

Women as a Weaker Section in Society: An Overview***Dr.PramilaRamani,****(*Assistant Professor, Navrachana University, School of Science and Engineering, VasnaBhaily, Vadodara, Gujarat)**

Abstract:*In India status of women was equal to men during Vedic period but gradually deteriorated. Their condition worsened during medieval period. Now the condition is comparatively better. But they experience different discrimination in different aspects of life. They not only experience discrimination but also experience different types of violence in job, family life, society etc. Different steps are taken by government like passing different types of laws to protect women rights and to raise their status but their efforts are futile. This is partly because of women themselves. If we see history dowry system continued because of women. In marriage mainly women asked dowry for their daughter in law. She failed to understand the truth that she is doing in justice to another woman. They worship goddess Sakthi and praise her power but fail to understand the real power of women. Goddess Shakthi is representation of real power of women. In some cases man treated woman as their inferiors. Most of the societies are patriarchal meaning man considered supreme, higher authority. Want of male child is clearly seen in skewed sex ratio. In certain region, culture, community, caste of our country there is craze of male child and hate of female child is overtly seen. The chance of survival of female child is more than that of male child similarly life expectancy of female is more than that of male. For measuring fertility of a country only female is considered. Only female can enjoy motherhood. Therefore biologically, physically, mentally and emotionally female is very much equal to man. The existing scenario of discrimination, harassment and violence can be totally removed from society by combined efforts of female power and Government.*

Keywords: *Vedic Period, Medieval Period, Discrimination, Goddess Shakthi and Patriarchal.*

1. Introduction

Women were respected during Vedic period and their position was held high. But gradually their position deteriorated. During medieval period it attained culmination. Women experienced different type of harassment during different period in the history. During Mughal period pardha system came into existence they are compelled to cover their head and face. They were not allowed in common gatherings. During their childhood they are dependent on their father after marriage their husband then their son. They are not allowed to live an independent life. They should live a dependent life. Widows are not respected and lived a horrible life. Child marriage was prevalent during this period. Bitter life of young widow who never experienced married life goes beyond our imagination. Polygamy was prevalent and a man remarried as soon as his wife died. Man is allowed to marry even in old age and that too with a young girl. Young girls are compelled to marry a man who is many years older than them in order to hold relation and property. During marriage their concerns were not asked mostly it was only compulsion marriage. Dowry system was prevalent in those days. Sati was also prevalent. Certain community women are forced to do prostitution and they had low dignity in society. Education was not given importance to girls and it was denied after certain age. Ancestral property was not divided equally between male and female child. Women cannot own an individual property. These pitiable conditions prevailed in society mainly because of

- lack of education among girls.
- They did not do any collective efforts to change their situation.
- Women themselves assumed their position in society is justified and correct.
- In many cases women failed to understand they are doing injustice to another women like mother in law asking dowry, harassing daughter in law, ill-treating widow, not concern about poor and destitute women, hated granddaughter, insisting male child etc.,
- They believed in certain unwanted practices and customs thinking that if they do not follow they will be punished by God
- They failed to analyze their pitiable situation critically, logically, practically, analytically, creatively, their belief in authority, narrow mindedness, not having out of box thinking, no transcendental thought, blindly following customs without asking questions, etc., added fire to their situation
- If rarely any women raised any question or trying to change the situation by boldly taking any initiatives others never bothered to encourage them but actually many discouraged them.
- They praised Goddess Shakthi and elaborately celebrated pooja but failed to understand she symbolically represented women power.

In latter period these conditions underwent transition after great efforts of reformer's. Actually there were more male reformers than female reformers. There were some very bold women from higher-class society who took drastic steps to break the monotonic situation. They boldly withstand opposition and achieved success. Their first step is great step to all women kind.

2. Status of Women in Different Religion

Most of the religion treated man and women equally; they never propagated superiority of men over women. In prehistoric period position of women was higher than that of men but this underwent a gradual change when men went outside for gathering food and women stayed at home taking care of children and household work. Religions are thoughts of great men as a reform of social, economical and political condition of society.

i. Position of Women in Islam

(Oxford Islamic Studies Online, 2016) Historical evidence indicates that women contributed significantly to the early development of the Muslim community. Women were the first to learn of Muhammad's initial revelation. They later played an important role in the process of collecting all the revelations from both written and oral sources into a single, authoritative text. Women were entrusted with vital secrets, including the location of Muhammad's hiding place when he was being persecuted and his plans to attack Mecca. The Prophet often consulted women and considered their opinions seriously. His first wife, Khadija, was his chief adviser as well as his first and foremost supporter. His third and youngest wife, A'ishah, was a well-known authority in medicine, history, and rhetoric. At Muhammad's death, the distinguished women of the community were consulted about the choice of his successor. Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (ruled 634 – 644) appointed women to serve as officials in the market of Medina.

(Ibrahim, 1996) Islam encourages the husband to treat his wife well, as the Prophet Muhammad said: {The best among you are those who are best to their wives.} Mothers in Islam are highly honored. Islam recommends treating them in the best way. A man came to the Prophet Muhammad and said, "O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship?" The Prophet said: {Your mother.} The man said, "Then who?" The Prophet said: {Then your mother.} The man further asked, "Then who?" The Prophet said: {Then your mother.} The man asked again, "Then who?" The Prophet said: {Then your father.}

ii. Position of Women in Christianity

(Robinson, 2012) In the first creation story (Genesis 1:27) God is described as creating man, both male and female at the same time: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." 2 This might be interpreted as implying equality between the two genders. But in the second creation story, (Genesis 2:7) God formed only a man: "...the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Realizing that he needed a helper (Genesis 2:18), God marched all of the animals past Adam (Genesis 2:19-20) looking for a suitable animal. Finding none suitable, God created Eve out of one of Adam's ribs. The term "helper" has historically been interpreted as implying an inferior role for Eve, although some modern interpreters believe that the word can mean a companion of equal status. "...the Hebrew word translated "helper" is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament: twenty of these cases refer to help from a superior." (3) In Genesis 2:27, Adam later asserts his authority over Eve by naming her: "...she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." In ancient times, one was believed to have authority over a person or thing by naming it.

iii. Position of Women in Hinduism

In Veda it is clearly written that "Matru devo bhava" meaning let mother be your God. During this period upanayana ceremony was celebrated for women also. After this ceremony they were sent to gurukulam for education. Male and female child were treated equally and education was given to them. Some verses of Rig Veda was written by female scholars. In Ramayana Rama considers Sita as his equal and he respects his mothers equal to his father Dasaratha. Some names of Rama is derived from his wife Sitaviz "Sitapathim", "Janakirama", "Sitarama" etc., Even marriage of Sita and Rama in Ramayanam is referred as "Sitakalyanam". Lord Vishnu's name "Lakshminarayan" derived from Goddess Lakshmi. Son God's name "Adithya" is derived from his mother Adithi. In Mahabharatha Arjuna's name Kounteya is derived from his mother's name Kunthi. There are several examples where the name of male is derived from female either from his mother or his wife. Many slokas reflect the high regard of women.

(Wikipedia, 2016) **Panchakanya** (पञ्चकन्या, pañcakanyā) is a group of five iconic heroines of Hindu epics, extolled in a hymn and whose names are believed to dispel sin when recited. They are Ahalya, Draupadi, Sita or Kunti, Tara and Mandodari. Ahalya, Tara, Mandodari and Sita are from the epic *Ramayana*; while Draupadi and Kunti are from the *Mahabharata*.

ahalyādraupadī sītā tārāmandodarītathā |
pañcakanyāḥsmarennityamaḥāpātakanāśinīḥ ||

English translation

Ahalya, Draupadi, Sita, Tara and Mandodari
One should forever remember the panchakanya who are the destroyers of great sins

Sloka that glorifies five goddess (Ramachander, 2016)

Uma, Usha cha Vaidehi Rema, Gangethipanchakam |
Pratharevasmarennithyamsowbhagyamvardhathesada ||

English translation

Daily early morn,
 If one remembers the five devis,,
 The goddess Uma,
 The goddess of dawn Usha,
 Lord Rama's wife Vaidehi,
 Lord Vishnu's consort Rema,
 And the holy river Ganga,
 His good fortune will daily rise

3. Biological Differences Between Male and Female

(Wikipedia, Sex differences in human physiology, 2016)**Sex differences in human physiology** are distinctions of physiological characteristics associated with either male or female humans. These can be of several types, including direct and indirect. Direct being the direct result of differences prescribed by the Y-chromosome, and indirect being a characteristic influenced indirectly (e.g. hormonally) by the Y-chromosome. **Sexual dimorphism** is a term for the phenotypic difference between males and females of the same species.

i. Sex determination and differentiation

The human genome consists of two copies of each of 23 chromosomes (a total of 46). One set of 23 comes from the mother and one set comes from the father. Of these 23 pairs of chromosomes, 22 are autosomes, and one is a sex chromosome. There are two kinds of sex chromosomes—"X" and "Y". In humans and in almost all other mammals, females carry two X chromosomes, designated XX, and males carry one X and one Y, designated XY.

ii. Size, weight and body shape

- Externally, the most sexually dimorphic portions of the human body are the chest, the lower half of the face, and the area between the waist and the knees.
- Males weigh about 15% more than females, on average. For those older than 20 years of age, males in the US have an average weight of 86.1 kg (190 lbs), whereas females have an average weight of 74 kg (163 lbs).
- On average, men are taller than women, by about 15 cm (6 inches). American males who are 20 years old or older have an average height of 176.8 cm (5 ft 10 in). The average height of corresponding females is 162 cm (5 ft 4in).

iii. Skeleton and Muscular System

Males in general are seen to have denser, stronger bones, tendons, and ligaments. Females in general have lower total muscle mass than males, and also having lower muscle mass in comparison to total body mass; males convert more of their caloric intake into muscle and expendable circulating energy reserves, while females tend to convert more into fat deposits.

iv. Respiratory System

Males typically have larger tracheae and branching bronchi, with about 56% greater lung volume per body mass. They also have larger hearts, 10% higher red blood cell count, higher haemoglobin, hence greater oxygen-carrying capacity. In athletes, the difference in oxygen-carrying capacity between men and women is much less prominent. They also have higher

circulating clotting factors (vitamin K, prothrombin and platelets). These differences lead to faster healing of wounds and higher peripheral pain tolerance.

v. Life Expectancy of Male and Female

(Desjardins, 2004)The biological advantage that women have is taken as a certainty, because the mortality of males is higher than that of females from the very outset of life: during the first year of life, in the absence of any outside influence which could differentiate mortality between the sexes, male mortality is 25 to 30 percent greater than is female mortality. The genetic advantage of females is evident. When a mutation of one of the genes of the X chromosome occurs, females have a second X to compensate, whereas all genes of the unique X chromosome of males express themselves, even if they are deleterious. More generally, the genetic difference between the sexes is associated with a better resistance to biological aging. Furthermore, female hormones and the role of women in reproduction have been linked to greater longevity. Estrogen, for example, facilitates the elimination of bad cholesterol and thus may offer some protection against heart disease; testosterone, on the other hand, has been linked to violence and risk taking. Finally, the female body has to make reserves to accommodate the needs of pregnancy and breast feeding; this ability has been associated with a greater ability to cope with overeating and eliminating excess food.

vi. Tissues and hormones

(Wikipedia, Sex differences in human physiology, 2016)Females typically have more white blood cells (stored and circulating), more granulocytes and B and T lymphocytes. Additionally, they produce more antibodies at a faster rate than males. Hence they develop fewer infectious diseases and succumb for shorter periods.

From the above argument it is very clear that females genetically have more advantage than males especially in the case of life expectancy of female is high than male. Even though the initial argument says that males have more muscle power, height and weight than females. In general considering total biological differences males and females work out to be equal.

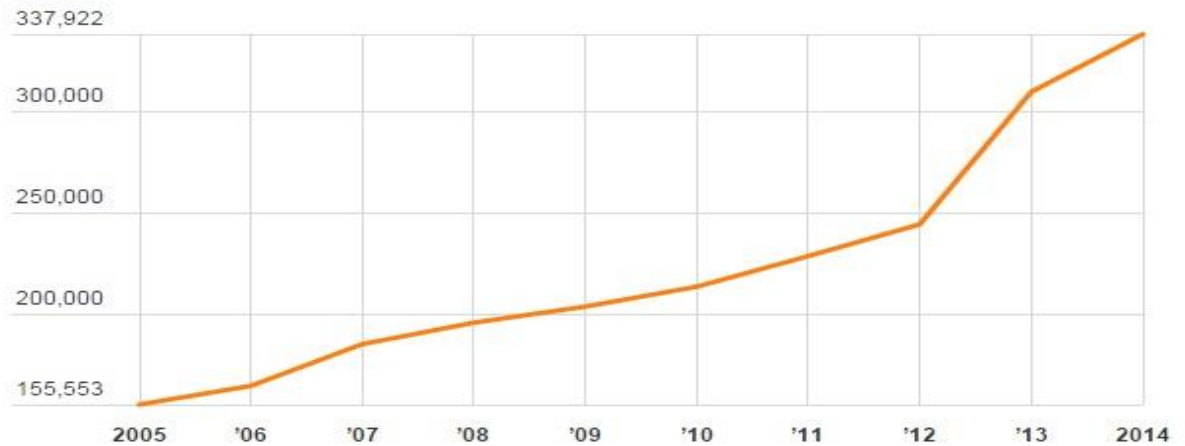
4. Violence against Women

(Mallapur, 2015)Crimes against women have more than doubled over the past ten years, according to latest data released by the National Crime Records Bureau.As many as 2.24 million crimes against women were reported over the past decade: 26 crimes against women are reported every hour, or one complaint every two minutes, reveals an IndiaSpend analysis based on the last decade's data.The semantic meaning of "crime against women" is direct or indirect physical or mental cruelty to women. Crimes directed specifically against women and in which only women are victims are characterised as "crimes against women".

Figure 1: Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Crimes Against Women, 2005-2014

*Figures represent cases reported.

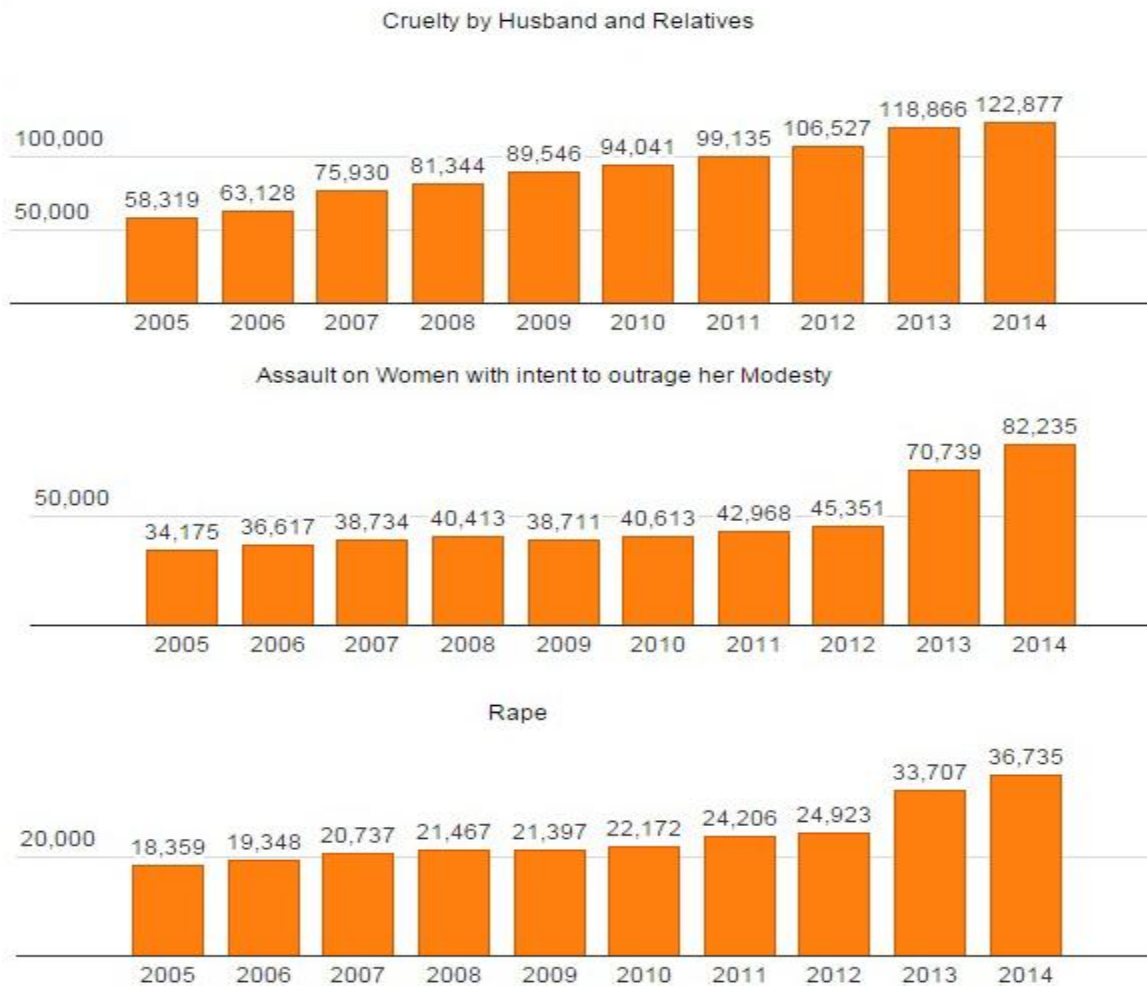


<http://scroll.in/article/753496/crimes-against-women-reported-every-two-minutes-in-india>

Cruelty by husbands and relatives under section 498-A of Indian Penal Code is the major crime committed against women across the country, with 909,713 cases reported over the last 10 years, or 10 every hour.

Figure 2: Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Major Crimes Against Women * Figures represent cases reported.



<http://scroll.in/article/753496/crimes-against-women-reported-every-two-minutes-in-india>

Figures represent cases reported. **Note:** Cruelty by Husband and Relatives (Section 498-A IPC); Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage Her Modesty (Section 354 IPC); Kidnapping & Abduction of Women (Section 363,364,364A, 366 IPC); Rape (Section 376 IPC); Insult to the Modesty of Women (Section 509 IPC); Dowry Deaths (Section 304-B IPC).

From the above data it is clear that crime against women is increasing year after year. Although government is taking many steps and measures to control the crime against women. This scenario will affect the development of women and country as a whole. Therefore we should collectively think and take proper measure to control the situation.

5. National Initiatives for Education of Women

Indian Government focused on women and child development right from pre independence till today. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) focuses mainly on this issue.

i. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW):**Domain Areas**

(NMEW, 2014)Poverty Alleviation and Economic Empowerment of Women, Social Empowerment And Education, Health & Nutrition, Gender Rights, Gender Based Violence and Law Enforcement, Gender Budgeting, Gender Mainstreaming & Gender Audit, Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups and Women in Difficult Circumstances.

ii. Partner Ministries & Departments for programmes related to empowerment of women facilitated by NMEW

(NMEW, 2014)

- Ministry of Human Resource Development
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation
- Ministry of Rural Development
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- Department of Agriculture and Cooperation
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
- Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
- Ministry of Law & Justice
- Ministry of Environment & Forests
- Ministry of Labour & Employment
- Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment

iii. Literacy and Education

(Smt. S. Jeyalakshmi , Shri Inderjeet Singh and Shri Mool Chand Bhaskar, 2012)As per Census 2011, 74.0% of the population is literate comprising 65.5% females and 82.1% males. The incremental increase over Census 2001 of 11.8% for females is higher than 6.8% for males.Among the States/UTs, the female literacy rate is the highest in Kerala at 92.0% followed by Mizoram at 89.4%. The highest male literacy rate is observed in Lakshdweep at 96.1% followed by Kerala at 96.0% as per Census 2011.As per NSS 64th Round, 2007-08, of the currently attending students aged 5-29 years, 69.2% females in primary schools, 65.6% females in the middle schools and 56.8% females in secondary and higher secondary schools were attending Government schools. The share of males is across the board lower at 65.4%, 64.0% and 55.6% in the respective categories.

6. Conclusion

1. Women status was high during Prehistoric period and during Vedic period it was equal to man.
2. Their status gradually deteriorated during Medieval Period.
3. In some cases women themselves are responsible for their lower status than that of men.
4. Child bearing is mainly in the hands of women if they think of changing social thinking they can imbibe in their child right from their tender age.
5. Crime against women is mainly due to lack of education, poverty, lack of discipline, lack of good character formation in childhood, etc this we can to some extent overcome by giving education,

eradication of poverty, building proper character during tender age of the child, giving more importance to spiritual and moral development of the child.

6. Giving priority of mother taking care of child and spending more valuable time with the kid than paid women taking care of the child.

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