

## **Janani (The Declining Stature Of Women In Indian Society)**

**YVG NUKESWARA RAO**

Faculty of English  
Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge  
Technologies  
Nuzvid, Krishna Dist, Andhra Pradesh  
nuk.lally@rguktn.ac.in

**Dr. RAJESH LANKAPALLI**

Assistant Professor in the dept. of English  
RGUKT Nuzvid  
rajeshlankapalli@rguktn.ac.in

### **Abstract**

*From Atharv Veda: “Yatra naryastu pujoyante ramante tatra Devata, yatraitastu na pujoyante sarvaastatrafalaah kriyaah” (which means where women are honored, divinity blossoms, and where women are dishonored, all actions, no matter how noble, remain unfruitful.).*

*Every Indian lad grows listening to this proverb all his life time. The ancient Indian Society allowed women to study and in fact, some women Philosophers like Lopamudra, Maitreyi, and Gargi were considered the leading scholars and could very well compete their male Philosophers in any philosophical and religious discussions. They were highly respected along with male counterparts of the time. Things have gone too far today. Atrocities to women are the very common headings of any newspaper in India.*

*In this article, we would like to focus on how the stature of women declined over years and may end up with suggesting few remedies to bring the glory back to women in Indian Civilization as we still feel where women is honoured, civilization flourishes.*

**Key words:** Indian women, Malala, Triple Talaq, Sabarimali Temple, Daily TV serials, Political reservation system and Nirbhaya Act.

### **Introduction:**

Since the dawn of the civilization, India has been a society which had a high respects for women. A society where woman was given utmost priority as rightly quoted in the Adharv Veda:

**“Yatra naryastu pujoyante ramante tatra Devata, yatraitastu na pujoyante sarvaastatrafalaah kriyaah”**

(Which means where women are honored, divinity blossoms there, and where women are dishonored, all actions, no matter how noble, remain unfruitful.). An Indian lad grows listening to this proverb all his life time. He keeps it in his mind and practices it for long ages.

It has been projected more or less the same way in the recently released a Tollywood movie.

**“While eating, a plate; a room in the house; one fourth of each rupee we earn are always spared to you even today, attha”.**

(The dialogue is delivered by the protagonist of the movie addressing to his maternal aunt.) This shows that the Indian society observed the same old principles of respecting sisters.

The ancient Indian Society allowed women to pursue studies and in fact, some women Philosophers like Lopamudra, Maitreyi, and Gargi were considered the leading scholars and could very well contest the male-philosophers in debates. They were highly respected along with Yajnavalka, Asvala, Artabhaga, Bhujyu, Ushasta, their male counterparts of the time. It was mentioned in the Briharanya Upanisad that Gargi has participated in ‘arguing combat’. Her Challenged Yajnavalk, whom believed to be the most male intellectual of the world? Amartya Sen, the renowned Welfare Economist, expressed the same in his book **‘The Argumentative Indian’**.

But the status of women in India has been deteriorating, especially, since the medieval Times. It has gone through several declining phases during various chronological stages. Male started dictating the terms. Freedom to women remained at stake gradually. Their role has been limited to the Kitchen and bed rooms. Gradually, women are looked mere instrumental in giving birth to their heirs and successors. The evil systems like Prohibiting women from education, Dowry System, Prohibiting widow-marriages, Sati (offering herself to the Fire along with the corpse of her husband) came into practice.

Resultantly, things have become worsen today. Kidnaps, rapes, murders and atrocities to women are some of the regular headings of any newspaper in India today. Even the whole world is not so kind to women as we can see the same thing more or less in developed countries also. It was rightly pointed out by Mahatma Gandhi:

**“The day a woman can walk freely on the roads at night, that day we can say that India has achieved independence.”**

Though this statement was made half a century ago, the true Independence, according Gandhi’s terms, is still a distant reality. It is not exaggeration to say it takes another 100 years to achieve his dream. Today, the parents of a girl or a young woman are so tense till their ward returns home safely.

But contrary to this, the position of women in ancient Indian society was so high. Matriarchy or matrilineal societies were quite common. They believed that women had better abilities than men. Jhansi Lakshmi Bhai in North India and Rudrama Devi of Orugallu in the South were given opportunity to rule the Kingdoms in the absence of male successors to the thrown. They proved they were worthy decisions. They took part in equal measure in the family professions and they held the fort in the absence of the men.

The respect to women in India has fell under suddenly with the invasions of Muslim rulers to India. As a part of their Invasion, soldiers were allowed to loot and rape. The usual norms of the battle have been violated deliberately. In order to protect woman from invaders, men began to restrict women to their houses. This paved a way to, on the name of safety and security of woman, man’s dominance over woman.

The advent of the British and other European countries into India and being ruled by the British for over three centuries further ruined the position of woman in Indian society. The

place of women in European Society was already at stake by then. This had clearly reflected in India too. We had started to act in accordance with the interests of our rulers.

Since the Medieval Times, Woman has been was looked as a machine of begetting children. But later, man has identified it is very much necessary to have woman's share and importance to develop financially, socially and even in other aspects. Thus it became mandatory to involve her in everything. It was then all the evil practices and traditions had to be kept aside so that to invite her effort, industry and knowledge. In the modern times, hopefully, no arguments prevailed now to negate her or debate her portion in development.

Every Hindu is born to believe that the whole nature has originated from the Goddess, Maha Shakthi, who in turn created the trio- Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. She was believed to be the lord of the entire Universe, who was the cause and course and the energy running through all creation. Since then, Indian society has been worshipping the Goddess and honouring women. The same principle continues still now that some seats in the public transport system are exclusively reserved for woman. Men do not sit in them even though they are found vacant.

It is still in the rural India the bahu (daughter-in-law) is handed over the keys of the Almirah/storey as soon as she arrives in the house. It is not exaggeration to say that there is no profession remains today a woman occupy. They have been very much successful. Today, the computer industry prefers a woman to man as woman can decode the algorithms quicker than men.

In the modern times, women have proved they are no less than any man in this world. Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimavo Bandaru Nayake, Sheik Haseena have registered their special and impressive mark in politics and administration. Mother Theresa and Florence Nightingale have showed the world their love and kindness. Aung San Suu kyi with her leadership qualities and Madam Cury with her intelligence enthralled the world.

Quite surprisingly in America and Russia, the nations those advocate the dental philosophy of woman empowerment the most, have not witnessed a woman president so far in their history.

Though the atrocities on women are going on worldwide, they are even fought against with courage and bravery. Now, let us know the story of a young girl who fought bravely against the mighty and dangerous Talibans for the right to education, **'The Story of Malala'**.

**Malala Yousafzai** was born on July 12<sup>th</sup> in 1997 in the Swat Valley of northwest Pakistan. When she was just 10 in 2007, her beloved hometown was captured by Taliban militants. Violence soon spread across the Swat Valley. As the girls were prohibited from going to schools, Malala refused to renounce her right to an education. Despite her young age, she knew that if she joined everyone else in fearful silence, nothing would change. Malala

Yousafzai has become a global icon for her fearless efforts advocating for every child's right to education, even while living under increasingly dangerous circumstances.

As a girl born and raised in a country where only boys were allowed an education and the Taliban dominated the law, Malala had very few people on her side as she raised her voice in protest against the extremist force oppressing her people.

This is the awe inspiring story of a school pupil with a relentless belief in her power to change the world. Finally, she got a reward for her valour and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2014.

Women are not allowed easily into a system where male only enjoys and dominates. The best instance for this the incident that happened very much recently in India.

With no specific and meaningless reasons, women (who are in the age of menstruation) have not been allowed to visit the temple of Ayyappa in Sabarimalai of Kerala state till recent times.

A new conscious effort went on well underlying as far as the entry to women into Sabarimalai Temple which set fire between genders, religions and communities. They dared to keep the verdicts of the apex, the Supreme Court of India in this regard and physically attacking them. The Supreme Court today ruled that not allowing women in their "menstruating years" into the Sabarimala is ultra vires the constitution, and all women should be allowed to enter the temple.

They are prohibiting women from entering the Sabarimalai temple even after the Supreme Court's direction. Temple management (the Travencore Devaswom Board) has welcomed the verdict and was, in fact, prepared to receive women to the temple. The state of Kerala had supported the entry of women into the temple, arguing that the "custom" of excluding women violated their rights.

Going to a temple or not is her interest. It is one of her rights provided by the Constitution. It is very dangerous that her right is taken for granted. The whole woman community is asking when her menstruation can be a hindrance for entering a temple, how can it be helpful for saving the existence of mankind on this earth. No house hold things should be stopped in her monthly menstruation. There is no relaxation for her in her work on those days. For men, systems, the nation and the world she has been a continuous media of investment.

In connection with this, Indian women have started a social media campaign to tell the world that they're not ashamed to menstruate. Using the hashtag 'happy to bleed', the women are making a stand against 'rules, which currently bans all women of reproductive age from 10 to 50.

Male and Female are two basic components of our human society. Woman is the other name for self-respect. The society has to think when it blames woman for such a blemish. Men and

women are part of creation. They are equal. We have to get rid of our narrow thinking so that the society will further go ahead. But there are few dogmas.

**Triple Talaq:**

In Muslim religion, the system of 'triple talak' was the example of how domination of the male still continues. A Muslim man who follows the Hanafi Islamic school of law is allowed to divorce his wife just by uttering 'Talaq' three times. That is considered as legal and will be accepted by the local Muslim Boards. Woman has been kept under subjugation for long years. In Indian society, a woman who has separated from her husband is always found fault with without listening to her advocacy. Thus, women in Muslim community have been made to suffer all the pains of the family (domestic violence) otherwise she will be, at any time, delivered 'Talaq'. There are't any provisions or reservations to her specified under this Muslim Law. She lives under a perpetual fear and pressure all her life since married. It is quite shocking to know that though Islam is followed in many countries and being the one the most wide-spread religion of the world, these Triple-Talaq systems is being followed differently and not such an easy process. They take not less than three months. Men are taking advantage to this and blackmailing them. Recently, it has come to light that the husbands who are living abroad are sending text or video message to divorce their wives.

Many governments, including Pakistan which is an Islam country predominantly, have banned this male-centred tradition which remains a threat to human civilization. There has been awareness among the Muslim women on the issue of divorce, marriage, and inheritance comes under the purview of the Muslim Personal Laws. They have started raising their voices on the rights of women and against the Muslim Law.

This Triple talaq system has already been ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in a number of cases. The Judge also suggested that polygamy should be made as a crime even in Muslims community.

India, as the Supreme nation, has provisions for personal laws for all religious communities. Every community in every religion is allowed to live freely without any discrimination. Equal rights must be observed. That's why the Government of India has passed a bill against it in the Parliament.

**TV Daily Serials**

Portrayal of women in television (TV) serials is another important thing to be discussed. Many Indian TV serials have female actresses in the main negative roles. The image of women in TV serial has impact on the public. It is a deliberate of the male-egoistic society. The antagonists of each serial are a woman.

People are habituated to watch them every day. The viewing of a TV Serial is a primary source of amusement to a household woman today. It is not exaggeration to say that their day is not fulfilled without watching them. Women are pictured as stereotypical, often fashionable way and never as an intelligent, confident and responsible. So these impressions carry big into the society. It is the time that Women have to quit them.

**Political Reservation System in India:**

To bring equality in the political arena, Indian Constitution has provided some political rights to women also. Now, let us see how these provisions are being used by women. Actually, the women are the major part in the population today. They are equivalent to men in number. Hence, 50% of reservation should be allocated to her. But it is reserved 33% political reservation to women in Panchayat, it is still remained a distant dream to acquire the same in the highest houses.

It is not the women on the merit of woman but it is the close relative of a male politician (Rabidi Devi for Lalu)

In rural India, the lowest official authority is the *Gram Panchayat* (GP). It is composed of five to 15 contiguous villages, and is led by a president. Since 1993, mandated political representation has been implemented to correct the underrepresentation of two social groups. First, one-third of the president positions are randomly reserved for women. Second, president positions are reserved for low-castes.

Women elected under gender quota provide public goods that are closer to the preferences of women.

It's no secret that women in India are grossly underrepresented in Parliament and State assemblies. Although women are nearly half the population, they make up a mere 11.6% of the 542-member Lok Sabha and 11% of the 245-member Rajya Sabha. According to the Association for Democratic Reforms, Bihar and Rajasthan have the highest percentage of women in their State assemblies with 14% each (34 out of 243 MLAs in Bihar and 28 out of 200 MLAs in Rajasthan). It's easy to hide behind the symbolic value of electing the world's first woman prime minister or electing a woman as Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

However, it's harder to hide these dismal figures of female representation. This is a problem that Parliament has long recognised but shown scant regard to addressing.

Even the passage of 73rd and 74th Amendment Act of the Constitution, which reserves one-third of all seats in panchayats and urban local bodies for women, does little to gloss over the lack of representation in bodies that actually determine and facilitate important policy decisions.

Nonetheless, reservation for women in one-third of the Lok Sabha seats will be on a rotation basis, which means a seat/constituency may be reserved in one election, but not in the following two.

The Rajya Sabha passed the Bill in March 2010, but it still hasn't received the Lok Sabha's assent. Under the previous ruling dispensation, one could cite the unwillingness of coalition partners to play ball. But with the present government's majority, this excuse no longer holds.

Our founding fathers had envisaged reservations as a model of social justice for communities that have been subject to historical discrimination. A lot earlier than many ‘progressive’ Western democracies, India has a long history of discriminating against women. Having said that, women in India today are still governed by social mores that deliberately stifle their growth and development. A recent study by the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) found that assembly constituencies with women representatives show significantly higher economic growth than those under their male counterparts. On the subject of economic growth, women legislators do a lot better than men in constituencies located in less-developed states, thus making their contribution more valuable. (The Print). Sweden leads the way with women accounting for nearly 45% of all members of their legislature.

### **Nirbhaya Act 2013**

The Criminal **Law** (Amendment) **Act**, 2013 is an Indian legislation passed by the Parliament in the year 2013 which aimed at better protection and severe punishments to those who was found guilty in the cases related to sexual offences. This act is otherwise called as Nirbhaya Act.

The Criminal Law Bill was enacted following the brutal rape and murder of a 23-year-old Delhi student. Her identity was kept secret and she came to be called Nirbhaya for whose justice, the nation witnessed an unprecedented uproar, paving for the tabling of the new anti-rape law, which is called the Nirbhaya Act. This Act has stringent punishments to deal with sex crimes against women. This new Act has expressly recognised certain acts as offences which were dealt under related laws.

### **‘Mee too’**

‘Me Too’ or is a movement which was initiated in the year 2006 by a social activist Tarana Burke against the dire concern of the masses on the matter of sexual abuse and harassment in America.

This movement has picked a quick pace with Alyssa Milano, an American actress posted a tweet asking the victims and survivors of sexual assault to come out, accepting the bitter truth of the society and letting others know that they are not alone in October 2017.

The idea of “Empowerment through Empathy” was behind the Me Too Movement. It was ultimately created to ensure survivors know they're not alone in their journey.

In India, it started with a Journalist named Priya Ramani, allegedly criticized against MJ Akbar, Union Minister of State for External Affairs, resigned from his post on October 17, 2018 over sexual harassment charges levied against him by several women journalists.

The movement has recently gained momentum in India as more women have begun sharing their experiences of sexual harassment on social media. This movement empowered the women to form a community and help each other in talking about the bitter truths of sexual abuse in the world and has helped the victims better fit in the society It raised awareness

among women about their rights as an individual in the work place or outside and helped men understand the consequences of the same.

### **Action taken on Indian Cricketers**

Recently, the young Indian cricketers Hardik Pandya and Lokesh Rahul were suspended from the Indian cricket team and called home from Australia due to their comments on women in an interview. They boasted about hooking up with multiple women and also how open they had been about it with their parents and family. They are prominent cricketers. Their contribution to Indian cricket is so much necessary. But BCCI did this the hard decision on them. Thus, it proved how much committed India is towards woman's cause.

Things like this will help improve the poor condition of women in India. Proper and severe actions must be initiated so that men should accept the equality at heart. Otherwise, it is not exaggeration to say even the girl foetus will be fearful of coming out from the womb of her mother.

Hence, in this connection, it is ventured to suggest a few measures so that the equilibrium be enforced initially, but accepted and habituated gradually.

### **Conclusion:**

Violence against women happen in India in the form of Murder, Honour Killing, Witchcraft-related murders, Female Infanticide and Sex-Selective Abortion, Rape, Insult to modesty, Human Trafficking and Forced Prostitution, Domestic Violence, Forced and Child Marriage, Acid Throwing, Abduction, Perpetuation. It is highly appreciative that the Government of India has initiated a campaign **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao** ( Save the daughter, educate the daughter) that aims to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls.

### **References:**

1. **'How did the position of women decline in Indian society?'** by Savithri B through [www.quora.com](http://www.quora.com)
2. **'One-Third Reservation in Parliament: Here's Why Indian Women Need This Bill'** by **Rinchen Norbu Wangchuk** through <https://www.thebetterindia.com/143745/one-third-reservation-parliament-indian-women-bill>.
3. **'The Argumentative Indian'** by Amartya Sen
4. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures> through **Facts and figures: Ending violence against women-Various forms of violence.**
5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malala\\_Yousafzai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malala_Yousafzai)
6. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/05/tripple-talaq-triple-divorce-170511160557346.html> by Saif Khalid.

7. <https://www.goalcast.com/2018/03/07/malala-yousafzais-life-story/> *Malala Yousafzai's Life Story: The Fearless Activist Who Challenged Terrorism with Education* by Jenny Medeiros.
8. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/indian-women-launch-happy-to-bleed-campaign-to-protest-against-sexist-religious-rule-a6748396.html>
9. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09737189.2010.11885293> 'Portrayal of Women in Television (TV) Serials' by Shashi Kaul & Shradha Sahni
10. <https://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Hans-Classroom/2018-04-15/Nirbhaya-Act/374241> Nirbhaya Act THE HANS INDIA | Apr 15,2018, 04:05 AM IST
11. Taittiriya Ekagnikanda, I iii, 14. ; Sastri, 1918.
12. Violence against women- 'Strengthening the health response in times of crisis' by World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/violence-against-women>) on 23 November 2018.