

TRANSITION OF WOMEN IN HISTORY: AN ILLUSION OR REALITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the "Transition of Women in History: An Illusion or Reality". Before Independence, women in India were considered inferior to men in Indian society. But with the passage of time, it has evolved remarkably through the struggle of women like Indira Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and Kiran Bedi. It is essential for a woman to have her own individuality because empowering women is an inevitable tool for advanced development and reducing poverty. Through the advancement, literature and other platforms, society has gradually changed but that does not change the fact that Indian society is still suppressing women. Women still feel pressurized by the environment and people around them. The patriarchal norms still exist along with low literacy rates, low wages, and low financial status and this has changed compared to the past, but the result is not satisfactory. There is a scope for improvement in the concerned area.

Keywords: *struggle, inferior, patriarchal, empower, women, India, dowry.*

INTRODUCTION

The Indian writer Sudha Murty has raised tremendous awareness for women's rights but numerous day to day cases show how women are tortured in marriage and still expected to stay in it. This research explores the status of women, the treatment society gives to women, their position in society, family, and workplace, and evaluates the position of contemporary Indian women. Recently, India has highly progressed in political, economic, social, literature, and many other fields. Considering the literature, India has reached new heights. This research paper takes into account women writers and their literature. The 21st-century Indian women writers have given new wings to literature by portraying women as strong, independent, and someone who can take a stand for themselves. She is equal to men and is aware of her rights. This paper observes the same at the ground level by conducting a questionnaire which targeted different women of society to know the actual position of the women asking them about the harsh realities and assessing whether the change is real or just an illusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

India, since the time of Mahabharat, had extraordinary characters like Draupadi, Kaikeyi, Gargi, and Ahalya; these women fought for their rights despite the patriarchal society which prevailed in Vedic times. Shakuntala, the daughter of Menaka, took her stand when her husband Dushyant rejected her. Women's status has been high and respectable since Vedic times. Razia Sultan, the first woman Mughal ruler, fought against all the odds and claimed her throne rightfully. Rani Lakshmbai was one of the first female warriors who revolted against the Britishers. Female pioneers like Indira Gandhi also known as the "Margaret Thatcher" of India, Sarojini Naidu, a devoted fighter of the Indian freedom struggle alongside Mahatma Gandhi; Kiran Bedi, the first Indian woman to join Indian Police Service in 1972 laid an exemplary foundation for other women in the country. At the same time *sati pratha*, female infanticide, dowry, child marriage, and illiteracy still existed in India.

With Independence, there has been a great change in the thoughts and ideas of people which can be seen in literature. From a literature point of view, we see raising voices of women in books like Breast Stories and Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi and When I Hit You: or A Portrait of The Writer as a Young Wife, literature has advanced by presenting strong women characters in books like Lifting the Veil by Ismat Chughtai, All the Lives We Never Lived by Anuradha Roy, Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Chup: Breaking the Silence About India's Women by Deepa Narayan, Seeing like a Feminist by Nivedita Menon, Mapping Dalit Feminism: Towards an Intersectional Standpoint by Anadita Pan, Law, and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India by Flavia Agnes, Writing Caste/Writing Gender Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies by Sharmila Rege, Those Magnificent Women, and Their Flying Machine by Minnie Vaid, Why Loiter? By Shilpa Phadke, What is Patriarchy by Kamla Bhasin, To Hell With You Mitro by Krishna Sobti, The Vigil by Sarah Joseph, Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back! By Priya Kuriyan, Interrogating Motherhood by Jasodhara Bagchi, Women Contesting Culture: Changing Frames of Gender Politics in India by Kavita Panjabi, Paromita Chakravarti and so on and so forth. Also, a recent Times of India reported a dowry-disputed case where Arti Devi died when she was thrown from the first floor by her in-laws. On average, India reports 20 dowry deaths every day according to Government Data Report 2017-2021.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research has been conducted to raise awareness towards the problems faced by women in Indian society:

- To know the position of women in various fields like social and work life.
- To know the behavioural treatment towards women.
- To know the social customs still prevailing in India.
- To show the ground reality of Indian society.

SCOPE

The scope of this research paper addresses patriarchal norms that still exist along with issues such as low literary rates, low wages, and low financial status in addition to the treatment given by society to women at the workplace and in day-to-day life. Further, a survey is conducted to know the status of the same by asking 25 questions to women who fall in the age group of 18 - 50, in order to know the actual status of women at ground level. The following sample inquiry was concluded within a period of 4 months. This study talks about how women are disempowered. The fears women face because of the Indian society many times makes them silent against all these issues and in case if they take a stand for themselves, it is not easily accepted by the people. This research paper takes into consideration problems such as body shaming, gender inequality, domestic abuse, and more in urban areas. The questionnaire was filled out by college going girls, working women, and housewives to know the exact scenario.

HYPOTHESIS

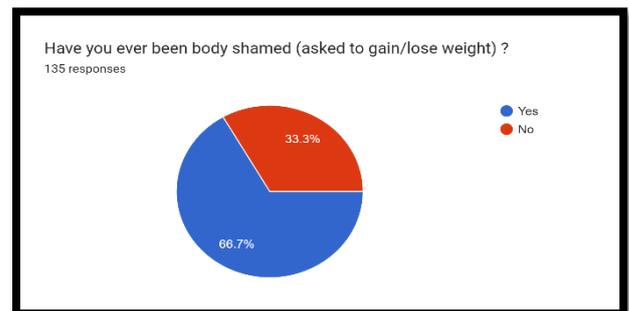
- H1: Changing trends of conventional practices in India.
H2: Women's status has got changed in India over the period.

Research Methodology

This is quantitative research carried out by a questionnaire which was answered by 135 Indian women from the age group of 18 - 50 years in Surat, Gujarat to know the valid numerical data supporting our research with the help of data analysis and further aiming to represent a qualitative result. The type of questions used are close-ended questions which were answered anonymously to maintain the privacy of respondents.

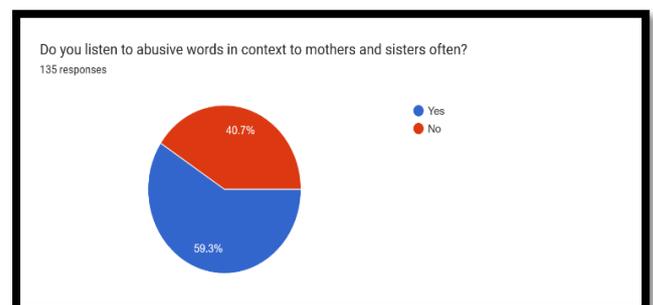
Data Analysis

We conducted a questionnaire consisting of 25 questions to know the ground reality of women in Indian society. This survey was answered by 135 Indian women. The following pie diagrams give us an insight into our research and support it:



Graph 1: Cases of Body Shaming.

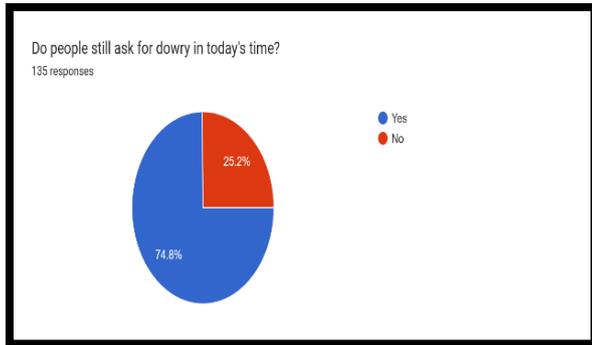
In response to the cases of body shaming, 66.7% of women have witnessed body shaming cases. The reason could be that people have a perfect picture of how a woman is supposed to be. If she gains more weight or loses more weight, she is openly body-shamed and trolled by the people around her, even her own family. For marriage proposals, women are openly rejected for being too fat or too thin. Apart from eating less or more, there are other factors too which are responsible for the weight in females in which hormonal imbalances play a major role. Thus, society overlooks the emotions of a woman and seldom shows inhumane behaviour towards her.



Graph 2: Abusive Words in context to mothers and sisters.

In response to listening to abusive words used in context to mothers and sisters often, 59.3% of women gave a positive response. The fact that most of the abusive Indian terms include mothers and sisters cannot be avoided. These terms are used so casually that they are not even considered inappropriate anymore by society. Youth even uses such words to add humour to their conversations, not caring how women feel when they overhear

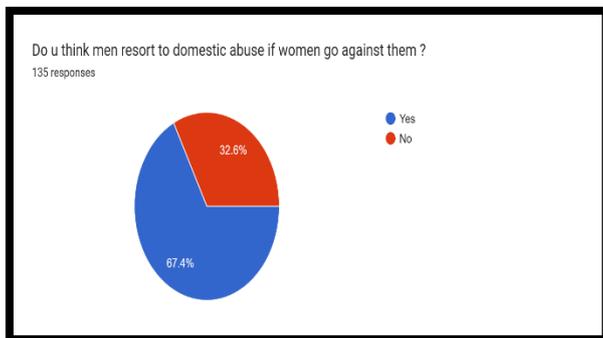
such words or even worse when these words are directly said to them.



Graph 3: Dowry cases.

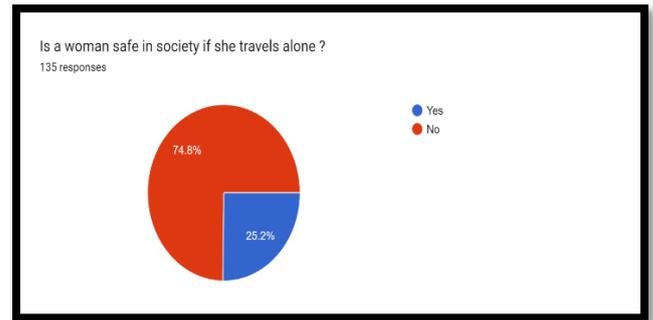
In response to dowry cases, 74.8% of women agreed that it is still prevalent in today's time and 25.2% of women disagreed. By the result, we can understand that people still ask for dowry in today's time and the patriarchal mentality and traditions have not changed. India records 20 dowry deaths every day according to the government data report. There are many cases of murders, domestic violence, and suicides due to the menace of dowry.

India has by far the highest number of dowry-related deaths in the world according to Indian National Crime Record Bureau. In 2012, 8,233 dowry death cases were reported across India. A bride is burned every ninety minutes in India leading to 1.4 % deaths per year, i.e., 100,000 women in India die every year over dowry disputes.



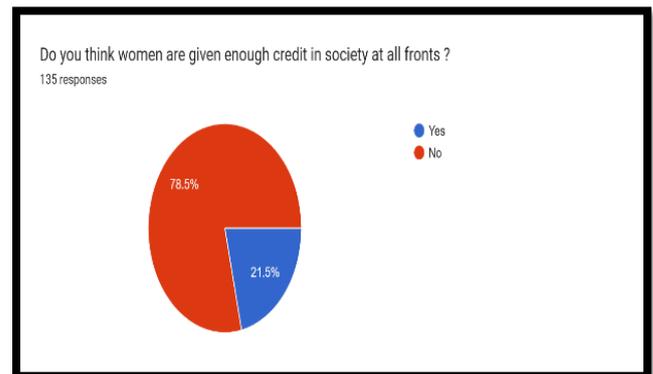
Graph 4: Men resort to domestic abuse if women don't listen to them

In response to the question that do men resort to domestic abuse if women do not listen to them, 67.4% of women agreed that men do become abusive if women do not listen to them. The main reason for this is that men in Indian society in general are dominating and they expect women to be submissive. If women go against this then men resort to domestic abuse, showing that they are in power. This is often witnessed in marriages. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 2019-2021, "29.3 percent of married Indian women between the ages of 18 and 49 have experienced domestic/sexual violence. 3.1 percent of pregnant women aged 18 to 49 have suffered physical violence during their pregnancy." In addition to these numerous unreported cases are easily seen around us.



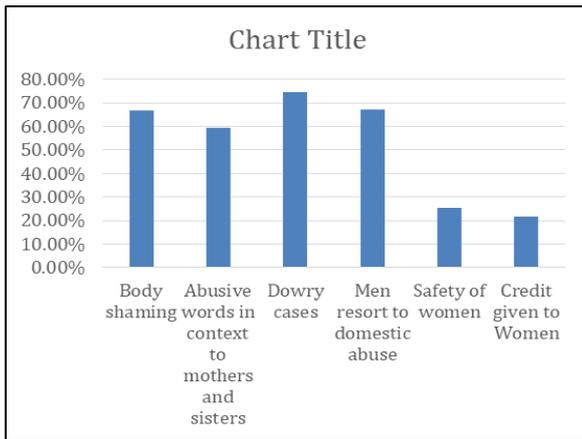
Graph 5: Safety of women

In response to the question about the safety of women, 74.8 % of women answered in negative. This is a major reason why women are not allowed to travel alone by their families or go out of the city to complete their education. A woman is an easy target for Indian society if she is alone which is why there is a vast difference in the above ratio. This hinders the progress of women and she is expected to live within the boundaries that are created by the society. Instead of this, society should rather teach their sons to behave properly and create a safe environment for women to travel and encourage them to be independent and brave enough to not depend on anyone.



Graph 6: Credit given to women.

In response to the credit given to women in society, 78.5% of women disagreed about the same and only 21.5% of women agreed. From this we can tell that after all the feminine problems like menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, menopause societal pressures, and facing all the existing patriarchal norms and looking after the household; women are considered weak and taken for granted. The majority of Indian society expects a woman to perform all her duties and tasks without keeping in mind her rights as a basic human and appreciating her for her contribution.



Graph 7: Issues faced by women in Indian society.

Thus, from the above data we can conclude and highlight issues faced by women in society and the ‘real picture’ of the status of Indian women. This questionnaire includes gender inequality, molestation, domestic violence, dowry, body shaming, and many other types of suppressions. The real - life cases and official reports make the idea of the position of Indian women crystal clear. Apart from this many cases and injustice are still unrecorded, adding up to the hurdles faced by women in Indian society which need to be addressed and must be eradicated from the roots i.e., the thought process prevailing in Indian society.

SUGGESTIONS

1. By the implication of practices followed by the first world countries like the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, Canada, and Denmark; India must also take proper measures in favour of women.
2. Empowering Indian women will lead to the economic as well as political and all-round development of India.
3. Women should be made aware to educate herself about the various legislations in India relating to women’s rights: The Provisions of The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005., Dowry Prohibition Act, The Maternity Benefit Act 1961., The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986., The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressing) Act 2013.
4. Lastly, women should themselves be empowered. Unless they make cast-iron decisions against the injustice they are facing, no one can protect them from the evils of society. She must raise her voice against the pernicious activities prevailing in the society.

CONCLUSION

We may conclude that the society we are a part of is patriarchal and this fact has still not changed. Most men dominate, abuse, and suppress women at domestic and work levels till today maybe because they think women are weak and won’t take a stand for themselves. Many times, women also have no issues if they are ill-treated and they choose to keep quiet where they should speak up; this is mainly because of low esteem, financial dependence on

men, or lack of literacy. This gives men more freedom to do whatever they like but it is the responsibility of a woman to take a stand for herself and not let anyone take away her rights. Whether it be an abusive relationship or a disrespectful work environment, women should not tolerate any kind of unacceptable behaviour. At the same time, society together should create a safe and healthy environment for women so that we can develop at the national level. Encouragement should be given to women’s education, and career instead of limiting them to marriage and household chores. We see many women running small businesses on social media, if we give such talents the acknowledgement that they deserve, women will be empowered as well as motivated. The ratio of successful Indian women who are entrepreneurs, politicians, and officers is comparatively less than those who are pressurized by society. Women contribute to society the most. Thus, no compromise should be made on a woman’s career, and she should be given the freedom to make a career if she desires to pursue one. With the support of society, every woman should be made strong and independent so that she is able to take a stand for herself. A woman should also be treated as equal human being by society. She should be appreciated and acknowledged. Such positive steps will lead to the betterment of society as a whole and push away all the negative mentality.

The tragic and bitter truth about the Indian society is that even though we find men who have changed their perception with reference to women and are supportive towards them; it does not change the fact that there are men who are still behaving as tyrants and oppressive fathers/brothers/husbands and cannot reconcile with the transitioning status of women today. The suppression and oppression by men still persist because women are so fed up with fighting for their rights and their identity that majority of them preferred being silent about it. This does not relate to a woman of a poor class but women of all classes – rich/poor/literate/illiterate who believe that it is better to be remain silent and suffer. Thus, the transition that we brag about is just an illusion with reference to India. There are only a handful of women who will speak up / raise their voice against patriarchy in India because it will disturb the whole family which women would not want. It will take thousands of years to bring a change in Indian society and the patriarchal order. Women too must be strong headed to handle these situations and fight for themselves in order to have a real transition.

Appendices

QUESTIONNAIRE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

This survey is only to get an **unbiased** insight into the research. Privacy shall be **maintained**. Data shall remain **anonymous**. All the answers shall remain **confidential**.

1. The theory and the concept of feminism have just created an uproar at the bookish level. According to you, will the situation in India ever change for women? *
Yes
No

2. Do you see a change in the thought process of your parents / elderly generations with reference to women? *
Yes
No
3. Have the boys/males around you support and accept the changes in society for the betterment of the status of girls/women?
Yes
No
4. Do you feel every person should be treated equally irrespective of their gender? *
Yes
No
5. Do you listen to abusive words in context to mothers and sisters often? *
Yes
No
6. Do you see domestic abuse near you? *
Yes
No
7. Do you know about the cases of molestation around you? *
Yes
No
8. Are you encouraged to study/complete your education? *
Yes
No
9. Do people still ask for dowry in today's time? *
Yes
No
10. Is there a particular code of conduct (how to sit/talk/walk) for you as a girl? *
Yes
No
11. Have you experienced molestation from a family friend/relative/someone known to you? *
Yes
No
12. Do you experience gender discrimination in your family /at the workplace / near you? *
Yes
No
13. Are sons given more freedom than daughters in your family? *
Yes
No
14. Do you believe financial responsibility is only for men (paying bills, monthly expenses)? *
Yes
No
15. Do you believe household responsibility is only for women (cooking, cleaning)? *
Yes
No
16. Do you think women are pressurized to give birth to boy-child? *
Yes
No
17. Do you believe the opinions of women are heard in the workplace? *
Yes
No
18. Have you ever been body shamed (asked to gain/lose weight)? *
Yes
No
19. Do you think women are given enough credit in society on all fronts? *
Yes
No
20. Do men around you make jokes about women casually? *
Yes
No
21. Do you think men really understand the struggles of women (menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, or any other health disorders)? *
Yes
No
22. Do you think men resort to domestic abuse if women go against them? *
Yes
No
23. Is a woman safe in society if she travels alone? *
Yes
No
24. As a girl/woman, do you support practices such as:
Live-in relationship
Sex before marriage
Having multiple relations
One night stand
Indecent dressing
Alcohol & drugs
Extra marital affair
None of these
All of these
25. Do you think the status of women will ever change in India? *
Yes
No

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