

History Of The Culture Of Indian Women

Posted on March 14, 2019

Introduction

The status of Indian women has gone through many significant changes over the past few centuries. In ancient medieval times, their status began to decline slightly. Many reformers played a vital role in raising gender equality and equal rights for women in India throughout history; Indian women's history and culture have been eventful. There are women in modern India now who are serving the nation at higher places like a high court, the prime minister, as leader of the opposition and chief ministers. Under the constitution of India, women's rights include many things like gender equality, freedom of speech, dignity, and respect for women and their basic rights. However, women in India have been facing numerous serious problems regarding gender inequality and sexual abuse for years.

Ancient Indian Women's History

During the Vedic culture in Indian history, women enjoyed the equal rights of men in society. They had the freedom to select their life partner, who was called swayamvar. The women also took an active part in the various administrative jobs.

Medieval Period

In the medieval period, the Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought many changes to the Indian women's culture and history. This period brought deterioration of women as a whole when Muslim rules introduced the purdah system; Kshatriya rulers also practised polygamy. The Islamic principles and prospects brought the concept of faith and justice among women according to the provisions of sharia. The Muslim women were supposed to wear a niqab or burqa and were not allowed to go outside alone without their guardians. They also have a share of their inherited wealth according to Islamic laws.

Women are upholders of traditional lore, and Āpastamba tells his audience that they should learn some customs from women (A 2.15.9; 2.29.11).

Important Historical Practices Throughout History

Sati and Pardah were the most important practices related to women in the history of India. Sati is an old and defunct custom in which the widow of a man was immolated on her husband during his

funeral. Widow used to do this voluntarily. Among various Muslim communities, purdah is the practice that enables women to cover their faces and body entirely for modesty and religious dignity.

The British Rule

Many women reformers fought for gender equality and women empowerment during British rule. In 1829, a law was passed for the abolition of Sati custom. The noble female ruler during this period was Begums of Bhopal, who was also trained in martial arts. Later, in 1947, India's independence brought women into many fields, such as education, sports, politics, culture, and science. Indira Gandhi served as the prime minister of India for 15 years in the 20th century. Indian women participate the most in politics in the world.

Family

The culture and status of Indian women are strongly related to the family and family structure; mostly, a man is ahead of the family, with his wife playing a supporting role. Families in India are multigenerational when the bride moves out of her house and lives with the in-laws. Families in India are hierarchical when the elders are prominent in the family. The vast majority of men and women get married to produce children and raise a family; marriages can be quite expensive in India when they are arranged according to traditional celebrations in culture.

The most popular dress of Indian women throughout history has been the sari; it is a piece of fabric that is made especially for women to wrap around their bodies to represent Indian culture. Bindi is another piece of makeup that women in India frequently use to describe married women, along with sindoor. Among Indian women, the traditional art of Rangoli is still trendy in contemporary India. The women of India represent an Indian way of life, portraying tender expressions.

Crimes Against Women

There have been many crimes against women in India over the centuries, including rape, dowry killings, forced prostitution and honour killings. More crimes were recorded in the 20th century by police. Statistics also show evidence that crimes against rural Indian women are still increasing. Many women become victims of acid throwing, and child marriages have been prevalent in the Indian culture to this day. Widows were condemned to live a life of agony in India with shaved heads, and they were banned from the community of social life to live in isolation. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 brought some changes in this culture, while 47% of Indian women were married before 18.

Domestic violence has been an issue in Indian women's history. ("What Underlies Violence against Women and Girls in South Asia") The statistics show that 70% of women in India become victims of

domestic violence who suffer from various physical and psychological diseases due to domestic violence. It is still not handled as a complaint or proper crime in Indian culture, as women are treated according to their race, class and gender biases. The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed by the government of India in 1961 to reduce the cases of dowry killing. Some women also die before reaching adulthood as compared to males. In the northern regions of India, the honor killings have been a tradition when her family kills a girl due to marrying a man of her choice. Another most common crime against Indian women is rape, where New Dehli city has the highest rate of rape incidents and sexual harassment of women. In 1856, the Hindu Women's Remarriage Act was also passed to empower women's rights.

Workplace Life

The caste system has influenced Indian women and their ability to do jobs over history; it goes thousands of years back. The fact is that the more educated a woman is, the more the wage gap that hindered many Indian women from advancing in their careers. More women are dropping out of the labour force in India than ever before due to some reasons, including gender biases and inequality. ("Women in the Labour Force: India") Working outside the home brings many positive developments in Indian women's lives who can make decisions on their own. Gender equality promotes economic growth, but the quality of jobs offered to women, compared to men, is of low quality. A survey reveals that 51% of women would like to work and support their families, while 93% of unemployed women were looking for a job. This shows a higher tendency and interest towards job attitudes in Indian women. By 2030, India will become the largest economy in the world, and it cannot leave its women's population behind to stay at home and not support the economy. The industries where women play the most important role in the economy are education, technology, and telecommunications.

Education

Throughout history, Vedic women have been playing their part in education and had greater access to education. During the British period, a great interest in women developed in school due to various socio-religious movements. The literacy rate of women has increased over the past two centuries, which will empower them to seek gender equality in society. Women have been trying to earn money according to economic conditions in the past, which is a step towards achieving their goals. More educated women can raise better children and guide them in a better way of life. There are some barriers, however, for women to achieve their educational goals due to poverty and male traditions of housekeeping in specific areas.

Religion

Religion has been somewhat of a barrier in the development of the social lives of women because the

wealth accumulates into the hands of males. ("Religion as a Barrier to Women's Empowerment") The girls and their birth have been highly unfavorable in the families, a general notion that religion provides the basis for gender inequality resulted in the elimination of female infant birth. A girl child still belongs to her husband and is treated like a commodity in the family. Science and technological progress have brought much less benefit to the status of women in the social dimension. Society has gone through rapid changes, but a religious distinction exists when the rights of women are compared to men.

Due to different religions in the subcontinent, the Indian woman situation has become complex. One religion influences another, which promotes cultural hybridization. When a woman of the lower class marries a man of the upper class, she has to go through humiliation and disgrace. The Indian court can see this issue as a social injustice or social inequality. Women have been a constant victim of religious oppression in India, where the question of equality is a fundamental characteristic of their social status. The oppressive religious structures work against women in rural areas, which promotes the notion that religion works against the freedom of women. There is a need to adjust the social obligations in the light of legitimate religious laws to integrate the benefits of religion into the lives of women. Religious barriers faced by women hinder them from achieving their rights.

References

1. Religion as a barrier to women's empowerment – The Hindu. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/religion-as-a-barrier-in-womens-empowerment/article5364865.ece>. Accessed 2018.
2. Marital rape immunity in India: historical anomaly or ... Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10611-017-9705-3>. Accessed 2018.
3. What Underlies Violence against Women and Girls in South ... Available at: https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/ref/10.1596/978-1-4648-0171-6_ch3. Accessed 2018.
4. Special Issue: Gender and Health – PubMed Central (PMC). Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4306759/>. Accessed 2018.
5. Empowerment Of Women Religious. Streevaniorg. 2018. Available at: <http://www.streevani.org/empower.php>. Accessed March 31, 2018.
6. Women in the Labour Force: India | Catalyst. Available at: <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-labour-force-india>. Accessed 2018.
7. Statistical Overview of Women in the Workforce | Catalyst.