shows that the Indian society is still prejudiced against female, and a lot is yet to be achieved in this context.

The path to women empowerment is tough. Women have made remarkable progress towards reducing gender gaps. Yet realities such as 11,332 women and girls getting trafficked every year, and increased practice of dowry, rape and sexual harassment is another reality against all the development that has taken place. Women are climbing the ladder of success, but on the other hand she is silently suffering the physical as well as mental violence afflicted on her by her own family members. A man and a woman are like two wheels of a cart. The cart can move fast and safely only when both the wheels pull it in the same direction and with equal strength, so is the wheel of life and growth. Hence no country or society can afford to ignore the role of women, if they are to progress.

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