

Study on Influence of Women in Indian Epics

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Abstract – Women can be one of the most overlooked and misrepresented figures in culture. This is especially true in patriarchal cultures, notably in the religious texts and mythologies of such sects, where women are often entirely overlooked or often seen as carriers of men's values in the society. In India, the time between the writing of the first documented Hindi book, the Rig Veda, and the emergence of Buddhism is no different in the Indian Epic Era (around 2000-700 BCE). Two great Indian Epics were the result of this period. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana. While historians and archaeologists' debate which of the two were first written, this specific analysis concentrates on the role of women in the two Epics and seeks to determine whether the studies have already degraded relative to the Vedic period or not. It also aims to restore the accessible historiography and to research whether women actually fell to patriarchy ideas in the Epic Era or whether they were imposed during late ancient and early mediaeval periods (circa 500 to 800 CE). In this analysis, the female protagonists of both Epics were thoroughly researched, and the updating and rewrite of the epics about 500 CE was taken into account.

Keywords: Influence of Women, Ancient History, Indian Epic

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INTRODUCTION

Women's position in Indian culture has often grown. These ups and downs of faith were all the more pronounced since "female sex had never favored any of the world's religions or their priests and prophets," as historian Wendy Doniger points out. Hinduism is no exception and the decrease in the degree of freedom which women enjoyed within the family and the Indian community is gradually sharper as society advances from the ancient times to the early mediaeval times. Although it is impossible to specify the exact moment in history that this decline occurred, it is possible to analyse the shifting status and function of women in society by opposing three wide phases of the Ancient Indian society.

The first is the early Vedic phase (1500-1000 BCE), the compositional period of the Rig Veda, which is not only the backbone of the Hindu philosophy and culture, but also the first textual source to research women's roles. While women were never autonomous of their patriarchal power at the time, they were still joint owners of property with their husbands and regulated biped (slaves) and quadruped (cattle's). Their existence was deemed significant both in the household economy and in society and, considering the patriarchal influence over them, no specific significance was attached to Chastity. Women were often provided education in these days. Many highly trained women engaged strongly in academic and philosophical discourses. References to Brahmadine or Vedic hymn

composers, such as Gosha, Apala, Lopamudra, Maitreyi, Gargi, Indrani, Mudgalini and Vishvara, with the six verses of book I, Hymn 179 of Rigveda being exclusively attributed to Lopamudra are interspersed through the text. Other job opportunities seem to have also been applied to women, aside from literary work and household economy. This involve school, music and dance and martial endeavors. The actual combat on the batteries Veda is identified as female warriors such as Shashiyasi, Vadhramati, Vishpala, Danu and Sarama. Furthermore, women can remain unmarried, if they so wish (Amajur).

The photo above, though is romanticized. In reality, the number of hymns attributed both to female scholars and to the number of female sages (only 30 Brahmadinis) is minimal, indicating restricted access by women to 'sacred information.' Furthermore, the role of women in the family has often been subject to men. A woman was subordinate to the supremacy of men and although her husband engaged in rites and offerings, she did not carry out any religious duties by herself. Moreover, she was neither the beneficiary nor the offeror. Female deities in the Rig Veda, after all had limited roles suggesting that the true strength and glory depended on the male while there was divinity in the female aspect. The role of women has often been acknowledged as subordinates and in the later Vedic era, the position is further rigidized (1000-600 BCE).

Somewhere in these two periods is the two great Indian epics that this paper deals with. It is in these texts where women from the old community take on a more specific form as definitive characters with distinctive actions and attitudes than simple names and references. These characters are explored in depth in the next parts in order to explain whether women succeeded in ideas of patriarchy in the ancient Indian texts.

WOMEN IN THE RAMAYANA

Of the two great Indian epics, collectively referred to as the Itihasa, the Ramayana is probably the first occurrences" according to mythological convictions, despites evidence in the text that suggests otherwise. It is thus examined here at first. Valmiki's Ramayana, written around the 2nd century BCE-2nd century CE, is called the general edition among the learned Indians, while it is the general one. There are many epic variants trained in India, not only in Hinduism, but also in Jaina and Buddhist practices. The versions often change from one place to another, historically named Sthala Ramayana. However, irrespective of differences, the key characters of women stay the same throughout the plot. For the purposes of this article, three significant phases in the existence of the protagonist, Rama, are studied here. However, it must be borne in mind that not all the female characters for this research were studied for convenience, since this can be part of a separate review, particularly on the subject.

On the basis of the significant phases of Rama's life, women may be separated as follows:

1. In the infancy: From this point were studied four major female characters: Rama's mum, Kausalya, Kaikeyi, Sumitra and the Royal wet nurse, Manthara and Ahalya.
2. In adulthood: Rama's wife, Sita, her foster sister, Urmila, her cousins, Shrutakirti and Mandavi.
3. In the forest: Anasuya, Shabri, Surpanakha.

In terms of study, there are many interpretations of women in Ramayana. Of these, several are based on the deconstruction of Valmiki's epic version of the female characters. Broadly speaking, Ramayana talks of two general female forms.

The first one adheres to the Dharma and are faithful children, sisters and mothers. They usually behave in line with men's desires in their lives and are therefore called fine, honorable, and virtuous, even spiritual. In the unusual cases in which they are behaving on instinct, interest or not agreeing with commands, they encounter disastrous scenarios. The best example of this is Sita, who crosses the path of defending her brethren, Lakshmana, which contributes to her kidnapping. Another example is

Ahalya, who commits adultery with Indra out of fascination, even when he sees his disguise, which contributes to her success. Rama, the elevated heroine of the epic, rescues the women involved in both situations.

The second group of women in the tale are the optimistic, who are searching for strength. These included Ramas stepmothers, Kaikeyi, and Manthara, the wet nurse who excluded him from the kingdom for 14 years to secure his throne for his wife, Bharata. Another indication of this is Surpanakha, sister of the key adversary, Ravana, who is physically assertive and therefore punishable by ideal persons. In both instances, inability to comply with the order set by men for women results in the collapse or humiliation of an individual.

There is therefore a strict underlying patronization tone towards women in the Ramayana which contrasts sharply with the portrayal of women in the Vedic corpus of literature. Before we discuss what has resulted in that tone, we must review the second Great Epic, the Mahabharata.

THE MAHABHARATA

Especially in comparison to the Ramayana, the female characters of the Mahabharata are highly numerous and hard to identify. However, in this specific situation, the patriarchal tone of patronizing is a little less evident and the female protagonists have a distinct and unabashed nature that does not always contribute to their breakdown. Women tend to be more sexually free in Mahabharata, marital partnerships polygamy and polyandrous (Pandu and his wives and Draupadi and their husbands) and although women maintain their daughters' responsibilities, sisters, wives and mothers, they are also capable of learning (Draupadi was competent in 36 arts) (Hidimba, Amba).

Obedient and self-sacrificing women, however are celebrated in this text, too and later, for using a woman or a wife as a possession (Draupadi is used as a game wager) underlines women's ill-treatment, if not inherently sexism. Like Ramayana, if the dignity of a woman is challenged (Draupadi is disrobing it in this case), it is seen as a challenge to her husband's masculinity, and as an incentive to battle. What is noteworthy, however in this case, is that in the Mahabharata women particularly Draupadi, frequently challenge their husbands' decisions, control political relations and in some situations, even take issues into their hands if justice is on the table, something that is not seen elsewhere in the Ramayana.

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE EPIC PERIOD:

The women of Epic India were honored at home. Ramayana and Mahabharata Epics had also offered women a proper place; women were named Dharma's origin, wealth and pleasure. We see detailed references to bravery, strong will and courage of women such as Kaikeye, Sita, Rukmani, Satyabhama, Sabitri, Draupadi, etc. Ramayana is a majestic picture of the Hindu ideal femininity, glorifies the importance of "Pativratya" and idealizes the femininity as one of the most venerable facets of our patrimony. The Mahabharata describes the husband's responsibilities and behaviors.

Women during the Period of Dharmashastras and Purans:

The role of women steadily deteriorated and experienced significant changes throughout the days of Dharma shastras and Puranas. Girls were deprived of academic schooling. Girls were deemed residents of second class. Women's independence has been curtailed. Sons were granted more weighting than girls. Girls were excluded from studying the Vedas.

Manu, the Indian advocate, said that women must be under father in infancy, under their husbands and under their son in their old age. She deserves no rights at all.

Restrictions imposed of social problems in women freedom

Owing to the different constraints on women's rights, several issues have begun to sink. In social fields marriage before puberty was practiced, widow remarriage was forbidden, a woman was granted the rank of a man of God, a wife was refused education entirely, "Sati's custom" became more and more popular, and the purdah scheme became trendy and polygyny practice was accepted.

Restrictions imposed of economic problems in women freedom

In the economic domain, a woman was refused a share in the property of her husband and believed that a wife and a slave cannot own property. In the religious area she was discouraged from making offerings and prayers, performing penance and pilgrimages.

Factors That Caused the Degradation of Women:

The renounced sociologist, Prabhati Mukharjee, established many explanations for women's low status after the Vedic time. These are the imposition of Brahminic austerity on society as a whole, strict limits on the Caste Structure and the common family

framework, the absence of educational facilities for women, entry of non-Aryan wives into the Aryan House and international invasions.

Women in the Buddhist Period:

Women's position changed somewhat during the Buddhist era, but there was no major improvement. Any of the rigidities and limits of the caste system have been eased. Buddha preached equity and sought to boost women's societal, religious and educational standing. Women reclaimed part of their lost liberty and status during the benign rule of prominent Buddhist kings such as Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, and Sri Harsha, thanks to the comparatively broad Buddhist doctrine.

Women were not limited to household labor but could still allow use of an educational profession if they chose to. Women came to hold a strongly superior position in the religious sector. Women have been enabled to become "Sanyasis." Many women played a leading role in the Buddhist monastic life, women had their sangha called Bhikshuni Sangha, ruled by the same laws and rules as the monks. The Sangha opened up opportunities for cultural events and social work and for public life. However, their political and economic position remained unchanged.

Ancient Women and Education:

In this awful picture, there are several bright exceptions. Women play an enormous part in ancient Indian literature. Ancient India had a number of ladies learned. The Brahmadini, or the women who never married and cultivated the Vedas all their lives, and the Sadyodvahas, who researched before married, had two forms of scholarly women. Panini listed Vedas teaching female students. Katyana named Upadhyaya or Upadhyaya female students. Ashoka had Sangha Mitra, his daughter, persuaded to preach Buddhism. From the texts in Jain we read about the princess Jayanti of Kousambi, who was always a spinner to learn theology and philosophy. Sometimes, hymns were penned by Buddhist nuns. Sanskrit plays and verses, excellent in poetry, painting and other fine arts have been published by the women.

Ancient Women in Politics:

Women also held influential leadership roles. Megasthenes listed the administrative Pandya women. The queen of Satavahana, "Nayanika controlled the realm in her minor son's behalf. So, did on behalf of the Vakataka Prince minor Pravabati, Chandragupta II's daughter. Somewhat after the Gupta era, queens in Kashmir, Orissa and Andhra were rulers. In the Kannada district

Princess Vijaybhattacharika worked as the Regional Governor under the King of Haluka; in Vikramadita.

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE RIG VEDIC AND LATER-VEDIC PERIOD

The Rig Vedic Women in India had a large degree of social standing. Their state was fine. The women were offered a chance to meet high academic and moral expectations. During this time, there were many Rishis women. While monogamy was more prevalent, the wealthier portion of society was polygamous. No sati scheme or early marriage occurred. But women began to be discriminated against as a consequence of their free and esteemed roles in the Rig-Vedic community after the later Vedic era of education and other privileges and facilities. Child marriage, widow fire, purdah and polygamy made the situation of women worse.

(i) Women in the Vedic and the post Vedic Periods:

The Vedas are the start of the Indian cultural heritage. The Vedic time is commonly thought to be distributed between 300 BC and 600 B.C. In this paper some general conclusions were addressed about the role of women in this time.

(ii) Freedom Enjoyed by Ancient Women:

The scale of women's right to engage in public events represents the essence of the role of women in the Vedic era. Women never saw "purdah." They had equality and had freedom to pick their male mate. You should teach yourself. Widows have been able to remarry. However, divorce was not permissible for them. And men were not allowed to leave their spouses. Women were granted absolute independence in family relations and treated as "Ardhanginis".

(iii) Equal Educational opportunities for women:

Girls were never raped, even though male children were preferred to female children. They earned education as boys and passed through the discipline of "Brahma achar," including rite of "Upanayana." The Vedic literature was researched by women as men, some as Lopamudra, Ghosa and Sikata Nivavari among the writers of the Vedic hymns. Many girls in well-to-do families were educated about B.C. for quite a while 300.

(iv) Position of Women in Matters Relating to Marriage and Family Affairs:

In the Vedic time marriage was viewed as a social and religious obligation and took the pair together in the same way. Women had the right in their lives to stay spinners. Marriage has not been forcefully forced on them Unknown children's marriages. Girls

were married only after puberty; which women still had the freedom to choose life partners after completing their schooling.

(v) Economic Production and occupational Freedom:

Vedic women had economic equality. Economic freedom. Any people have become active in education. The place of development was house. Clothes were spinning and weaving at home. Women even supported their husbands in farm purists.

(vi) Property Rights and Inheritance:

The privileges of women in inheriting property were rather restricted. A married daughter didn't take part in her father's properties, but each spinner was entitled to one-fourth of her brothers' assets. Women had power over the presents and property etc. received by a wife after marriage but much of the family property remained under the patriarch's control and administration. As a child, a woman had no direct role in the property of her spouse. A forsaken wife was however entitled to 1/3 of the fortune of her spouse. A widow had been forced to pursue an ascetic existence and had no part in the property of her spouse. It may also be widespread that the social condition did not benefit women having land, however they were covered as daughters and wives.

(vii) Women Role in the Religious Field

In the area of faith, the wife had complete privileges and engaged actively in religious rituals with her spouse. The husband and the wife held holy rites and sacrifices together. Women have also been prominently interested in religious speeches. There was no bar in our holy literature for women to read or learn.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIEVAL INDIA:

For Indian people, the mediaeval era (500 A.D. to 1500 B.C.) was particularly disappointing since their condition tended to decline throughout that period. Medieval India was not the feminine age, but the "dark age" for them.

When foreigners like Muslims entered India, they took their own civilization with them. For them, woman was their father, brother or husband's only land, and she had no self-will. This kind of mindset even slipped into the minds of Indians and they even started to handle their own women like that. Another explanation for the decrease in the status and rights of women was that the initial Indians chose to defend their women from barbarous Muslim invaders. As a practice for these invaders' polygamy, they took every girl

and held it in their "harems" To shield them, Indian women began to use "Purdah" (a veil), which protects their bodies. Because of this their freedom was also impacted. They were not permitted to travel easily and this led their position to deteriorate further. This issues with women have modified people's mentality. Now they began to view a girl as suffering and a burden that must be covered from intruders' eyes and requires more consideration. While a boy does not require such extra focus and is helpful as an earning hand instead. So began a vicious cycle in which women were getting. All this has contributed to new evils such as Child Marriage, Sati, Jauhar and female education constraints.

Sati:

The death ceremony at the husband's funeral pyre is called "Sati" or "Sahagaman" According to some of the Hindu scriptures, women who die in her husband's funeral pyre are right into heaven so performing this practice is a positive thing. At first it was not compulsory for women, but she was widely valued by society because she followed such a tradition. Sati was seen as the better option than a widow, as the condition of widows was much worst in Hindu culture. Some of the scriptures, such as 'Medhatiti,' varied in their opinion that Sati is like committing suicide.

Jauhar:

It's more or less like Sati, except it's a mass suicide. In Rajput communities, Jauhar was prevalent. In this tradition, wives immolated throughout the life of their spouse. When people from the Rajput clan were confident of their enemy's demise, all women put a big pyre together and set off while their husband used to fight the last definitive fight with the enemy known as "Shaka" This defends women's sanctity and the whole clan.

Child Marriage:

In mediaeval India, it was a standard. Girls were marrying at 8-10 years of age. They were refused access to education and regarded as the stuff. One of the Tulsidas shloka can picture the plight of women, writing "Dhol, gawar, shudra, pashu, nari, ye sab tadankeadhikari" This indicates that animals, alphabets, lower castes, and women should be beaten. Women were thus related to livestock and married at an early date. The children's marriage carried with its other issues, including higher birth rates, woman's bad health due to repeated child care and high mortality among women and children.

Restriction on Widow Remarriage:

The state of widows was quite poor in mediaeval India. They have not been regarded as human beings and have been exposed to several prohibitions were expected to live a pious life after

their husband died and no celebrating was permitted. Their presence in any successful job was known as a poor omen. Heads of widows were also often cut. They did not remarry. They could not. Any remarrying woman has been frowned at by society. This cruelty to widows was one of the key causes for Sati's many women. In mediaeval India, a Hindu widow existed as a curse.

Purdah System:

In mediaeval Indian culture, the veil or the 'Purdah' scheme was popular. It was used to shield women from the gaze of foreign rulers who in the mediaeval era conquered India. But this structure limited women's rights.

Girl Education:

Girls from mediaeval India and in particular Hindu society were not properly taught. They were taught about household duties. But a prominent Indian author, 'Vatsyayana' wrote that women should be perfect in 64 arts, including cooking, spinning, grinding, medical skills, recitation and much more.

CONCLUSION

A short study of the depiction of women in the epics and a contrast with the representation of women in the Vedic corpus of literature revealed a few points on the role of women in ancient India. The Vedic texts in their interpretation and representation of women was reasonably liberal. While the authority of a woman in the family and community was well below the power of a Vedic man, she was still a person of her own right, could chose to stay unmarried and had the right to be informed. The representation of women in the Mahabharata is closer to this picture. But in Ramayana, and in lay texts such as Manu smriti, women immediately started to be called the guardians of male honor and the source of sexual offences. Vedic corpus then tends to talk about what women were really as part of culture, whilst the Manu smriti and the Epics appear to stress what women ought to be like.

This normative approach of these texts in the course of portraying the perfect woman who is submissive, compassionate, self-sacrificing and compliant therefore indicates that women were actually the contrary in the formulation of these texts. The Ramayana which specifically defines marriage as a requirement of girls and men's assertive forces over women contrasts with the Rig Veda assertion that a married woman is her own householder and has jurisdiction over the father-in-law, her younger brethren, and shares her husbands' duties. Similarly, themes of kidnapping as well as the usage of one's tongue and humor before the guys, typically seen in both Epics, seem

to be alert. Women who could freely move as per the Vedas as well as engage in processions are forced here to stay in the boundaries of the "lines drawn by the men of the family to their protection, the proverbial Lakshmana Rekha. Failure to do so will contribute to shame and decay irrespective of the chastity of the individual.

The exact date of the creation of the two Epics is not known, as mentioned above by chronological records. It is assumed, however that the texts as they exist today were eventually collected by the third to fourth centuries CE (the Gupta period) with appropriate supplements from mythology, local heroes' story's, and conventional stories. It is also necessary to consider that these texts are more didactic than descriptive. Instead of focusing about what the Epics mean about culture in Ancient India and about the role of women, it is important to understand what they may choose to do. It is therefore important to bear in mind that historiography was most commonly utilized as a method to exploit common thinking to accomplish specific ends. Historical data suggests that much of this exploitation was carried out in the early Middle Ages not just to legitimize authority but also to manipulate citizens through the mainstream literature (Sahu,1994). The analysis of Epics to assess women's position in culture as a basis of total authority in history is thus a misguided strategy. While the tales reflect culture and societal expectations, though, it cannot be forgotten that there is still space for fiction, artistic license and in this case even distortion of evidence for didactic reasons or merely to take a certain perspective of another.

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