

## A STUDY OF SOCIO CULTURAL POSITION OF WOMEN IN BRITISH ERA

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### Abstract

Women were at their lowest during British control in India. The wife had a poor domestic situation. One in women could read and write. Evil social practices, dogmatic religion, horrible superstitions, and dark habits produced the most degeneration. Child marriage, enforced widowhood, sati, Devadasi, purdah, dowry, female infanticide, and polygamy froze Indian civilization. After decades of social degradation, persistent despair, horrible suffering, and societal collapse in the nineteenth century, social reformers zealously worked to eradicate social evil and awaken people to the injustice meted out to Indian women. Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and other social reformers focused on women's education, child marriage, polygamy, and widow remarriage. Sati drew public ire. Mahatma Gandhi led the National Movement in the early 20th century to end women's disabilities. Gandhiji urged India's roughly half-female population to rally for freedom. Under Gandhiji's leadership, women participated in large numbers, gaining equality with men. Women gradually protested traditional society's centuries-old oppression.

*Keywords: Women, India, social rank*

### INTRODUCTION

It seemed that a woman's social position in Colonial India was defined by the social rank of her spouse. This was a common belief According to the religious tradition, the fact that humans saw them as superior led to their lowness and complete subjection to human authority in all areas of life. They were denied of the opportunity to advance their culture and get an education, respectively. The majority of women in society had lives that were not worth living, with a select few women from more privileged groups being the exceptions. In a nutshell, they were prevented from gaining access to social justice and equality in the society they lived in. They did not have access to education, were illiterate, and had been held in lower economic positions over the years; as a result, they were uninformed of the basic rights that they have as humans. (Manu Smriti with its six modern annotations, 1886). It's hard to fathom how Christian missionaries could have arrived in India and seen women living in such deplorable circumstances. Women are expected to play subordinate positions in traditional Indian society. They were stunned and profoundly moved by what they had just experienced.

Missionaries of the Christian faith had the goal of spreading their religion over all of India. As a direct consequence of this, they constructed institutions like as schools, asylums, hospitals, and orphanages with the intention of extending aid to the economically disadvantaged Indian populace. They were able to effectively convert the vast bulk of the Indian population that was found in the lower classes. They were not capable of

determining the measures that they should do in order to save the ladies from being murdered by the fire. They had high hopes that by taking part in a "Culturally Motivated" performance, they would be able to put a stop to their involvement in illegal behavior. Some who have more enlightened opinions were quick to point out that one of the most pressing problems facing society now is the inadequate treatment of women in public settings. In the elimination of the barbaric practices of sati and infanticide; in the condemnation of child marriage and polygamy; in the popularization of widow remarriage; in the abolition of purdha; in the provision of educational opportunities for women and economic opening in order to empower them to support themselves; and finally, in the enfranchising of women so that they may have an equal voice in the political life of the nation.

## **1.2 SATI ABOLITION ACT (1820)**

"Pure and Virtuous Women" is what the word "sati" means when translated from its original Sanskrit. It was used in the case of a devoted woman who, once she obtained proof that she had been married to her husband for life, burned herself along with the body of her husband so that she could continue to have an uninterrupted marital union with her spouse. This was done so that she could continue to have an unbroken marital union with her spouse. The execution of this art has been hampered by the Peshwas, who were educated Indian emperors comparable to Akbar. Early Governor Generals such as Cornwallis, Minto, and Lord Hasting took some steps to restrict the practice of Sati. This was despite the fact that the East India Company generally adhered to its declared policy of not interfering with the social customs of the people. The policy stated that the company would not interfere with the social customs of the people. These steps included discouraging compulsion, prohibiting the administration of intoxicating drugs to the bereaved widows, placing a ban on the performance of sati by pregnant women or widows who are younger than 16 years of age, and most importantly, making it mandatory for widows to carry out the ritual. In his letter to the Colonial Government in 1813, Mr. Loushington, a Magistrate in the Madras Presidency, said that the legal eradication of Sati would bring "Universal Satisfaction," with the exception of a few orthodox Purohit who made a lot of money by presiding over the rites of Sati. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, known as the "Father of the Indian Renaissance," was the one who first brought up the subject of Sati, and he had been making a determined effort to convince Hindus that the practice was not supported by their religious beliefs ever since he first brought it up. In the year 1822, Raja Ram Mohan issued his "bring statement" in opposition to the ongoing encroachment on the traditional rights of women in line with the Hindu Law of Inheritance. This was done in order to protest the prevailing situation. This comment received a lot of attention from the media. The court of the Director exerted a great deal of pressure on William Bentick to enact legislation that would put an end to the practice of sati.

## **WIDOW REMARRIAGE ACT (1856)**

They were in such a terrible position that it was inevitable for them to feel that death was the better option for them since it released them from the anguish, sin, and suffering that life brought. Because of this, they were compelled to believe that death was the better option for them. In India, there was a tradition that had been around for a very long time that permitted widows from lower castes to marry either the surviving brother or the father of their deceased husband. There was a widely believed belief that widows who remarried were committing a sin, as defined by the Hindu scriptures, "because it entailed remorse and disgrace on earth and exclusion from paradise." [More citation is required] This notion was held by many people. It was brought up for debate in the Barama Samaj, where it received overwhelming support from the Brahman community. The practice of widow remarriage is still practiced today. Pt. Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar (1820-91) faced the

arduous effort of uncovering an old sanskrit reference and establishing that vedic literature sanctioned widow remarriage. He was successful in achieving both of these goals. By delivering a petition to the Indian government that had 987 people's signatures, he asked the Indian government to take legislative action on the issue. His efforts were rewarded with the enactment of the Hindu-remarriage Act (Act XV of 1856), which accepted children born to such marriages as having full legal standing and made it lawful for widows to marry. The act also made it possible for widows to marry again. It was beneficial to a significant number of widows, who afterwards became beneficiaries.

## **EDUCATION OF WOMEN**

Throughout the 19th century, Hindu society was afflicted by the erroneous theological illusions that Hindu scripture did not sanction female education and that teaching girls would bring about the fury of Gods, which would result in their being married off as widows. Both of these beliefs were incorrect. The Christian missionaries were the ones who, in 1819, took the initiative to establish the Calcutta female Juvenile Society. Their motivations for doing so are unknown, but they were the ones who did it. Pt. Vidya Sagar is credited for the establishment of at least 35 different schools in Bangladesh that are exclusively for female students. In the report that Charles Wood wrote on education in the year 1854, he put a substantial amount of stress on the need of educating girls and women (Jones, 1994). From a more macro perspective, the evolution of education for women into an essential component of the larger movement to better the situation of women in society as a whole may be seen as an important step (Heimsath, 1964)

## **BAN ON FEMALE INFANTICIDE (1870)**

The killing of their newborn girls was still another horrible and inhumane tradition, and it was one that was especially common among the Bangalis and the Rajput. Both the Bangalis and the Rajputs believed that having female kids was a considerable financial burden, which is why this practice was implemented. Numerous culturally archaic tribes have the habit of putting their newborn females to death during the first few hours of their lives. "He had genuinely witnessed when he was a youngster in Lahore, his sister being stuffed into sack and flung in to the river," Maharaja Dalip Singh, son of Ranjit Singh, said of his father. This is something that Maharaja Dalip Singh mentions in his book. (Jones, 1994). The custom of putting an end to the lives of newborn children was universally denounced by the educated people of Britain and India. Once it became apparent that only trying to persuade people to stop the practice would not be sufficient, the government of Bengal passed regulation XXI in 1775 and regulation III in 1804, both of which deemed the murdering of children to be the same as committing murder and made it illegal. In 1870, the government of India passed a law in an effort to take prophylactic measures. (From the 1975 pamphlet titled "The Right of Women") It makes the recording of the birth of each and every child by the parents a requirement, and it allows for the verification of female children for a period of time after they are born, making it essential for the parents to do so.

## **NATIVE MARRIAGE ACT II (1872)**

In the Indian Panel Code, rape was classified as a crime for the first time in 1819 by the colonial authority. In the year 1846, the definition of rap was enlarged to include a husband who had consummated his marriage to a woman who was under the age of 18. This was the beginning of the criminalization of such behavior. The practice of marrying minors was condemned by a number of reformers, notably Vidya Sagar and Kashub Chandra Sen, who voiced their opposition in public comments and published works. The Native Marriage Act

It was approved by the colonial administration in 1872, and it established that the minimum age of marriage for females was to be set at 14, while the minimum age of marriage for males was established to be 18. (Sharma, 1985). In addition to this, it included a provision that would put an end to the practice of polygamy, which was supported by the more forward-thinking elements of India's intelligentsia. The Act was drafted with this clause already present.

## OBJECTIVE

1. Studying the Women progressively denounced the centuries-old tyranny of traditional society
2. Research on women was at its lowest point in India during British rule.

## WOMEN IN DHARMA SHASTRA

The Brahmanas, the Upanishads, and the Great Epic Era are all sources of knowledge that may be used to assist in the creation of a picture of post-Vedic civilisation. The respectable position that women had maintained during the early Vedic period had already started to disintegrate by the time the late Vedic era came around. During this time, the Vedic period. Throughout the time period that the Dharma Shastras cover in history, the position of women reached an all-time low and continued to decline. The ancient literature known as the "Manusmriti," which translates to "Laws of Manu" and is written in Sanskrit, ended up being a significant contributor to the decline of the Sanskrit language.

A complete collection of rules was developed by Manu and Yajnavalkya. These laws cover a variety of topics, including emancipation, rituals, asceticism, and an exact knowledge of Brahma. In addition to this, they lay out certain standards that individuals are expected to adhere to during the course of their life. As a consequence of the social norms and customs that were perpetuated by the low donors, women are held to a lower position in society. This results in a reduced status for women. These rules did not even come close to resembling any kind of equity or justice in any way, shape, or form. Throughout this era of history, women were not permitted to take part in either the secular or the religious aspects of society.

During this time period, the patriarchal family structure gained a great deal of authority, which led to an increase in the number of restrictions placed on the activities that women were allowed to participate in. This led to an increase in the number of restrictions placed on the activities that women could participate in. In their journey for higher development, the vast majority of women were held in contempt and seen to be both an impediment and a source of temptation on their road. Because of this, her standing not just within the family but also among society as a whole reached an all-time low. Child marriage was extensively pushed by the low donors, whereas remarriage for widows was rigorously outlawed. Child marriage was also encouraged by the high donors. Since the author of Artha Sashttra, Kautilya, considered women to be nothing more than reproductive machines, he urged for young girls to be married off as soon as possible and put a number of restrictions on women's rights.

## VEDIC AGE (2500-1500 B.C.)

The status of women in Vedic society was quite a deal higher than one would generally assume it to be in Hindu culture, according to the conclusions of a number of scholarly studies that were conducted on the topic. The data that has been offered in works that have been published reveals that women and men held positions

of equality throughout the whole of this historical period. Females were supposed to finish the same amount of brahamcharya that boys did, and they got the same education as boys. Because of the high respect in which their education was held, the Atharva Veda made the proclamation that "the success of woman in her married life depended upon her good instruction during brahamcharya." This declaration was made because education was considered to be of the utmost importance. Women were afforded a significant amount of freedom and were encouraged to take an active role in public life. The conventional age for a woman to be married was between 16 and 17 years old, so the practice of marrying minors was frowned upon. Since they were adults and had some level of knowledge, they were able to have a voice in the decision-making process.

## **BRAHMANS AGE (1500-500 B.C.)**

- While changes in the status of women had started to emerge during this historical period, these shifts were incredibly sluggish, and for the most part, women had the same rights and advantages as men and retained a recognized position within the household.
- Throughout the dawn of time, the ideals of marriage and the reciprocal connections that should exist between a husband and wife have, for the most part, been basically the same. These interactions should be based on mutual respect and admiration for one another.
- Despite the fact that divorce was allowed under the law, only a small percentage of couples actually used this right. At that time, remarriage was not something that was forbidden by the Vedic faith. The fact that the husband was also there with his wife was not an obstacle but rather a necessary condition.
- At the religious ceremony, the gods did not acknowledge any ablutions that were brought by unmarried individuals. This was due to the fact that unmarried people were not allowed access into heaven.
- As a result of the events that transpired, she was able to maintain her post. It was difficult to continue the practice of marrying off children. The age of consent for marriage ranged from 16 to 18 in several countries.

## **SUTRAS AND EPIC: AGE (300 B.C. to 500 A.P.)**

Women had a position in society that was considered to be rather high up until the year 300 B.C., but this started to shift during this time period and has continued right up to the present day. Till this point in history, females born into rich families received an education equal to or greater than that of their male counterparts. With the arrival of Aryans about the year 300 B.C., the practice of interethnic marriage between people of various ethnic groups became obligatory.

Another aspect that contributed to the deteriorating of the status of women in society was the rising complexity of the ceremonies related with the Vedic sacrifices. This was one of the contributing factors. Their marriages had to be put off until they reached the age of 22 or the year 2000, whichever came first, so that they could devote the necessary amount of time to their studies. Intermarriages eventually led to all women being regarded as ineligible for Vedic studies and rituals since the non-Aryan wife could not enjoy the same religious benefits as the Aryan consort owing to her lack of the Sanskrit language and Hindu religion. This is due to the fact that non-Aryan brides were unable to speak Sanskrit and did not follow the Hindu religion. She was unable to complete her schooling as a consequence of these circumstances, which led to her being married at a younger

age and assuming a less significant role in terms of the household's religious and social practices as a consequence. Because of the widespread disapproval of the practice, marrying a widow was made illegal in the year 500

## MODERN WOMANHOOD

In an effort to make the constitutional ideal a reality and to bring women out of their traditional roles, some efforts have been made by the state to get women out of the kitchen and the house and into the mainstream of the socio-economic life of the country. These efforts have been made in the hope of bringing women out of their traditional roles. Although a number of influential committees have been established in order to investigate these issues, the fact remains that women continue to be subjected to a variety of disadvantages as a result of the actions of males, most notably those who are in positions of authority in the workplace. Despite the fact that these committees have been established, the reality is that women continue to be subjected to a variety of disadvantages as a result of the actions of males. Even though there have been major changes in urban regions, rural areas have, for the most part, remained in the same condition as they were in the past. The history of Indian women may include a paradox that is both interesting and intriguingly contradictory. On the other hand, academics from India as well as from other countries are in agreement that they are engaging more than in any other society at the highest levels of practical and legal domains, as well as in the process of decision making.

This is the consensus among academics from both India and other countries. On the other hand, a significant number of women are still subjected to the degrading purdah system, and in addition to this, they are victims of detrimental social behaviors and religious events. Although while child marriages and the dowry system are still prevalent in rural India, very few women, particularly very few rural women, are aware of their legal rights, and even fewer of them have the self-assurance, the knowledge, or the skills required to exercise those rights. The contemporary woman has a place not just in the family unit but also in the larger community in which she resides. In addition to other women in influential roles, there are female ministers, female parliamentarians, female publicists, female pilots, female police officers, female brigadiers, female personal secretaries, female typists, female engineers, female educationists, female drivers, female astrologers, female agriculturalists, and female scavengers. Despite the fact that women play a significant role in a wide variety of industries and have also held prominent positions, they continue to face various obstacles in a wide variety of sectors, including the following:

## WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

The study of how well women fare economically is a research subject that has only been around for a short while. During the period of the British Empire, there were not many chances for women to study academic disciplines, engage in professional professions, or find positions in manufacturing. This was especially true for women who wanted to work in manufacturing. After independence, the issue of employment, labor force involvement in industries, and career suggestions for the next generation of workers has been the subject of the highest number of studies that have been published. These topics have been examined in a variety of different ways. These research have concentrated their attention specifically on professional occupations for metropolitan women. According to figures provided by the 1997 Census of Population and Housing, there are now more than 35 million working women around the globe. Women's participation varies greatly throughout

India's rural and urban landscapes for a number of different reasons, including the education levels of various groups, the degree to which they have reached cultural maturity, and other factors

The most significant item that came out of the cenou's in 1971 was the fact that there had been a consistent drop in the number of women who were active in gainful economic activity, especially in organized industry. This was the most important thing that came out of the cenou's in 1971. In the census that was done in 1961, there were 970 females for every 1000 males. But, by the time the census was done in 1971, the ratio had declined to 930 females for every 1000 men. In the year 1971, there were 930 females for every 1000 men in the population. This constant drop has been ascribed to a number of explanations; nevertheless, the only explanation that effectively answers the issue is that women are exposed to universal neglect. This is the only explanation that adequately addresses the problem. The decline is being felt not just in the total employment of women but also in the traditional sectors in which women worked on a large scale before the decline. This is a substantial departure from what occurred in the past. Women are most often seen working in our country's agricultural, textile, and industrial sectors, as well as in mines and plantations.

## **WOMEN AND POLITICS**

According to the material that has been made public, the engagement of women in political life is a phenomenon of relatively recent origin. As a direct consequence of the fight for independence from the British, the everyday woman made her debut in the political arena for the very first time during the British rule. This occurred at the time when people were demanding their freedom. Mahatma Gandhi and a number of other influential people were early pioneers in the movement to integrate women into society. It is astounding that so little study has been done on this historic ascent, which contributed more than any other factor to the shift in women's legal standing in a free India. This is one of the areas in which the lack of research is astounding. Even biographies are few and often only cover a small subset of the available leaders. Notwithstanding the fact that our constitution gives women equal political rights, the number of women elected to the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures has usually been on the decrease. This is the case even if our constitution affords women equal political rights. Because of the excessively high fees, the possibility of being raped or otherwise damaged, and the loss of someone's image, none of the political parties are prepared to sponsor women candidates, and the majority of women elect not to run for office as a result of these factors. Notwithstanding this, a good trend can be seen in which an increasing number of women are utilizing their right to vote in elections. Notwithstanding this, the number of female representatives in houses of parliament has never exceeded one percent of the total number of seats available. Women, especially those with high levels of education, have a very limited understanding of political and civic problems and events; as a consequence, their degree of political awareness is quite low. It is sometimes much easier to find illiterate women who are eager to support a certain cause when they are the target audience. The most depressing thing is the cynical attitude that is widely pervasive among men and women, especially that of educated men and women. This mindset should be abandoned since it is so widespread. Women need to educate themselves and organize themselves in order to become a political force and a pressure group. Only then will they be able to exert their influence. It is very necessary for women's groups to have a substantial part in the process of educating women about the many political problems that are now being discussed.

## **WOMEN AND LEGAL RIGHTS**

despite the fact that our constitution mandates equality in all matters relating to positions in the public sector, this problem will not be addressed. It says that "there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in issues relevant to employment or appointment to any office under the State," and it relates to employment and appointments to state offices. The phrase "any office under the State" is a reference to state positions.

On the other hand, things were much different in our country during that time period. In the year 1989, women were not recognized to be first-class citizens by either society or the law; as a consequence, they had very limited legal rights, if any at all. This was the case despite the fact that women made up half the population. Their status was subordinate to that of males in every conceivable respect. For all of history, this was the situation. The improvement of conditions for women has led to the adoption of a variety of new laws and policies. The purpose of the inheritance legislation is to end discrimination between the rights of male and female children to inherit their parents' property and to put an end to the centuries-old practice of widows being financially dependent on their husbands. Additionally, the legislation aims to end the practice of widows being dependent on their husbands for emotional support.

It is against the law for anybody of either gender to take part in a polygamous marriage according to the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. In accordance with the provisions of the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, and the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956, any adult Hindu, male or female, is permitted to adopt either a son or a daughter. In accordance with the provisions of the Succession Act of 1956, a son and a daughter are each entitled to an equal portion of the property that their parents own. In addition to this, the Factory Act of 1958 and the Plantation Labour Act of 1961 both provide particular measures for the health, safety, and welfare of women who work in mines and plantations. Both of these acts were passed in the United Kingdom. The freedom to recruit women for manual work is not subject to any restrictions of any kind.

In a similar line, the availability of employment for women During night shifts, which begin at seven in the evening and last at six in the morning, is not permitted. These shifts continue from the evening until the morning. There is a limit of 9 hours on the total amount of overtime that may be accumulated. According to the Mines Act, it is against the law to employ women for labor that takes place underground. They now have the right to get the same remuneration for the same amount of work they put in, Given all that has been said up to this point, the fact that the legal system in India places men and women on an equal footing shouldn't come as much of a surprise. However, while a very small percentage of educated women have benefited from those laws at least to some extent, the vast majority of women, who do not have an education and are therefore unable to pursue their rights and enjoy the benefits of equality, are still in the same position as they were fifty years ago. This is because the majority of women do not have an education.

## CONCLUSION

The position of women in British society was marked by a number of substantial obstacles and pervasive inequality during that time period. During this time period, women were relegated to subservient roles and forced to endure the oppression of a strongly patriarchal society. Their responsibilities were limited to the typical range of household chores. They had restricted access to educational resources, less prospects for economic advancement, and fewer political rights. For instance, the freedom of women to vote and participate in democratic processes was a faraway dream until quite recently. This denied them a fundamentally important right. In addition, prevalent societal norms and legislation that were discriminatory often helped to maintain



the subordination of women, which hampered their ability to advance and exercise autonomy. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that in spite of these repressive conditions, a number of trailblazing women made tremendous accomplishments in a variety of professions, contributing to the advancement of education, social reform, and writing, among other things. However, their accomplishments were frequently obscured by the male-centric narrative that was prevalent at the time.

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