

## **Women in India**



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### **Something we achieved, more we need to achieve.**

The earth is created or evolved, may be lucrative stuff of debate and discussion but we witness dualism in everything visible or invisible. This may be cited as positivity and negativity, goodness and badness, day and night so on. The very nature of atomic structure, the smallest particles in universe, also has positive, negative and neutral forces inside it.

The most fundamental and conspicuous that lies in the very root of evolution and continuation of generations is the male and female characteristics of all living beings. In absence of one, the evolution of the species seems impossible. Both the male and female characteristics are equally important for the immortalization of species. Since the day, human species appeared on the face of earth both strived and struggled in tumultuous waves of time. They established their unchallengeable and unquestionable supremacy over other living and non living organism of the planet and completed journey from stone and woods to metallic aero jets and atomic and ballistic missiles. The long and lasting race from manual to machine was not simple and easy. Human race is now considered to be the wisest race among all. Was this possible only by male or by female? The answer is a big and enormous 'No'. The male and female characters are an integral and inseparable part of the same coin. One is because of other and is complementary to each other.

In beginning of human civilization during stone age when the human creature lived on hunting, the men carried bigger responsibilities of safeguarding the family by food and lodging whereas the women bore progeny and looked after the domestic deeds. Biologically man was the symbol of strength and woman was symbol of love and care. But even during this era, in many dangerous hunting expeditions women assisted the men. They even sometimes headed the hunting expeditions. They went to all extreme level in the mortal and magnificent struggle for survival. They together with the male counter parts paved the path to posterity.

The Vedic religion in India had ample regard for the women as there had been the goddesses, the epitome of reverence, devotion and power. These deities had the equal right like men. They companioned in fields, hunt, battles and all religious rituals along with men. Goddesses like Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Seeta and Radha and many more are worshipped in every part of the country. The temple of Vaishnav devi in Kashmir, Kamakhya in Guwahati, Kali in Kolkata, Maihar Devi and Vidhyavasini in Madhypradesh is pilgrimage where copious number of devotees and tourists throng about to prostrate in front of feminine power. What to say about shrines situated in farthest and highest peaks, they also occupy the hearts of the lanes and streets and even in the purged corner of Hindu houses. The public sentiment toward such feminine power is displayed highly while celebrating Durga Puja and observing stark 9 days fast not only by the women but also by the men at large.

Away from such mythological references we have plenty of historical evidences which solidify the women's strong hold in the then social and public life. All historians and archaeologists together agree to the fact that Indus Valley family system was matriarchal. The women during that time had worthy and respectable place in the making and machinery of the social vehicle. The idol of the dancer does exemplify the notion of their freedom to choose the profession and it was not considered to be the act of lewdness. The Linga and Yoni worship of the Hadappan age is another great evidence showing the equal and most often superior status of women. During the Vedic era, the women were 'Vidushi' and composed verses of Vedas. These Vidushi women participated in the public debate and open discussion to prove their pedantry. Many times the men had to subdue in front of the women in such open public occasions of their learnings. 'Gargi and Yagyalkya Sanvaad' is the finest example it. Siddharth Gautam buddh is named after his aunt 'Guatami' who brought up him after his real mother Mahamaya's death and later she along with Yashodhara and hundreds of women were solemnized in bhikhu Sangh. They were called as 'Bhikshuni' who roamed around the world to expand the light of learning and experience. After establishment of the world class Buddhist universities in Takshshila today in Pakistan, Nalanda and Vikramshila in Bihar and Ujjain in present Madhya Pradesh, these Bhikhunis' worked as teacher along with being pupils there. Moreover in later period too, many

parts of India there had been matriarchal family system where woman was the natural head of the family. Even today such system prevails in south of Kerala state and north east Manipur state of India. Not only this even the naming system was where the names of the children started from the name of mother like 'Gautami putra Shatkarni' during Satvahan of present Andhra region. More than that, the naming system of god and goddesses also reveals this where the name of wife goddess came before their husband like Uma Mahesh, Seeta Ram and Radhey Shyam so on. The reverence to the feminine power is also exhibited in the way where Indians feel motherhood everywhere and call the river 'Ganga Mata', the earth 'Dharti Mata', the cow 'Gau Mata', the country 'Bharat Mata' and even diseases 'Sheetla Mata'. Is such great tradition to reverend woman is found anywhere in the world? Obviously it's not.

But in later years women's condition worsened and became too miserable and pathetic. Muslim invasion to India gave fatal blow in downfall of women and they slipped from the dominant status to abject state in the society. Indian society went through a overhaul of its norms and standards during this age. Though in the middle age, there had been the women enjoying the freedom and public honour and even became the rulers of the country like Rajia Sultan, Jodhabai, Noorjahan and Mumtaz Begam but parallel to that women from middle and lower section of society lost the right to live. They were encumbered under the yoke of heart rifting social taboos like child marriage, sati system and widowhood. They became subservient and dependant under the commandment of men. The poetess Meerabai too hardly got respectable recognition amid hurricanes of social and political drama. That was simply because of her Krishna sectarianism. Manusmirti clearly says, "The women are not free in any state. They depend on men in all measure and ages, in childhood on father, in young on husband and in old age on son". What to say about heading whole of the family they even didn't had any right in the paternal property. By the name of tradition and religion they were also called 'Shudra', fourth one in the Varna system and were devoid of all human rights. Education, the root of all advancement became a dream beyond their reach. The injustice done to them is still not compensated.

The country where the women goddesses are esteemed high and worshiped in large, they are the victim of numerous crimes afflicted to them by the fellow men. What is the reason of this colossal contradiction? The shastras say, "yatra narystu pujiyante, ramnte tatra devta" but in the same vein the heinous and derogative crimes like rape, kidnapping, eve teasing and molestations are everyday reality to modern life against them. According to the National Crime Record Bureau of India the cruelty against women by husband and relatives were reported 122877 in 2014 compared to 118866 of 2013. And the assault to outrage her modesty in colleges was reported 82235 in 2014 compared to 70739 in 2013. The rape cases were reported 36735 in 2014

compared to 33707 in 2013. Uttar Pradesh tops in the list of crime against women like abduction, molestation, rape, dowry death cases numbering 38467 in 2014 followed by West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

The man dominated society even feels cursed on the birth of the girl child. This is the reason why there is large scale foeticide- the process of killing the unborn girl child in the womb before it breathes in the world. Since the arrival of ultra sound and ultra sonography in 90s increased the such cases of foeticide and infanticide. Though the government has mad stricter laws like Pre- Conception and Pre- Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PCPNDT) in 1994 to ban and punish pre natal sex screening against it but situation is beyond control. The state like Rajasthan and Hariyana is far ahead in this regard. The estimate of foeticide by different scholars that 10 million cases of female foetus may have been illegally aborted in India since 1990. MacPherson has estimated around 100000 abortions of female foetus are done every year. The nobel laureate Indian economist Professor Amartya Sen compared the sex ratio of United States, Europe with South Asia, East Asia and West Asia and proclaimed that if male and female get similar nutritious value and medical attention, the female has greater prospect of survival than the male as the men are genetically more fragile.

Another mammoth challenge to these girl children is the threat of devil of dowry. The newspapers and televisions abound in the news of dowry death and domestic violence against women. The social reformers may boast to ride out the social evils like sati system, child marriage and widow re-marriage but the negativity and criminal acts against women still exist in human society. The situation will be crystal clear if we give a look to the criminal records against women collected by the government and NGOs. According to the National Crime Record Bureau, 8233 dowry death cases were reported across India in 2012 and dowry issues cause 1.4 deaths per year per 100000 women in India. For protection of women's right in such cases the government structured laws like The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, section 498a of Indian Penal Code, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 and Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012. These data are about the cases registered and recorded. Those unrecorded and unregistered even goes beyond the number games. In spite of all these criminal records and enactment of laws and legal procedures, the crime against women is a reality in India. Though to save the face of the government and administration from being condemned and criticized, a handful of data is misrepresented. How long will we evade the harsh realities and sing the slogan of advancement of human society? How long will we keep alive such stains within us?

There is discriminatory attitude of the parents towards girl child compared to the boy child in bringing up, education and facilitating their needs. The girl child is considered to be the curse and a burden. The education to women had been a matter of great concern. “*There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.*” Kofi Annan (The secretary of UNO) said highlighting the significance of women’s role in the process of development. But the scene of women’s education in India is gloomy and pessimistic. There is very sloth and sluggish progress in it. From the average literacy rate of India 73% by the census 2011, the literate women are 64.6% where men are 80.9%. This data clearly shows that 37.4% of total women don’t even be able to identify the letters and sign. Here the far flung proclamation of technological advancement and fastest growing economy with the highest GDP falls apart. They had been the subject of perpetual prejudice and discrimination in this regard too. It is rightly observed that if a man is educated, only a man is educated; if a woman is educated, the family is educated.

*Literacy rate and sex ratio are another parameter to measure the social and economic growth of any country. The developed countries like USA, UK, Russia, France and Japan have high literacy rate and sound sex ratio in respect of women. India has an average 943 per 1000 in sex ratio a slight reform 2011 to that of 2001 with 933. The Indian states like Kerala, Pondicherry and Tamilnadu top in high literacy rate and sex ratio (1084, 1037 and 996 per 1000) where as Haryana and Bihar stand at miserable points. If we analyze this we will find that the crimes against women are in juxtaposition.*

If we look into the conditions of women in developed and developing nations we shall find that the women in developed nations enjoy more freedom and concessions than those of developing nations marginalized of such human rights. The woman in developed nations are modernist and ever exposed to changes of time whereas the women in the developing nations are traditionalist and god fearing. One becomes scientist and another becomes Sadhvi. To quote Dr. Ambedkar , “ I measure the progress of any nation from the degree women have progressed”. Sex ratio, literacy rate, life expectancy and public life partnership of women of such countries justify it.

The religious constraints and social institutions mostly deny the upliftment and empowerment of women. These rigorous social system barricades the path of progress to them. In scriptures and Shastras they are presented either to perform religious rituals or to serve their men. During the Rajput era , the ‘Jauhar’ and ‘Sati’ system were esteemed on high regard. The scholars and poets glorified such inhuman and cruel acts as the great obedience of culture and religion. The false picture of uniting their husbands in heaven was shown to them. If ever they

were afraid of such abominable practices, they were tempted or compelled to do so. This is not a myth but a real history. Indian history has plenty of such examples. The prevalent child marriage led to early widowhood in the prime age because their men were killed in ongoing frequent battles mostly for pomp and show of power of monarchy. Such futile tendencies gave birth to another big evil like polygamy. The polygamy was another instance prevailing in the society that denied the right of equality and respect of women. These women are even today brought up with notion to be religious, obedient, submissive, polite and well mannered. The same is least expected from the men. They don't have their own opinions on family issues and public life and if they dare to opine, they are simply taken to be talkative and uncultured one. Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest sons of India, quoted that, "*There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one win*".

The government, administrators and common citizens are to step forward for abolishing the blemish. Instead to carry out their onus to root out such blot, they are all together either transferring it on other or blaming others. Some rogues on authority even proclaim and shower suggestions on women to dress well and not to move out alone. I feel embarrassed to listen such notions of people preaching high lessons to women to be modest and submissive. Why not they transform their spectacles and see in every woman their daughter, sister and mother? Why not they learn to behave gentle and docile to women? Are these kinds of scoundrel ready to have hawks eye upon their owns?

They comprise 586.47 million which is nearly 48.5% of women of total population in the country. If we overlook them, we overlook the major portions of the society who can contribute in the development of the nation. "We cannot all succeed if half of this are held back" The brave teenager Afgan girl Malala Yousafzai says emphatically while addressing the UNO being awarded the most coveted and world's most prestigious Nobel Peace Prize along with Prakash Satyarthi of India.

The history abounds in instances where the women have done wonders in various fields like politics, science, sports, administrations, arts and many more. Who can forget the names like Indira Gandhi, Kalpana Chawla, Kiran Bedi and P.T. Usha? The misconceptions about their fragility and vulnerability is a myth today. Presently the female political leaders like Sushma Swaraj, Sumitra Mahajan, Vasundhara Raje, Mamta Benerjee, Jai Lalitha and Mayavati are nowhere less than male leaders. Harriet Beecher Stowe is no superfluous when she says that "Women are the real architects of society". Rani Laxmibari, Mother Teresa, Savitribai Fule and

Anie Besent were such greatest ladies who stood strong in the bitterest and cruelest time and set an unprecedented example of undaunted courage and love to life and humanity.

But the matter of great anxiety is that the opportunity and participation in the public life is not even to the satisfactory level. The middle, lower middle and lower class women are still forced to live undignified and deprived life. These women are the easy victim of all sorts of criminal acts against them. They even don't have resources and assistance to oppose such sordid offences. One side the men folk assumes women to be weak and fit for bearing child and household deeds and another side the women have taken it for granted. The morale and spirit of women has been brutally suppressed and essence of life is mercilessly squeezed out. Even women have started thinking themselves to be ruled by men. This is more pathetic to think about. They don't have opportunity to grow rather they are destined to dwell in the dark.

Valuing the dignity of women and their worth in the human society, Eleanor Roosevelt has rightly called, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." No other statement can stand so apt and fit than that of Roosevelt. The woman must strive themselves to break such nonsense barriers. They must step forward to bravely take all the challenges posed and presented by the world. It's none other but they themselves can emancipate and liberate themselves from the age long chains of slavery to breathe afresh. If they determine to move ahead, no power of the earth can stop them. Various women named before have come across their ignominy and ignorance. They even became the torch bearer and shown the glorious paths to others. Adreinne Rich one the eminent feminist writer once wrote, "Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; grappling with hard work."

The men need to change the perception towards women. Merely considering them as female character will never suffice to do any good. Rather they must show ample reverence to them as an individual. The women have their individuality as men. Before considering them as female character the men must regard them as equal partner of human race. Feminine and masculine features are not only the measures to set differences. Above it they belong to the same species of human race. The first prime minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had remarked about the need to awaken the drowsy spirit of women to make them equal partner in the race of development. He said, "To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves".

Talking about the strength and stamina of women and advancement of society, I affirm that whenever they got the opportunity, they shut the mouth criticizing them of their worthiness and mountainous caliber. Hilary Clinton talks about it as, "women are the largest untapped

reservoir of the talents in the world”. She further adds, “I believe that the rights of women and girls are the unfinished business of the 21st century.” The women have superseded and surpassed the men of their exemplary deeds. According to Eleanor Roosevelt on what role women has on the face of earth, she says, "A woman is like a tea bag—you never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water."

It was not only the men who fought from the British empire to set India free but also the women walked hand in hand. They sacrificed their temporal pleasure and jumped into the fire of revolution. They thrashed, bulletted, lathicharged and jailed too. The names of Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani and Vijaya Laxmi Pandit is worth mentioning. So call them weak and feeble is either lack of understanding their real strength or prejudiced misconception. To quote in the words of Mahatma\_Gandhi, “To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?" [*To the Women of India (Young India, Oct. 4, 1930)*]"

The most outstanding endowment of our ancestors to us is ‘Indian Constitutions’. The constitution of India guarantees the equality based on individuality. It abandons any sort of gender bias. The article 14 gives equality before law and article 15 firmly says, “The state shall not discriminate all her citizen based on religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them”. Further article 16 emphasizes equal opportunity in employment in public offices. In article 19 the women too like all other citizens are entitled of the right of freedom. Under adult franchise and universal suffrage, the constitution also gives one citizen one vote value even to the women. The constitution exhorts to constitute women commission in centre and state and also allocate adequate funds for their health, education and empowerment. The centre and state government at different times have enacted laws and announced schemes for this reason like Sukanya Yojana, Kanya Vidyadhan, Beti Padhao and Beti Badhao, Matritva Sahyog Yojana, Priyadarshini and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, UJJAWALA, SWADHAR Greh etc. The NGOs local, national and international are also running numerous schemes to help and aware the women. In spite of such magnificent and paramount guideline we could not achieve the goal of gender equality even after 70 years of independence. They are still treated as the second rate citizen barring the exceptions.

There must be public program and campaigns to spread awareness among people by government, NGOs and also by the responsible citizens of the country. The artists and scholars



may also play vital roles in this regard. The programs on gender sensitization and women welfare can be organized in books, movies and serials. In school and colleges, the conference and competitions can be held on this vital cause. The advertisement in electronic and print media may also help a lot. The common mass needs to be fully awakened and educated. During the parent teacher association's meeting, there must be counseling session esp. on this topic. The social taboos and religious complications must also be dealt with fervently and feverously. The task to value womanhood must be taken to war level. "We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored." Says Sheryl Sandberg, one of the greatest feminist scholars of the world.

In recent days there has been some positive and constructive measures adopted to empower women. They are competing and even surpassing men in various spheres of human activities. They are getting education and being placed and elected to prominent positions and they are setting newer norms and standard. They are crossing the four walls and performing their best in the country and abroad. They are becoming more scientific, rational and sagacious than being superstitious, susceptible and theistic.

At start of 21<sup>st</sup> century, we all need to pledge for new start with new thinking to bestow all blessings of the world to women. Let them fly high with feather of equality and freedom to choose the path of life they want. Let manhood no more be tainted of not being humane and just. Let the new chapter of human history be written with no such evils. Let nobody forget the precept that, "We are human race before being male or female". Let all enjoy the birth right to live the world on one's own accord. Let no one's soul be unnecessarily be sacrificed. Live and let live and together make the world a beautiful place to live.