



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## PROBLEMS AND IMPROVING STATUS OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

**Dr. SURENDRA. K**

Assistant Professor in Sociology

Shri G.R. Gandhi Arts Shri. Y.A. Patil Commerce  
& Shri.M.P. Doshi Science Degree College INDI.  
DistVijayapura State Karnataka.

### Abstract

The status of women began to decline in the medieval period. During this period, there was prevalence of the Muslim era. This period brought about changes in the lives of women to a major extent. They were regarded as inferior as compared to their male counterparts. The birth of the girl children were not appreciated. During this period, the women were required to experience number of problems. The various problems that were experienced by women, which led to a decline in their status were, child marriage, purdah system, sati, jauhar and restriction on the education of the girls. Furthermore, there were implementation of factors, which led to improvements in their status. These are, education, employment opportunities and up-gradation of skills and abilities, which would render a significant contribution in bringing about improvements in their lives. Therefore, it is necessary for the leaders and reforms to formulate measures, which would contribute in eliminating the problems and barriers, experienced by women. The main areas that are taken into account in this research paper are, major problem experienced by women in medieval India, factors highlighting the status of women in medieval India, and improvements made in the status of women in medieval India.

**Keywords:** Communities, Deprivation, Improvements, Medieval India, Problems, Status, Women

### INTRODUCTION:

The medieval period begins with the entry of Muslim invaders in India. The span of the period was about 500 years from the era of the Delhi sultanate to Mughal era (Status of Women in Medieval India, n.d.). The status of women began to decline in the Muslim era. This period brought about changes in the lives of women to a major extent. They were regarded as inferior to their male counterparts. The birth of the girl children were not appreciated. In some communities, there were prevalence of the practices of female foeticide and female infanticide. Female foeticide is the practice of killing of the girl children inside the womb, before they are born. On the other hand, the practice of female infanticide is killing of the girl

children after they are born. These are regarded as heinous practices, which indicated that the birth of the girl children was not appreciated. Furthermore, there are other practices as well, which signify the deprived status of women, i.e. sati, and child marriage. One of the major practices that was prevalent was, widows were allowed to remarry.

During this period, preference was given to the male members. It was believed that males are assets of the family. If their parents paid wholehearted attention on various factors and promote their upbringing in a satisfactory manner, they will be able to augment their competencies and abilities. When the male members will be educated, they will render an important contribution in promoting well-being of their families and communities. Hence, males were encouraged to acquire education. On the other hand, girls were regarded as liabilities. They were trained in terms of implementation of household responsibilities and taking care of the needs and requirements of family members. They were discouraged from attending schools, as it was believed that in their marital homes, they will not be given the opportunities to make use of their educational qualifications, skills and abilities. If they will carry out the household responsibilities and take care of the needs and requirements of family members in a satisfactory manner, they will be able to prove that their parents have taught them the values that are needed in promoting well-being of their families.

The girls experienced discriminatory treatment. But they formed the viewpoint that they should be provided with education as well as equal rights and opportunities as compared to their male counterparts. If their parents paid wholehearted attention on various factors and promote their upbringing in an adequate manner, the girls will be able to augment their competencies and abilities. When the girls will be educated, they will render a significant contribution in promoting well-being of their families and communities. Hence, the girls aspired to acquire education as well as lead to up-gradation of their skills and abilities. The practice of child marriage was not appreciated. It was comprehensively believed that this would deprive them from acquisition of education as well as participation in various tasks and activities. The girls took pleasure in the implementation of household responsibilities and taking care of the needs and requirements of family members. But they aspired to acquire education as well as participate in social, cultural, economic and religious activities. Gradually, changes took place in the viewpoints of the individuals and girls and women were encouraged to participate in various tasks and activities.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN STATUS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA**

It has been understood that in medieval India, the status of women began to decline. The major problem that has been experienced by women was discriminatory treatment (Nitisha, n.d.). Within the households, the purdah system was prevalent. Due to this system, they were deprived of public observation. All individuals, irrespective of their communities, categories, and backgrounds aspire to sustain their living conditions in a well-organized manner and enrich their overall quality of lives. In order to achieve these goals, they need to socialize and interact with others. When the women will be confined within the enclosures, screens, curtains and purdah, it is apparent that they will experience number of problems and barriers within the course of sustenance of their living conditions in an efficient manner. The seclusion of

women from public observation was recognized and is one of the major barriers experienced by them within the course of their progression. Therefore, deprivation of women from public observation was the major problem experienced by women in medieval India.

In order to live an efficient life and promote good health and well-being, the individuals need to meet the three basic requirements of food, clothing and shelter. The women were discouraged from acquisition of education and participation in various types of employment opportunities. Hence, they were dependent upon the male members of the households. In natal homes, women are dependent upon their fathers and brothers. Whereas, in marital homes, husbands and sons are responsible for fulfilling the needs and requirements of the women of the house. When the women need to participate in any task or activity, they were meant to seek permission from their fathers in natal homes and husbands in marital homes. Though the women formed the viewpoint that their fathers and husbands will not encourage them to participate in any task or activity, which would prove to be unfavourable to them. Therefore, women followed the rules and obey the instructions of the male members of their families. As they provided them all the resources and materials, which are needed to sustain their living conditions in an effective manner.

Education was regarded as an instrument, which renders an important contribution in leading to up-gradation of knowledge, skills and abilities to sustain one's living conditions in an effective manner. When women will be educated, they will be self-sufficient and will not be dependent upon the male members. Furthermore, they will be able to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate. The girls were discouraged from attending schools, as it was believed that in their marital homes, they will not be able to make use of their educational qualifications, skills and abilities in any manner. Hence, when women were not educated, they experienced number of problems and barriers within the course of the implementation of various tasks and activities as well as in participating in the decision making functions. Therefore, it is apparently understood, when the women will not be able to generate awareness in terms of methods, approaches and strategies that are needed in living effectual lives, they will have to experience number of problems and challenges. To provide solutions to these problems, it is of utmost significance to encourage the acquisition of education among women.

### **OBJECTIVE OF STUDY:**

To study the historical background of the women status.

To understand the problems of women in medieval india.

To study the improvement of status of women in other activities.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This is a theoretical research paper, where secondary information produced by different authors and researchers has been used. For obtaining necessary information, various books, magazines, journals, periodicals and different websites have been explored by the researcher which has been mentioned in the reference section.

**PROBLEMS HIGHLIGHTING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL INDIA**

The medieval period was the period from 500 A.D. to 1500 A.D. It proved to be disappointing to a major extent for the Indian women (Status of Women in the Medieval India, 2020). The main reason being, their status deteriorated during this period. Medieval India was not the women's age, it was supposed to be the dark age for the women. When foreign conquerors like Muslims invaded India they brought with them their own culture. For them women was the sole property of her father, brother or husband and she does not have any will of her own. The women were meant to follow the rules established by the male members of the household. They were not meant to make any decisions and all the decisions were taken by the male members of the household. The viewpoint was prevalent among the members that women are subordinates and they should be made to abide by the rules, principles and values. Therefore, it can be stated, a vital factor that led to a decline in the status of women is, they were regarded as inferior to men.

Women were encouraged to remain in purdah (veil). They were supposed to keep their faces covered. Due to the prevalence of the purdah system, they were not given the freedom to live their lives in accordance to their wishes and desires. The women were not supposed to move freely. If they were to go out of their homes, they were accompanied by others. They were discouraged from participating in social, cultural, economic and political functions. In rural communities, agriculture was the major occupation of the individuals. Apart from agriculture and farming practices, the women were encouraged to participate in the production of artworks, handicrafts, pottery making, silk weaving, food production, rearing of the livestock and so forth. From the stage of early childhood, they were trained in terms of these activities. As when a family has a business of production of artworks, their girls can assist them. Therefore, during the medieval period, the status of women began to decline, but one of the positive factors is, they were trained in terms of all areas in their natal homes, which would enable them to live enriched lives. The various problems were experienced by women, which led to a decline in their status and these are, child marriage, purdah system, sati, jauhar and restriction on the education of the girls. These are stated as follows:

**Child Marriage:**

Child marriage is the marriage which takes place when both girls and boys are below 18 years of age. The birth of the girls was not appreciated. From the stage of early childhood, they were trained in terms of implementation of household responsibilities and taking care of the needs and requirements of family members. The practice of child marriage was regarded as one of the major societal problems, which deprived the girls from participation in various tasks and activities, which would contribute efficaciously in bringing about improvements in their overall quality of lives. The childhood age is the age of getting enrolled in educational institutions to acquire education, play, get engaged in leisure and recreational activities, and participate in social, religious and cultural activities. When the girls are married off at the childhood stage, they are deprived of participating in these activities. Furthermore, they are meant to put into practice the household responsibilities and take care of the needs and requirements of the family members. From the childhood stage, the girls are required to hold the materials that are utilized in the preparation of meals, instead of books. This is unfortunate and is regarded as one of the major barriers

within the course of progression of girls. Therefore, child marriage is regarded as one of the major problems, which deprives the girls of their childhood.

### **Purdah System**

Women were encouraged to remain in purdah (veil). They were supposed to keep their faces covered. Due to the prevalence of the purdah system, they were not given the freedom to live their lives in accordance to their aspirations and wishes. The women were not allowed to move freely. They were encouraged to remain within the four walls of the household. The purdah system signifies the seclusion of women from the public observation, by the use of the clothing as well as through the high-walled enclosures, screens and curtains with homes. The practice of purdah was originated in the Persian culture and have been acquired by Muslims during the Arab conquest of what is at present Iraq in the seventh century A.D. Muslim domination of northern India in turn influenced by the practice of religion of Hinduism. Purdah observance was strictly adhered to and was widespread among the Muslim minority. Since then, this system has disappeared from the Hindu society. Though, in the present existence as well, it is prevalent in Islamic countries (Purdah, 2020). Therefore, through the prevalence of this system one can understand that when women will be deprived of public observation, they will experience problems within the course of their progression.

### **Sati:**

Sati was the practice of burning the widows alive on the funeral pyre of their husbands. In accordance to the ancient Hindu customs, the practice of sati symbolised closure to the marriage. It is a voluntary act, in which the women followed their husbands to the afterlife. This practice indicates the sign of being a dutiful wife. The status of widows was in a deteriorated condition. Hence, they were required to give up their lives on the funeral pyre of their husbands. Between the years 1815 to 1818, there were number of incidents of sati in Bengal. They numbered from 378 to 839. In some cases, it was believed that women were meant to assist and support their husbands after death as well, hence, the practice of sati was prevalent. But one of the important aspects that was identified was, when women practiced sati, they did not depict any form of fear and apprehensiveness. They possessed the confidence to put into practice this act. But this practice killed thousands of women. Women aspired to live and did not want to give up their lives on the funeral pyre of their husbands. In other words, they did not wish to bring an end to their lives. Therefore, one is able to understand that the practice of sati was regarded as one of the major problems and one of the impediments within the course of progression of women.

### **Jauhar:**

Jauhar was the Hindu practice of mass self-immolation of women, or otherwise execution by their husbands, fathers or brothers. This practice was observed in the northwest regions of India. This practice was commonly recognized during the battles between the Hindu Rajput kingdoms and Muslim armies. The practice of jauhar originated from the sati ritual. The term jauhar often connotes with the jauhar immolation and the saka ritual. During the jauhar ritual, Rajput women committed suicide with their children and

valuables in the massive fire. The main aspect of this practice is to avoid abuse and detention in the face of the military defeat and capture. Jauhar by the Hindu kingdoms have been documented by the Muslim historians of the Delhi sultanate and the Mughal Empire. The practice of Jauhar was the Indian rite of collective self-immolation, performed by women, children and other dependents of a besieged fort or town. When it was felt that holding out against the enemy was no longer possible and that death appeared the only honourable way out of the impasse. The practice of jauhar would be followed by the surviving fighting men of the encircled fort charging defiantly into the battlefield one last time (Jauhar, 2020). Therefore, the practice of jauhar is also regarded as a barrier within the course of living effectual lives.

### **Restriction on the Education of the Girls:**

The girls were discouraged from attending schools and acquiring education. The reason being that when they will attend schools, they will not be able to acquire training in terms of implementation of various types of household responsibilities. The main reason being, it was believed by their parents that in their marital homes, they will not be given the opportunities to make use of their educational qualifications, skills and abilities. Acquisition of education required expenses. The parents formed the viewpoint that if they spend their financial resources on the education, they would be wasting them, hence, they arrange finances and make savings for the marriage of their girls. In educational institutions, the students are not only provided with training in terms of academic subjects and lesson plans, but they are provided with information in terms of morals, ethics, norms and values as well. These would contribute efficiently in bringing about improvements in their overall quality of lives. In addition, training is provided in terms of extra-curricular and creative activities as well. Therefore, it is well-understood, when there will be restriction on the education of the girls, it is regarded as one of the major problems within the course of their progression.

### **IMPROVEMENTS MADE IN THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL INDIA**

It is comprehensively understood that effective growth and progression of the families, communities and nation as a whole cannot take place, when women will not be treated with respect and courtesy. They should be provided with the opportunities to improve and enhance their lives. When women are allowed to express their viewpoints and perspectives, they will be able to render an important contribution in leading to effective growth and development of the families, communities and nation as a whole. The individuals within homes and the communities need to understand that women should not be confined within the households or remain in purdah, but public observation should be encouraged. The factors that highlight that improvements are made in the status of women are stated as follows:

**Acquisition of Education** – Through acquisition of education, the individuals will be able to augment their knowledge and understanding in terms of ways and procedures that are necessary to live their lives in a well-ordered manner and achieve personal and professional goals. Hence, when women will be educated, they will render an important contribution in promoting well-being of their families and communities. Thus, it was necessary to encourage women to acquire education. Therefore, it is comprehensively understood that through acquisition of education, one will not only augment knowledge

and skills, but it is regarded as an important factor that highlight that improvements are made in the status of women.

**Participation in Employment Opportunities** – In rural communities, agriculture and farming practices were the major occupation of the individuals. Apart from agriculture and farming practices, the women were encouraged to participate in the production of artworks, handicrafts, pottery making, silk weaving, food production, rearing of the livestock and so forth. From the stage of early childhood, the girls were encouraged to participate in these activities, so they can contribute in promoting well-being of their families and communities. Therefore, one can understand well that participation in employment opportunities is regarded as an important factor that highlight that improvements are made in the status of women.

**Participation in Decision Making Processes** – In one lives, there are number of factors in terms of which individuals need to make decisions, i.e. education, employment opportunities, management of the household, child development and so forth. When the women will be allowed to express their viewpoints and perspectives, when they will be listened to by their male counterparts, and they will be able to bring about improvements in their status. Therefore, it can be stated, participation in decision making processes in personal and professional lives is regarded as a factor that highlight that improvements are made in the status of women on a large scale.

**Participation in Various Activities** – Participation of women in social, cultural, economic and religious activities is regarded as one of the indispensable factors that rendered a significant contribution in bringing about improvements in their status. These need to be encouraged in natal as well as in marital homes. The main reason being, when they are participating in these activities, they will not only augment knowledge, skills and aptitude, but they are able to contribute in an efficacious manner in enhancing their status. Therefore, it can be stated, participation in social, cultural, economic and religious activities is regarded as a factor that highlight that improvements are made in the status of women on a large scale.

**Encouraging Empowerment Opportunities** – In encouraging empowerment opportunities, there are various factors that need to be taken into account, i.e. acquisition of education, participation in employment opportunities, participation in decision making processes, participation in various activities, upgrading skills and abilities, expressing their ideas and viewpoints, socializing with others, promoting public observation and so forth. When the women are encouraged to participate in various tasks and functions, they will encourage empowerment opportunities and bring about improvements in their overall quality of lives. Therefore, one can understand well that encouraging empowerment opportunities will contribute significantly in bringing about improvements in the status of women.

**Curbing the Societal Problems** – The various problems were experienced by women, which led to a decline in their status and these are, child marriage, purdah system, sati, jauhar and restriction on the education of the girls. It is of utmost significance to curb these problems to up-grade the status of women. There was the need to implement reforms and formulate measures that would contribute in curbing the societal problems. When these will be curbed, effective growth and development of women will take place.

Therefore, one can acknowledge that curbing the societal problems is a key factor in highlighting that improvements are made in the status of women.

**Promoting Public Observation** – The purdah system indicated the isolation of women from the public observation, by the use of the clothing as well as high-walled enclosures, screens and curtains within homes. The abolishing of the purdah system will contribute significantly in promoting public observation. When the women are encouraged to participate in public, they will encourage empowerment opportunities and bring about improvements in their overall quality of lives. Therefore, one can acknowledge that promoting public observation is a fundamental factor in highlighting the point that improvements are brought about in the status of women belonging to all communities, categories and backgrounds.

**Encouraging Up-gradation of Communication Skills** – It is apparent that all individuals aspire to communicate and express their viewpoints and perspectives. When women will be consulted and will be provided with the opportunities to express their ideas, they will be able to up-grade their communication skills. When they will be listened to by their male counterparts as well as other women, they will be able to bring about improvements in their status. Therefore, it can be stated, encouraging up-gradation of communication skills will contribute not only in bringing about improvements in the status of women, but also help them in forming a social circle.

**Generating information in terms of Managerial Functions** – Generating information in terms of managerial functions of planning, organizing, directing, leading, co-ordinating and controlling are regarded as significant in bringing about improvements in the status of women. Within as well as outside the homes, when women will be provided with the opportunities to do well and enrich not only their job duties, but overall quality of lives, they will be well-equipped in terms of managerial functions. These are put into practice in the implementation of household responsibilities as well as other tasks and functions, i.e. employment opportunities, pursuance of education, implementation of household responsibilities and so forth. Therefore, generating information in terms of managerial functions prove to be worthwhile and effective to women in bringing about improvements in their status.

**Practicing Creative Skills** – The women should be encouraged to practice creative skills, i.e. production of artworks, handicrafts, pottery making, silk weaving, food production, playing of musical instruments, singing, dancing, role plays and so forth. When the women will focus upon honing of their skills and abilities in terms of one or more of these areas, they will be able to make use of them in promoting better livelihoods opportunities. When one is able to augment their competencies and abilities needed to sustain their living conditions in an effectual manner, they will be able to bring about improvements in the status. Therefore, it can be stated, practicing creative skills is a crucial factor that highlight that improvements are made in the status of women.



## Conclusion

The medieval period begins with the entry of Muslim invaders in India. The span of the period was about 500 years from the era of the Delhi sultanate to Mughal era. The status of women began to decline in the Muslim era. They were required to experience number of problems, which gave rise to impediments within the course of their effective growth and development. This period brought about changes in the lives of women to a major extent. The women were regarded as inferior as compared to their male counterparts. The various problems were experienced by women, which led to a decline in their status and these were, child marriage, purdah system, sati, jauhar and restriction on the education of the girls. The factors that highlight that improvements are made in the status of women are, acquisition of education, participation in employment opportunities, participation in decision making processes, participation in various activities, encouraging empowerment opportunities, curbing the societal problems, promoting public observation, encouraging up-gradation of communication skills, generating information in terms of managerial functions and practicing creative skills. Finally, it can be stated, the status of women declined in medieval India, but with the introduction of reforms by rulers and leaders, improvements were brought about in their status.

## References:

1. Mamta Rao. 3rd, 2012, ed. Law Relating to Women & Children (Paperback). pp. 1– 640. ISBN 9350286610. women and the protection provided under various criminal, personal and labour laws in India.
2. Jauhar Indian Rite. (2020). Retrieved January 06, 2021 from Britannica.com
3. Nitisha. (n.d.). The Position of Women during the Medieval Period. Retrieved January 06, 2021 from yourarticlelibrary.com
4. Biswas, J. and Singh Verma, J. 2009. "Tackling child undernutrition in India: Governance challenges need more attention." IDS Bulletin. Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 111–124.
5. K.M. Ashraf, Life and Condition of the People of Hinduism, 3rd Edition, 1988, pp.165-166; See Also: Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, The Making of Early Medieval India, New Delhi, 1999.