

# Ancient Cultural History of India: Contribution of Women – folk.

Swati Ingole

School of Scholars , YTL

## Abstract :-

The Indian history speaks that the women are considered as a divine force but the multi- cultured Indian society placed the women at different positions. Thus there is no uniform status of women in Indian society. The Indian philosophy poses the women with dual character. On the one hand she is regarded as fertile, patient and benevolent but on the other hand she is considered aggressor and represents “shakti”. Any study of society is incomplete without study the status, role and even position of women in it. Women constituted the keystone in the arch of Indian society. No doubt the Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society and their condition was good. Even the women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There was no sati system or early marriage. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the RigVedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities (Nandal and Rajnish, 2014). Indian society based on the spirit that women’s cause is men; they rise or sink together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free. There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a great revolution in the history of women. The evidence is everywhere; the voice of women is increasingly heard in Parliament, courts and in the streets (Sreenivasa, 2006). While women in the West had to fight for over a century to get some of their basic rights, like the right to vote, the Constitution of India gave women equal rights with men from the beginning

## Introduction:

The status of **women in India** has been subject to many changes over the span of recorded Indian history. Their position in society deteriorated early in India's ancient period, Indo-Aryan speaking regions, and their subordination continued to be reified well into India's early modern period. especially in the During the British East India Company rule (1757–1857), and the British Raj (1858–1947), measures aiming at amelioration were enacted, including Bengal Sati Regulation, 1829, Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856, Female Infanticide Prevention Act, 1870, and Age of Consent Act, 1891. The Indian constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex and empowers the government to undertake special measures for them. Women's rights under the Constitution of India mainly include equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination; additionally, India has various statutes governing the rights of women.

Several women have served in various senior official positions in the Indian government, including that of the President of India, the Prime Minister of India, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. However, many women in India continue to face significant difficulties. The rates of malnutrition are exceptionally high among adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women in India, with repercussions for children's health.<sup>[e][11]</sup> Violence against women, especially sexual violence, is a serious concern in India.

## Women in India during British rule:-

During the British Raj many reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagr and Jyotirao Phule fought for the betterment of women. Peary Charan Sarkar, a former student of Hindu College, Calcutta and a member of "Young Bengal", set up the first free school for girls in India in 1847 in Barasat, a suburb of Calcutta (later the school was named Kalikrishna Girls' High School). While this might suggest that there was no positive British contribution during the Raj era, that is not entirely the case. Missionaries' wives such as Martha Mault née Mead and her daughter Eliza Caldwell née Mault are rightly remembered for pioneering the education and training of girls in south India. This practice was initially met with local resistance, as it flew in the face of tradition. Raja Rammohan Roy's efforts led to the

abolition of Sati under Governor-General William Cavendish-Bentinck in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's crusade for improvement in the situation of widows led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Many women reformers such as Pandita Ramabai also helped the cause of women.

Kittur Chennamma, queen of the princely state Kittur in Karnataka,<sup>[13]</sup> led an armed rebellion against the British in response to the Doctrine of lapse. Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Queen of Jhansi, led the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the British. She is now widely considered as a national hero. Begum Hazrat Mahal, the co-ruler of Awadh, was another ruler who led the revolt of 1857. She refused deals with the British and later retreated to Nepal. The Begums of Bhopal were also considered notable female rulers during this period. They were trained in martial arts. Chandramukhi Basu, Kadambini Ganguly and Anandi Gopal Joshi were some of the earliest Indian women to obtain a degree.

In 1917, the first women's delegation met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights, supported by the Indian National Congress. The All India Women's Education Conference was held in Pune in 1927, it became a major organisation in the movement for social change. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed, stipulating fourteen as the minimum age of marriage for a girl. Mahatma Gandhi, himself a victim of child marriage at the age of thirteen, he later urged people to boycott child marriages and called upon young men to marry child widows.

### Independent India

Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving female Prime Minister.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)) equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)) and Article 42. In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

Feminist activism in India gained momentum in the late 1970s. One of the first national-level issues that brought women's groups together was the Mathura rape case. The acquittal of policemen accused of raping a young girl Mathura in a police station led to country-wide protests in 1979–1980. The protest, widely covered by the national media, forced the Government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Indian Penal Code; and created a new offence, custodial rape.

Since alcoholism is often associated with violence against women in India, many women groups launched anti-liquor campaigns in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and other states. Many Indian Muslim women have questioned the fundamental leaders' interpretation of women's rights under the Shariat law and have criticised the triple talaq system (see below about 2017).

Mary Roy won a lawsuit in 1986, against the inheritance legislation of her Keralite Syrian Christian community in the Supreme Court. The judgement ensured equal rights for Syrian Christian women with their male siblings in regard to their ancestral property. Until then, her Syrian Christian community followed the provisions of the Travancore Succession Act of 1916 and the Cochin Succession Act, 1921, while elsewhere in India the same community followed the Indian Succession Act of 1925.

In the 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs. Self-help groups and NGOs such as Self Employment Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in the advancement of women's rights in India. Many women have emerged as leaders of local movements; for example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan

In 1991, the Kerala High Court restricted the entry of women above the age of 10 and below the age of 50 from Sabarimala Shrine, as they were of the menstruating age. However, on 28 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India lifted the ban on the entry of women. It said that discrimination against women on any grounds, even religious, is unconstitutional.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (*Swashakti*). The National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women came was passed in 2001.

In 2006, the case of Imrana, a Muslim rape victim, was highlighted by the media. Imrana was raped by her father-in-law. The pronouncement of some Muslim clerics that Imrana should marry her father-in-law led to widespread protests, and finally Imrana's father-in-law was sentenced to 10 years in prison. The verdict was welcomed by many women's groups and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board.

According to a 2011 poll conducted by the Thomasan Reuters Foundation, India was the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women, India was also noted as the worst country for women among the G20 countries, however, this report has faced criticism for promoting inaccurate perceptions. On 9 March 2010, one day after International Women's day, Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill requiring that 33% of seats in India's Parliament and state legislative bodies be reserved for women. In October 2017 another poll published by Thomson Reuters Foundation found that Delhi was the fourth most dangerous megacity (total 40 in the world) for women and it was also the worst megacity in the world for women when it came to sexual violence, risk of rape and harassment.

The Sexual Harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is a legislative act in India that seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work. The Act came into force from 9 December 2013. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 introduced changes to the Indian Penal Code, making sexual harassment an expressed offence under Section 354 A, which is punishable up to three years of imprisonment and or with fine. The Amendment also introduced new sections making acts like disrobing a woman without consent, stalking and sexual acts by person in authority an offence. It also made acid attacks a specific offence with a punishment of imprisonment not less than 10 years and which could extend to life imprisonment and with fine.

In 2014, an Indian family court in Mumbai ruled that a husband objecting to his wife wearing a kurta and jeans and forcing her to wear a sari amounts to cruelty inflicted by the husband and can be a ground to seek divorce. The wife was thus granted a divorce on the ground of cruelty as defined under section 27(1)(d) of Special Marriage Act, 1954.

On 22 August 2017, the Indian Supreme Court deemed instant tripaltalaq (*talaq-e-biddat*) unconstitutional.

A 2018 poll by Thomson Reuters Foundation termed India as the world's most dangerous country for women. The National Commission for Women and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies rejected the survey for its methodology and lack of transparency.

Also in 2018, the Supreme Court of India struck down a law making it a crime for a man to have sex with a married woman without the permission of her husband.

Prior to November 2018, women were forbidden to climb Agasthyarkoodam. A court ruling removed the prohibition.

## Politics

India has one of the highest number of female politicians in the world. Women have held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime minister Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of opposition. The Indian states Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, <sup>1</sup>Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura have implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs. Majority of candidates in these Panchayats are women. In 2015, 100% of elected members in Kodassery Panchayat in Kerala are women.<sup>[63]</sup> There are currently 16 female chief ministers in India as of 2020.

As of 2018, 12 out of 29 states and the union territory of Delhi have had at least one female Chief Minister.

Currently there are 81 women members and 458 male members in the Indian Parliament which equals 15.3% and 84.97% respectively.

## Culture

The status of women in India is strongly connected to family relations. In India, the family is seen as crucially important, and in most of the country, the family unit is patrilineal. Families are usually multi-generational, with the bride moving to live with the in-laws. Families are usually hierarchical, with the elders having authority over the younger generations and men over women. The vast majority of marriages are monogamous (one husband and one wife), but both polygyny and polyandry in India have a tradition among some populations in India. Weddings in India can be quite expensive. Most marriages in India are arranged

With regard to dress, a sari and salwarkameez are worn by women all over India. A *bindi* is part of a woman's make-up. Despite common belief, the bindi on the forehead does not signify marital status; however, the Sindoor does.

Rangoli is a traditional art very popular among Indian women.

In 1991, the Kerala High Court restricted entry of women above the age of 10 and below the age of 50 from Sabarimala Shrine as they were of the menstruating age. On 28 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India lifted the ban on the entry of women. It said that discrimination against women on any grounds, even religious, is unconstitutional

## Military and law enforcement

The Indian Armed Forces began recruiting women to non-medical positions in 1992. The Indian Army began inducting women officers in 1992.<sup>1</sup> The Border Security Force (BSF) began recruiting female officers in 2013. On 25 March 2017, Tanushree Pareek became the first female combat officer commissioned by the BSF

On 24 October 2015, the Indian government announced that women could serve as fighter pilots in the Indian Air Force (IAF), having previously only been permitted to fly transport aircraft and helicopters. The decision means that women are now eligible for induction in any role in the IAF.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, India announced a decision to allow women to take up combat roles in all sections of its army and navy.

As of 2014, women made up 3% of Indian Army personnel, 2.8% of Navy personnel, and 8.5% of Air Force personnel.<sup>1</sup> As of 2016, women accounted for 5% of all active and reserve Indian Armed forces personnel.

In 1972 Kiran Bedi became the First Lady Indian Police Service Officer and was the only woman in a batch of 80 IPS Officers, she joined the AGMUT Cadre. In 1992 Asha Sinha a 1982 Batch IPS Officer became the First Woman Commandant in the Parliamentary forces of India when she was posted as Commandant, Central Industrial Security Force in Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited. Kanchan Chaudhary Bhattacharya the second Lady IPS Officer of India belonging to the 1973 Batch became the first Lady Director General Of Police of a State in India when she was appointed DGP of Uttarakhand Police. In 2018 an IPS Officer Archana Ramasundaram of 1980 Batch became the first Woman to become the Director General of Police of a Paramilitary Force as DG, Sashastra Seema Bal. In March 2018, Delhi Police announced that it would begin to induct women into its SWAT team

On February 17, 2020, the Supreme Court Of India said that women officers in the Indian Army can get command positions at par with male officers. The court said that the government's arguments against it were discriminatory, disturbing and based on stereotype. The court also said that permanent commission to all women officers should be made available regardless of their years of service. The government had earlier said that women commanders would not be acceptable to some troops.

## Education and economic development

.According to 1992–93 figures, only 9.2% of the households in India were headed by women. However, approximately 35% of the households below the poverty line were found to be headed by women. The female literacy rate in India is less than the male literacy rate. Far fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school, and many girls drop out. In urban India, girls are nearly on a par with boys in terms of education. However, in rural India, girls continue to be less educated than boys. According to the National Sample Survey Data of 1997, only the states of Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy.

According to scholars, the major factor behind improvements in the social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy.

Under the Non-Formal Education programme (NFE), about 40% of the NFE centres in states and 10% of the centres in UTs are exclusively reserved for women. As of 2000, about 300,000 NFE centres were catering to about 7.42 million children. About 120,000 NFE centres were exclusively for girls. According to a 1998 report by the U.S. Department of Commerce, the chief barriers to female education in India are inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities), shortage of female teachers and gender bias in the curriculum (female characters being depicted as weak and helpless).

The literacy rate is lower for women compared to men: the literacy rate is 60.6% for women, while for men it is 81.3%. The 2011 census, however, indicated a 2001–2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2%, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. (population aged 15 or older, data from 2015).

### **Workforce participation**

Contrary to common perception, a large percentage of women in India are actively engaged in traditional and non-traditional work.<sup>1</sup> National data collection agencies accept that statistics seriously understate women's contribution as workers. However, there are far fewer women than men in the paid workforce. In urban India, women participate in the workforce in impressive numbers. For example, in the software industry 30% of the workforce is female.

In rural India in the agriculture and allied industrial sectors, women account for as much as 89.5% of the labour force. In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour. According to a 1991 World Bank report, women accounted for 94% of total employment in dairy production in India.

Women constitute 51% of the total employed in forest-based small-scale enterprises.<sup>1</sup>

India is ahead of the world average on women in senior management.

### **Gender pay gap:**

In 2017, a study by Monster Salary Index (MSI) showed the overall gender pay gap in India was 20 percent. It found that the gap was narrower in the early years of experience.

While men with 0–2 years of experience earned 7.8 percent higher median wages than women, in the experience group of 6–10 years of experience, the pay gap was 15.3 percent. The pay gap becomes wider at senior level positions as the men with 11 and more years of tenure earned 25 percent higher median wages than women.

Based on the educational background, men with a bachelor's degree earned on average 16 percent higher median wages than women in years 2015, 2016 and 2017, while master's degree holders experience even higher pay gap. Men with a four- or five-year degree or the equivalent of a master's degree have on average earned 33.7 percent higher median wages than women.

While India passed the Equal Remuneration Act way back in 1976, which prohibits discrimination in remuneration on grounds of sex. But in practice, the pay disparity still exist.

### **Women-owned businesses:**

One of the most famous female business success stories, from the rural sector, is the Shri MahilaGrihaUdyogLijjatPapad. Started in 1959 by seven women in Mumbai with a seed capital of only Rs.80, it had an annual turnover of more than Rs. 800 crore(over \$109 million) in 2018. It provides employment to 43,000 (in 2018) women across the country.<sup>1</sup>

One of the largest dairy co-operatives in the world, Amul, began by mobilizing rural women in Anand in the western state of Gujarat.

### Notable women in business :-

In 2006, KiranMazumdar Shaw , who founded Biocon, one of India's first biotech companies, was rated India's richest woman. LalitaD.Gupte and KalpanaMorparia were the only businesswomen in India who made the list of the Forbes World's Most Powerful Women in 2006. Gupte ran ICICI Bank India's second-largest bank, until October 2006<sup>1</sup> and Morparia is CEO of JP Morgan India

Shaw remained the richest self-made woman in 2018, coming in at 72nd place in terms of net worth in Forbes's annual rich list. She was the 4th and last female in the list, thereby showing that 96 of 100 the richest entities in the country continued to be male controlled directly or indirectly.

According to the 'Kotak Wealth Hurun – Leading Wealthy Women 2018' list, which compiled the 100 wealthiest Indian women based on their net worth as on 30 June 2018 Shaw was only one of two women, the other being JayshreeUllal, who did not inherit their current wealth from family relatives in the top ten.

However, India has a strong history of many women with inherited wealth establishing large enterprises or launching successful careers in their own rights.

### Conclusion :-

It may thus be concluded that in Vedic India, women did not enjoy an inferior status rather they occupied an honorable place. They had ample rights in the social and the religious fields and limited rights in the economic and the political fields. They were not treated as inferior or subordinate but equal to men. We have honoured our country as our Motherland "Bharat Mata" and our nationalism has grown up from the seed Mantra "VandeMataram". Position of women in society is the index to the standard of social organization. Through this study we come on conclusion that as the women has equal participation in human development. She is half of the human race. But she lack in society. Women are not treated with respect as in the ancient Indian society. Lot of crime against women is seen in modern society.

Constitutional provisions are not sufficient to get the respectable position in society. Some certain changes inside mind-set of women as well as man are required .