

Socio-economic status of women in Jainism: Then and now

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Abstract

The socio-economic status of women is an important indicator to measure the development of either community or nation. Most of the religions have accorded women inferior status and relegated them to a secondary position. However, Jainism is a religion of equality of all souls, devoted to a recognizing the rights of all living creatures. So not surprisingly, it accepts that women are equally important as men. Hence, this paper mainly focuses on Socio-economic status of women in Jainism. Though it is a minority community, it is an attempt to gather the data from various sources from the period of Rishabha, the first Thirthankara to present era. The Socio economic status of women are analysed with their contributions and their participation in various religious activities and socio-economic services. The study covers the geographical scope of Jain population clusters of India. The findings reveal the fact India.

Keywords: women in Jainism, equality, religious participation, socio-economic services, social status

Introduction

The status of women refers to her position in the network of social role structures, privileges, rights and duties. It refers to her rights and duties in family and social life. The worth of civilization can be judged by the place given to women in the society. In this context the United Nations declared the year 1975 as an International Women's year and March 8th is celebrated as International women's day indicates that the fair and just treatment of women for all round development all over the world.

Status of women in India: General view

India is a cradle for many religions and they have their own principles, philosophies and ideals in general. With that, the status of women also differs from one religion to another. Due to various historical changes, the status of women in India has been fluctuating and it has gone through several changes. From the Vedic age until today her status and position has been changing with the passing of time.

In general, the status of women in India can be analysed under different time period.

Socio-economic status of women in early Vedic period: (Rig-Veda)

Early Vedic period was the period of highest stage of civilization. This age has excelled in every occupation. All the valuable things in man's life like philosophy, religion, Science, code of conduct, equal status were all developed in the early Vedic period. Scholars believe that in Ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life and greatness of India's ancient culture lies in the honourable place granted to women. Literary works of eminent Indian scholars suggest that Women were educated in the early Vedic

period (Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy, 1979) ^[1]. In various scriptures, it is mentioned that a man without the participation of his wife can perform no religious rite with perfection.

Socio-economic status of women in later Vedic period

According to ancient Hindu texts and traditions, until about 500 B C, women in India enjoyed considerable freedom. But after next 1000 years women's position gradually deteriorated. It began to decline with the introduction of Manusmruthi. Manu deprives the social and economic rights of women and he says that a wife, a son and a slave these three declare to have no property. In between period a reformatory movement undertaken by Lord Mahavira, who allowed women admitted to the religious order.

Socio-economic status of women in medieval India

Medieval India was not women's age and it is supposed to be the Dark Age for them. Medieval India saw many foreign conquests which resulted in the decline in the women's status. The Indian women started using purdah to protect themselves from polygamy norm of foreign invaders. Since polygamy prevailed, the women lost their honoured position in the society.

Socio-economic status of women in modern India

Even under British rule in India, the breakdown of social institutions, the vast migration of people and economic depression in the country have greatly contributed to a general decline of socio-economic life particularly among women (Puja Mandal, status of women in Vedic and post-Vedic period).

After independence Indian Constitution guarantees of equal rights for Indian women. But even today in Hindu society girl

child is misery and a burden and needs extra care. All these gave rise to treating women only at receiving end.

But the condition is different in Jainism. Jainism and its organizational system provided avenues of religious, cultural and social services. The women in Jaina community got ample opportunities in public life. However their socio-economic status remained unchanged in the time immemorial. Based on analytical study of literary and epigraphic sources, here attempts are made to explain the socio-economic status of women in Jainism.

Socio-economic status of women in Jainism

Jainism is one of the oldest religions among all the religions. Jainism has contributed some original ideologist to the world. The most significant aspects is that Jainism has always respected the smallest of the insects among living organisms and this attitude extends even to the inanimate world, to even a blade of grass. Thus it is natural for such a religion to cultivate an attitude of respect towards women. This approach of Jainism towards women is based on the concept of equality of souls of all living beings. Hence in this context Jainism recognizes women have equal rights with men and provides dhārmik protection to the same.

From the inception of Jainism, the followers are divided into four groups which is known as chaturvidha sangha, viz. Muni (Monk), Āryika (Nun), Shrāvaka (Lay Man) and Shrāviki (Lay women). The first two groups of ascetic renounced their households and next two are those of house holders. Such four fold orders of Jaina Sangha existing even today. In practicing vows, daily rituals women in Jainism are treated within the same code of ethics as that are prescribed for men. Since, women are accepted in the monastic order; the women enjoyed an honoured place in Jainism. That honoured place was given from the period of Lord Ādinatha, the 1st Thīrthankara.

Religious participation of women

In Jainism women has a unique position as Jina Mātha, a woman who gave birth to the Thīrthankara, a Jain deity. The Jain scriptures and history is full of names of Jain women who have done a lot more for the wellbeing of the society and for their religion in particular. Scholars mentioned that, in ancient Karnataka Jain women were more actively participated than others in religious activities (Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy, 1979) [1]. It clearly states that women have the same rights as men to get educated and to take part in any type of activities (A.R. Nagaraj, 1987) [6].

In the beginning it is mentioned that, except Rig -Vēda in later Vēdic period women were regarded as inferior to men. Women were debarred from all religious practices and practically no place in religious place of the Vēdic society. The same situation was also existed in Thīrthankara Mahāvīra. But Lord Mahāvīra opposed all such evil practices and he did not make any such differences between male and female in observance of religious vows including reading of sacred books, practice of vows and are all admitted to the fore-fold (chaturvidha) organizations without any gender discriminations. The facts of Jaina text shows there were about 14,000 Sādhus, 36,000 Sādhvis, 1, 00,000 Shrāvakas and 3, 00,000 Shrāvakis shows female practisers have out-

numbered men. Many female from royal families joined ascetic order and became nun along with commoners and could rise to the position of a head of the community of nuns under an Arahāt. The nuns Brāhmi, Sundari, Āryayakni, Pushpakala, Chandana Bāla and Salasa Revati were heads of the community of Jaina Nuns under the arahāt like Rishabha, Arīsthanēmi, Parshwa and Mahāvīra respectively. (Debendrachandra Dasgupta, 1999) [4]. In scriptures it is mentioned that there were more than 3, 00,000 nuns under Brāhmi and Sundari, daughters of 1st Thīrthankara, RishabhaDeva (Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy, 1979) [1]. During Thīrthankara Mahāvīra, the Nun Chandana Bala was in charge of the Nunnery at Champa (Debendrachandra Das Gupta, 1999) [4]. She built as organization of 36,000 Āryikas. Hence during ancient India along with the monasteries, the nunneries were established which were headed by nuns. These nunneries serve as places of relief and shelter to many distressed one in the high rank of life. It is recorded that widow princess of local royal household sought shelter in the nunnery of Shrāvasti. In ancient period the Jaina Nunneries were existed at Champa, Mithila, Rājagriha, Shrāvasti, Bhāravi (Dwārka) and in Kammasadhāma in the Kuru kingdom (DebendraChandra Das Gupta, 1999) [4]. Praises have been showered on Jain nuns like Kamalāshri, Brāhmila, Gunamathi, Sudarshana and others in the oldest Kannada literary work Voddārādhana of the 10th century. These nuns were able to influence the social life of the people of that period (A.R. Nagaraj & Chandrakeerthi - 1987) [6].

Among all the Jain nuns, we have had in history, Nun Yākini Mahattara was the greatest intellectual and she accepted the open challenge of a Brāhmin pandīth Haribhadra Sūri, who defeated by her and became her disciple (Dr.A. R. Nagaraj - 1987) [6].

The Jain nuns were also associated with internal administration of Jaina church and Kanti which indicates a special class of nuns with higher position in the monastic organization. The inscription at Shravanabelagola refers to the nun Rājamathi ganti, Gunamathi Yavve, Prabhāvati and Damitha mati were nuns of highest position.

Jain women in education

Along with religious participation, women were also able to get equal opportunity in other social spheres like education and literature. In many Jain scripts it is mentioned that Rishabha, the 1st Thīrthankara, imparted 64 disciplines of knowledge for women signifies the prominence of women in Jainism. The fact is that Lord Rishabha Dēva imparted knowledge of language and alphabets to one of his daughter Brāhmi and fine Arts to his another daughter Sundari. Thus the famous Brāhmi lipi named after her (Natu Bhai Shah - 2004). In this context Jaina art schools, Monasteries were established to provide education to both male and female without any gender discrimination. The art schools, Monasteries were continued to be public schools and university for the greater part of India (Nādoja Dr. Nagarajiah, Hampa - 2010) [2].

In history Jain nuns have been known for their education, intellect, profundity and sacrificial qualities. An Epigraph of vedal, Tamilnadu dated CE 885, illustrates that, a palli, place of Jaina recluse, existed exclusively for the Jaina nuns. The

unique feature of this large Vidal monastery in SingāpuraNadu is that there were 900 nuns and women students. They had separate university of their own and it is opened by nun Pattinattu Kkurattiyār a disciple of Arishta Nēmi and headed by nun Kanakavīra Kurattiyār, a disciple of GunaKīrthibhātara (Nādoja, Prof. Nagarajaiah, Hampa, 2010) [2]. The Jain nuns also taught male disciples depicts gender equality. All the above facts shows that the women enjoyed and encouraged in getting education in Jain community.

Jaina women not only received 64 courses of education including Vēdas, Vēdangas, Āgamas from Art or vernacular schools, but also they received secular education. The evidence of Kathā Kōsha mention Dēvadhanthi, daughter of King Bhīmaratha and queen Pushpadanti, became learner in all subjects from Art school. As a result of this high type education received by women, some of them were entered into teaching profession and also got employment in royal households; some remained to spread Jaina Gospel. It is recorded in Jaina tradition that Jayanthi daughter of King Sahasrānika of Kousambi, remained unmarried, who received highest education and became nun under Lord Mahāvīra.

Women as warriors and administrators

The equal status of women in society and their education in Jainism made them to withstand in the society as the brave warriors and administrators of their provinces from the ancient period till the medieval period. Mrigāvathi, the wife of Shānthanika, King of Kousambi took the charge of administration after her husband's death and later she became a nun and influenced Pradyōtha, the King of Ujjain who accepted Jainism as his religion. She also converted many women into Jain Nun (A.R. Nagaraj & A.N. Chandrakeerthi, 1987) [6]. Hence Jain nuns were also able to influence the social life of the people of that period.

In Karnataka the status of Jain women was varied. In early medieval Karnataka Jaina women were pioneers in the development of the Kannada language. They dominated and contributed to the political, social, economic cultural life of the people of that region for about more than one thousand years. Royal women were served as nuns, rulers, good administrators, in military campaign, literary works, commissioned temples and monasteries, custodian of Indian culture and fine Arts, Trustees, poetess, philanthropists, built tanks and trained princess to become ideal rulers.

The royal women administered villages, towns, divisions and provinces. Jakkiyabbe, an able administrator during Rāshtrakūta king Khriṣṇa-III supervised the work of several headmen recovered dues and distributed grants. Mylādēvi, a senior queen of Somēshwara-I ruled the important province of Banāvāsī comprising twelve thousand villages.

The two brave women names were associated with political warrior and able administrators, who has greater faith in Jainism. Channabhairādēvi of Gerusoppe and Abbakka of Ullāl were popularly known as queens of pepper. Channabhairādēvi built Chaturmukha Basadi and many more temples at Gērusoppe and made it temple city during 16th century. She also scientifically built Kannur fort characterised by non-recognition from its long distance has seven entrances and which helped to conserve the water scientifically. She started international trade and used to get gold coins. Hence

some of the resource persons through their excavation are of the opinion that the purpose to build Kannur fort was that to protect gold coins and war instruments from invaders. In 1623, A. D. an Italian traveller Pietro Della visited Gērusoppe and described it as one of the famous city, the seat of pepper queen, Channabhairādēvi (Manjunatha Sullalli -2013).

Rani Abbakka of Ullal was a brave warrior known about different aspects of warfare and military strategy. She made Ullal a prosperous port and hub of spice trade to Arabia and other countries in the West. Faith in Jainism made her to keep good harmonious relations with local rulers who supported her to fight against Portuguese by cutting across caste and religious lines. Even today, Abbakka memory is much cherished in her home town of Ullal. Veera Rani Prashasthi is awarded to distinguished women on the occasion annual celebration of Rani Abbakka Utsava. In 2003 the Indian postal department issued a special cover on Rani Abbakka. It is also a matter of great pride for the people of Karnataka that a coast Guard ship now carries the name of Abbakka. Hence she is a legendry queen and for her bravery she came to be known as Abhaya Rani – the fearless queen.

Many queens of Kadamba, Ganga and Rāshtrakūta Dynasties were rulers and efficiently ruled various sub-divisions. Some of them were Rēvakanimādi, Queen Consort of Bhūtuga – II was in charge of Kanningal sub-divisions. Kanchibbe administered the Agali region. Ankabbarasi wife of Mārasimha – II was governed Pullungur (Hulugur) territory in 1972 CE (Nādoja Prof. Nagarajaiah, Hampa, 2010) [2]. Jakkiyabbe had efficiently administered Nagara Khanda – 70 and in turn entrusted the administration work to her daughter (Nadoja. Nagarajaiah Hampa, 2010) [2]. All these facts prove that women were succeeded to rule and enjoy equal status with men in Jainism.

Contributions to art, architecture and literature

In ancient Karnataka queen Mālādēvi of Kadamba Dynasty constructed and patronised the Jaina Monastery at Kuppalam (Dr. Jīvandar Hotapet, 1987). Kālādēvi, mother of Chāvundarāya was a driving force for the installation of world famous monolithic statue of Lord Gommatēshwara in Shravanabelagola.

Pōchikabbe sacrificed her life for the construction of Jinālayas. Chagalādēvi, since she was a Jain, constructed Shiva temple at Balligāve exhibits her religious tolerance. Pāliyakka daughter of Shāntarasa palace cook had become favourite consort of King Vikrama Santhara constructed Jaina temple at Hombuja. Bhāgiyabbe founded Jaina shrines at Shranavabelagola.

According to Humcha shilālēkha of 1148, Pampādēvi, queen of Ganga dynasty constructed many temples and as a scholar she wrote two books namely Asthavidhārchanā Mahābhishēka and Chathurbakthi. Achalādēvi, the wife of Chandramouli, the minister of King Vīraballāla constructed Pārshwa Jinālaya at Shravanabelagola. She did chaturvidā dāna throughout her life. Chāthalādēvi was Jain follower married Pallava king Kaduvēti and there she constructed Jaina temples, guest houses, erected caves for the meditation, Aharadāna and medicine for Sādhus.

Like them other women like Rēvakanimadi, Rāshtrakūta king consort of Bhūtuga – II, Chandabbarasi, Parihabbarasi,

Asagabbarasi, Ravakayye and many more Jain women were played as a spiritual motivator influencing the public of that period by practicing Jain philosophy and principles and also by commissioning Jaina temples, arranged festivals to worship Jina and involved themselves in various religious activities.

Shāntaladēvi wife of king Bittidēva (Vishnuvardhana) was a devotee of Jina and constructed temples at Dōrasamundra (present Halebīd). She had a special love for art and titled with Kala Saraswathi and Nātya Rāni. Shāntaladēvi and Kundanarasi, daughter of Bhūtuga, the king of Ganga dynasty had mastered in the fine arts dedicated their profession for Lord Jina and not for entertainment. Some women were poetess. As it is known fact that Kanti, orator and poetess along with Abhinava Pampa was one of the gems that adorned the court of Hoysala king Ballāla – I. Kundanarasi, daughter of Bhutuga was also an early poetess.

Attimabbe also known as Dāna Chintāmani was well known personality of the Kalyāni Chālukya period. Though she belongs to royal family, she sacrificed her life for the propagation of Jainism and her contributions to Kannada culture was of immense importance. She encouraged writing 1000 copies of great poet Ponna's Shāntipurana to various scholars. She also patronised great poet Ranna. She distributed 1500 Jina idols made of gold and studded with precious stones. She also constructed Jaina temples at Lakkundi and

one among them is famous Bramha Jinālaya. Since she was a philanthropist, in her name Government of Karnataka has instituted an annual award in her name Attimabbe Prashasti to a women writer. Dēvamathi, wife of camunda, a royal merchant has been compared to Goddess Sīta and Lakshmi, and served as philanthropist for needy people, refugees, and disease sufferers by providing food and medicines to them.

There were other women's like Kuliabbajee as a trustee promotes education and literature. Manasije, the Rāshtra kūta queen donated lands for feeding the pilgrims at Shraavanabelogola.

The said information shows that a remarkable religious, social and economic status enjoyed by Jain women as a warrior, social servant, religious performer, Patron, scholar were influencing both the public of that period as well as present era.

Socio economic status of women in present era

Even today status of women in Jainism is par with men in all religious and secular activities. Many women organisations involve themselves in various spheres of religious, social and economic life. In the present era, it is analysed on the basis of various criteria like literacy rate, religious participation and social services rendered by women and women organizations.

Table 1

Name of the Religion	Literacy Rate (Total)	Literacy rate (Male)	Literacy rate (Female)
Hindu	65.1	76.2	53.2
Muslims	59.1	67.6	50.1
Christians	80.3	84.4	76.2
Sikhs	69.4	75.2	63.1
Buddhist	72.7	83.1	61.7
Jains	94.1	97.4	90.6
Other Religions	47.0	60.8	33.2
Total	64.8	75.3	53.7

(Source: 2011 census)

From the above table it is clear that among the major religious communities in India, Jains have the highest literacy rate for both male and females compare to other religion. The gap of male and female literacy rates is also lowest among Jains which is only 6.8 percent point as against national gender literacy gap of 21.6 percent points. About half of the Muslim and Hindu Women's are illiterates. This represents in Jainism equal status for women with men in education.

Religious participation and social services of women

In present era, various women personalities involved themselves in religious activities and social services. One such great women personality was late Māthrushree Ratnamma Heggade, a truly humble personality and was popularly known as Māthrushri among all devotees of Karnataka and all over India. She was a guiding spirit for all religious programs being held at Dharmasthala and other places. Mathrushri known as Abhinava Kālaladēvi, who inspired Dr. Vīrendra Heggade for the installation of monolithic statue of Lord Gommatēshwara at Dharmasthala. The social services of Mathrushri are extended towards free education, free medical facilities and professional education to women. Mathrushri also started

Nēthravathi Handicraft training centre and Siri a self-employed program for women which providing employment opportunities. Hēmavathi Heggade, wife of Dharmadhikāri Vīrendra Heggade and their family members following the same footsteps of Mathrushri. The activities under taken by them are religious, social and economic oriented for wellbeing of the society.

Another great woman Rēnu Ranka is a social worker for more than 15 years. She has taken the responsibility of providing free education, food and cloth to poor children. Nārangi behan has opened Pashu Shāla at Kōramangala in Bangalore with 11 doctors and 250 staffs for serving the animals which are met with accidents and sick. Other Jain Women like Dr. Kamala Hampana, Kausalya Dharnēndra, Dr. Prīthi Shubhachandra, Shānthā Sanmathi Kumar, Dr. Padmāvati, Saraswathi Vijaykumar, and all other women contributing to the society through their literary works.

Like that, there are various women organizations actively undertaking service-oriented programs for the welfare of the society. Such women organizations are Jain International Women Organizations, Akhila Bhāratīya Digambara Jain Mahila okkūta, Tērapanth Mahila Mandal, Chakrēshwari

mahila samaj, Padmāmba Mahila Samaj, Ratnatraya Mahila Samaj, Satsanga Mahila Samaj, Kālala Dēvi Mahila Samaj, Jwala Malini self-help group. All these organizations themselves involved in religious, social service activities and they are freely exposed to the society.

Tērapanth Mahila Mandal undertaking various social service activities like adoption of village, organizing health camps, extended their hands for those who are suffering from physically handicapped by providing necessary equipment's. They are also distributing text books, note books, uniforms and other school accessories. They created awareness about swaccha Bharat mission. They also organizing awareness programs at schools and colleges about life skills, environment protection, save girl child and other social issues. Akhila Karnataka Jaina Mahila okkūta organised three days National Level women conference on 11th, 12th, and 13th of August 2017 at Shravanabelagola, on the accession of Bhagawan Bahubali Mastakābhishēka Mahōtsava-2018, under the guidance of Karmayōgi Chārūkīrti Bhattāraka Swāmiji. The objective of the conference was to protect culture, Religion Awakening and women education and many Jain women scholars from all over India presented a paper on contributions of women in Jainism in various fields. In the conference Dr. M. S. Padma in her speech said that in Jainism women are best like men. The conference was presided by Māthrushri Hēmāvathi Heggade and women achievers in different fields from different religion were felicitated.

Findings

- Men and women are equal in the eyes of Jainism. The role played by both of them is equally important for the welfare of their children, family, society and nation.
- Jains encourage their women to get higher education and enable them to take part in social, economic, religious and cultural activities.
- From the beginning until date, women proved her ability in the areas of education, organization, social welfare activities, practising daily rituals and even in economic status.
- Anywhere in Jain Agamas women not seen in any undermined position.
- Status of women was unaffected in spite of Vedic religion and philosophy. This does not change general view of Jainism regarding their parity with men.

Conclusions

It is clear from the analysis of study from earlier period to the present era; the religious, social and economic participation of women is quite common irrespective of time period. The findings reveal the fact that women in Jain community contributes to the society in the form of protecting culture, awakening society, educating society, producing academicians and women social entrepreneurs. Their activities are based on religious injections like live and let-live policy, be good, see good and do good. The community accorded important place for women in all family, religious, economic and social activities.

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