

Deification of Women's Role at Household Level Sans Emancipation: Insights from Odisha, India

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Abstract

In recorded Indian history, women's status has been subjected to many changes. There are several factors that validate the privileged position enjoyed by women in ancient India. Socio-cultural constructs with religious overtones, of assigning roles to gender have a significant impact on defining women's role within the society. The conditioning of women based on the religio-cultural expectations lead to their subjugated position in the society. This paper attempts to understand the role of women within the household with the help of real-life analysis of case studies collected in Khordha district in Odisha. This illustrates the different roles of women aligned with their cultural interpretation through history embedded in religious scriptures. It simultaneously discusses how the position of women has declined in due course of time in history, underscoring the contradictions as well. The article brings out that deification of women at the household level does not lead to their emancipation and empowerment.

Keywords: Culture, Discrimination, Deification, Household, Odisha, Patriarchy, Society, Women

I. Introduction:

Culture plays a significant role in determining the values, views, approaches, conduct and practices by both women and men in the society which has a substantial influence on the nation's progress. To understand the influence of culture on society and on the status of women in India in particular, it is imperative to revisit the religio-historical practices. Women held a dignified position in society in the pre-Hindu society that gets reflected in the culture of Mohenjodaro and Harappan civilizations. This is depicted in sculptural poses of the early Mohenjodaro dancing girl which is an epitome of a confident and independent woman. During the Rig Vedic period, women could enjoy full religious rights and also availed the educational opportunities for improving their personality (Tripathy, 2000). Women were empowered, had equal say in family matters, independent enough to take important decisions of their life and were free to choose their life partners (Mallik, 2019). In ancient India (till about the seventh to eighth century AD) women in many places occupied an equal position to men (*ibid*,

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2019). Several literatures depict how women ruled their kingdoms efficiently and many battles were won under the monarchy of a single woman ruler. Women also enjoyed absolute economic rights, during the early Vedic period (1500 BCE - 1000 BCE), and were considered as joint owners of their household and its property along with their spouses (Pal, 2019). They were engaged in professions related to health, welfare and teaching as *asachāryās* (Altekar 1938). Besides, women were also involved in earning money through spinning and weaving of clothes at home along with engagement in agricultural activities (Pal, 2019). However, the “golden period” for women in the Indus civilization. After the Aryans came to India, the matriarchal society got diluted towards a patriarchal system (Shrivastava, 2009). The position of women started to lose its importance and their value began to wane in the later Vedic or Epic period (Pathak, 2019). The social status was not the same as it was during the early Rig Vedic period. The changes in the societal norms and practices gradually started curtailing the liberty of women and, their opinions in family matters as well as political, social and economic matters of the society were neglected (Mallik, 2019).

In the medieval period (the eighth to ninth century AD), the status of women degraded considerably. Men were considered superior to women thereafter. Hence, the medieval period is considered as the 'dark age' where women were deprived of their equality with men. Customs of '*Purdah*', '*Sati*' (burning of widows), child marriage and the joint family system became the prime reasons for subjugation of women. It gradually resulted in a devaluation of women's position both within the household and the society. The position of women in India after the eighth to ninth century AD, witnessed a decline and they started being controlled as possessions by men. The custom of female infanticide started being practiced in some sections of the society during the medieval period. However, Buddhism and Jainism both had considered women equal to men and given the former opportunity to participate in religious activities (Mallik, 2019). According to *Atharvaveda*³, a woman is described as hardworking, possessing best behaviour who strives to maintain a perfect home. According to Hindu mythology, women are projected as an incarnation of Goddess Durga who is “Dashabhujā” (10-armed goddess) which describes a woman as multi-tasker and can cope with everything efficiently. Besides, *Manusmṛiti*⁴ explains how a woman is expected to be the source of all kinds of contentment within the family that includes proper upbringing and care of children to noble benevolent deeds of taking care of elders. During the age of *Dharmaśāstras*, *Mānsmṛiti* (200BC–647AD), women have been characterized by the subordination of social status and acted like slaves in order to satisfy the overwhelming immorality of masculine demand and sexuality (Pal, 2019). Subsequently, the Muslim invasion in India affected the position of women and deprived them of their egalitarian privileges (Shrivastava, 2009). The exclusion of women from social production resulted in relegating the importance of household tasks and confining them to the private sphere. The control of private property not only got into the hands of patriarchy, but also, resulted in subjugation of women. The ownership of private property augmented the ability of men to generate surplus, altered the family form of social arrangement to a patriarchal structure (Engels, 1942). Power played a

³The *Atharva Veda* (*Atharvaveda* from *atharvāṇas* and *veda*, meaning "knowledge") is the "knowledge storehouse of *atharvāṇas*, the procedures for everyday life". The text is the fourth Veda, but has been a late addition to the Vedic scriptures of Hinduism (Wikipedia).

⁴The *Manusmṛiti*, also spelled as *Manusmṛiti*, is an ancient legal text among the many *Dharmaśāstras* of Hinduism. *Manusmṛiti* is usually translated as "code of Manu", but it literally means "reflections of Manu". It is also called as *Manava-Samhita* or *Manava-Dharmaśāstra* (Wikipedia).

strongrole within gender relationsaffecting women’s status in the society. Thus, existing social arrangements, norms and power structure at the household level have a significant influence in confining womento the private domain (Sadan, 2004). This gets reflected in the way women are overburdened with domestic responsibilities along with paid employment even in the current scenario (Owens, 2018).

Women areexpected to play different roles and as multi-taskers (super women, super mom etc.) adjustablein all domestic situations. Multi-tasking does not change in case of women taking up paid employment outside theirhomes. They are expected to cope with their domestic responsibilities as well as balance their engagement in paid career (Bose & Panda, 2019). Typically,a womanengaged in remunerated employment is expected to start her domestic chores such as cooking and other works after she returns home from work while the husband and other members of the family in similar situations are relaxing. And evidence from many regions reveal persistent gender inequalities in the distribution of household resources and tasks (Agrawal, 1997). Women are also engaged in unpaid works in the family farm, household enterprise, processing of agricultural products for family consumption, activities such as fetching water, fodder and collection of firewoodetc. (Elborgh-Woytek et al. 2013).However, the paradox is that women’s contribution towards the household has always been ignored.A review of literature on religio-history confirms that though women have been epitomized as ‘*GharkiLaxmi*’ or ‘*Goddess of Fortune at Home*’ in India, yet herrole in Indian religious scriptureswere curated and modified to suit the needs of a patriarchal society.

The paper at hand is divided into eleven sections. After the introduction and methodology, the third section discusses women’s role as mother or ‘*Janani*’. This is followed by women as ‘*Single mother*’as the super mommy and companion (‘*Ardhangini*’) in fourth and fifth sections respectively. The sixth section discusses the role of women as ‘*Matrika*’ or grandmother and seventh section illustrate women’s role as ‘*Savitri*’- the life saviour. This is followed by twosections discussing women as ‘*Karta*’or head of the household and sacrifices made by them as ‘*Aadarshgriha badhu*’. The tenthsectionanalyses women’s struggle as ‘*Breadwinner*’ of the family. Thefinal section includes a discussion andsome concludingthoughts. It may be noted that the terms - domestic responsibilities, tasks and duties have been interchangeably used in the article.

II. Methodology:

The articleis basedon a literature review and empirical study conducted in both rural and urban locations of Khordha district, Odishabased on purposive sampling. Selected case studies have been used in the paper to illustrate the different roles played by women in Indian society.Focus group discussions with all family members and women groups within the community were conducted to understand women’s role and contribution to the household. The ensuing sections discuss the cases looking at women’s role at the household level as depicted religio-historically.

1. 'Janani': The Mother

Motherhood is one of the significant accomplishments of women in her life cycle. The role of a mother is not only restricted to giving birth to her children but also, their upbringing. In other words, it is not only limited to contributing to the nation's labour force but also, their maintenance, for which a woman needs to make many adjustments and sacrifices in her personal life. The semblance between the role of women as mothers giving birth to a child and Earth Goddess nourishing nature has been depicted in social science literature. According to the *Tantra Parampara*, even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (the *Trimurtis*) had their origin from *Devi Prakriti* (Adi Maya Shakti). Hence, *Devi Prakriti* is God's mother and often referred to as *Triamba* (one who gave birth to three children). Besides, *Shakti Parampara* also underscores that even the almighty God does have a mother. The feminine power to reproduce new life is inherent in every wife and mother. Furthermore, in depth understanding of the early Vedic period in Hinduism emphasises that the "position of women was considered identical to Goddesses and were worshiped for their ability to give birth to children" (Gatwood, 1985, p. 31). Besides, giving birth, she also provides social security to women in a conjugal relationship. This societal expectation has caused a noticeable traditional association of womanhood with motherhood in conjugal relations.

The Upanisads consider the position of a mother equivalent to God. It emphasises that the position of mother and father should be equally recognised in the society. This gets reflected in the story of Satyakama Javala in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Javala was recognised by his preceptor after his mother's name. According to *Manusmriti*, the position of a mother is considered esteemed and more prevalent than father and an Acharya (teacher) which is reflected in the following verses:

"An Acharya excels ten Upadhyayas, a father excels a hundred Acharyas, and a mother excels a thousand fathers, in respect of veneration." (2:145)

This may seem contrary to the way Manu's codification of social norms which have depicted women as impure, someone who can never be equal to men and are second-class citizens (Pal, 2019). According to Krishnaraj (2010), the social construction of gender influences glorification of motherhood, as different from the lived realities of Indian women that gives them no empowerment.

The case of Sanjukta Mishra from Bhubaneswar city is one such example where she had made many compromises and sacrifices in taking up household responsibilities. She was married at the age of twenty and had to forego her career aspirations to the extent of giving away a government job in Indian Railways. Instead, she was persuaded by her parents to get married to a man who had a secured Central Government job. This indicates how competent women in India give up their career ambitions and dreams in order to get married and settle down. Competent and talented women restrict themselves to domestic work during the productive phase of their lives rather than entering the labour market, which deprives them from life opportunities and a professional career. This can be referred to as the 'mommy track' (Becker, 1965; Raju, 2010 and Menon, 2012). Such patterns are commonly found in female participation in the labour force in South Asian countries and elsewhere (Bagchi & Raju, 1993; Looma & Lukose, 2012).

Engagement in household responsibilities, foregoing career aspirations never reduces the burden of women, rather it demands more of their time and leads to physical stress. "In the Indian society, women are expected to be educated not for their personal advancement, but to become more efficient in taking up household responsibilities and child-rearing. While doing so women serve and maintain the current labour force of the nation, yet their contribution towards the household and the national economy remains invisible, weakening the position of women both within their family and society" (Bose & Panda, 2019, p. 7653). Self-denying, caring, suffering and nurturing is considered as the 'inherent' characteristics of women that is 'natural' (Sreekumar, 2015).

Today, Sanjuktai in her early forties, often regrets to have given up her aspirations of pursuing a career. With this realization and regret, she has been involved in guiding her children in their studies. It is worth mentioning that her children are bright students. Besides, when she was asked – "Whether household works have value? And should it be recognised?"

She responded-

"My major contribution to the family is good upbringing of my children to become responsible persons. If I forego this part of my responsibility towards my family and depend on a caretaker and a tutor, it surely is not the same. Recognition of such work done will ensure respect and acknowledgement".

This is how women try to justify their role as housewives and mothers. The role of mother becomes more challenging, when a woman has to take up the responsibility as a single parent.

2. 'Single Mother': The Super Mommy

Women have a spiritual significance, as fertility deities in India are mostly goddesses associated with fertility, pregnancy, childbirth and crops. Further they also represent 'shakti' which is the feminine source of power. In the texts of epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas, the character of a woman as strong role models and their expectations as mothers in the Indian society is well portrayed. According to the UN Women report, it was estimated that 4.5% (13 million) of all Indian households are run by single mothers (Pandit, 2019).

Consider the case study of Monica from Bhubaneswar city, who was married in her early twenties to a man 10 years older to her. Belonging to a family of orthodox traditional values, she was socialized to obey the decisions of her parents and her in-laws after marriage. She was submissive, accepted subjugation and the chauvinist attitude of her husband. She abided by the decisions taken by him and in-laws without complaining. Due to the rigid patriarchal values existing in her family, Monica was not allowed to pursue her career and hence, became financially dependent on her husband. She was vulnerable to domestic violence and mental tortures even during her pregnancy and childbirth. Eventually, she decided to move out of the bad marriage with her newborn baby.

Her struggle did not end after leaving her in-laws' place, she came back to her parental home where she was always taunted by her brother. A divorced woman in Indian society is generally considered as a burden to her natal kin (Patel, 2010). Monica decided to earn a livelihood for her son and herself. She requested her father to aid her with some financial help and started a beauty salon. It has now been seven years, she is not only earning for her livelihood but also, is contributing to household expenses and educating her son.

The above case reiterates the fact that women's role as successful single mothers have been witnessed in the Hindu epics such as Ramayana where the character of Sita, mother of twin sons Luv and Kush raised them in the forests in Rishi Valmiki's ashramafter being banished from the palace. Similarly, Shakuntala the daughter of Sage Vishwamitra and Apsara Menaka, a strong headed woman and a single mother who raised her son Bharata alone in the forest. Another example is Mahabharata, where Hidimba, the wife of Pandav Bhim who raised their son Ghatotkach as an able warrior. The number of women as single parents in India accounts for 4.5 percent of all India households (approximately 13 million) and most of them have to struggle in a patriarchal society to survive and take care of children, especially without the support of their natal families (UN Women, 2019). Apart from playing the role of mother, women are expected to be a perfect 'Ardhangini' or 'Sahadharmini' to their husbands to fulfill the fourfold aim of the dharma of life i.e. Ethical perfection, Karma, Artha and Moksha.

3. 'Ardhangini': The Companion

The process of socialization has demarcated boundaries for segregation of activities on the basis of gender. According to *Atharvaveda Mantra* 1/14/1 for a woman, after marriage her husband's home should be her permanent abode and she is supposed to be faithful, gentle and handle daily matters ably to avoid household conflicts. Besides, she is also expected to be on the side of her husband in the ebb and flow of life as 'Sangi' or companion. Loyalty and chastity were considered the nature of an ideal woman in India. The case study of Manjulata Malla of Bhubaneswar city who is in her mid-fifties is a case in point who toils to be a perfect 'Grihini' (housewife). Besides accomplishment of the household responsibilities, she also takes care of her husband who is ageing and paralyzed as a perfect 'Ardhangini' (better half of the husband). She does this despite her own health issues. Women are expected to serve their husbands like God. Epics and Puranas portray such women boisterously like Sita, Ahalya, Mandodari, Savithri, Seelavathi, Anasuya, Arundhati, Gandhari and many others. Most of the Holy books also glorify women's servitude to men. During the interview, Manjulata had severe fever and back ache, yet she was busy preparing meals and efficiently doing other household chores without any complaints.

She expressed:

"My husband retired when he attained the age of 60 years, but I will have to work till I die."

She further emphasized:

"With changing times and empowerment, women are becoming more competent in taking up household duties efficiently, but they also excel in careers outside. However, there is a need to

sensitize male members to share domestic responsibilities. It is the responsibility of parents to educate their sons to be sensitive and share household tasks.”

A woman is considered as ‘*Sahakarmini*’ who shares an equal responsibility in all the actions performed by her husband. The term ‘*Dampati*’ emphasises for the owners specifically husband and wife who own the household jointly and share all responsibilities.

4. ‘*Matrika*’: The Grandmother

Many rural households in India are made up of three generations, where grandparents are found to spend quality time with their grandchildren. The grandmother is often found telling stories to her grandchildren. She passes knowledge that she derived from her own grandparents and her personal experiences about traditional cultural norms and behavioural practices to the future generations. In the current scenario, due to livelihood compulsions, women are engaged in income generating activities outside the household, leaving behind their young children. Not all can afford hired caretakers and therefore some senior household women member take up that responsibility irrespective of age. Such roles demand not only, taking care but also, spending quality time with young children. Champa Sahoo aged 64 from Kunjuri village in Tangi block, takes care of grandchildren as her son and daughter-in-law are in Puri town to earn their livelihood. As a grandmother, she enjoys imparting religious and moral values to her grandchildren. The case of Champa Sahoo underlines how grandmothers play an important role in the process of enculturation of values to the next generation. She makes them understand what life used to be in the olden days and the significance of being attached to the roots of their glorified past through oral cultures (Shah, 2010). She also takes care of meals of her grandchildren along with multiple other responsibilities at household level like engagement in the household enterprise (grocery store) in the village and supervising wage labour in the agricultural fields. This case study affirms that women play a significant role as grandmothers which is often overlooked. Many senior women also successfully take up the responsibility of altruistic head of the family in the absence of a male counterpart.

5. ‘*Karta*’: Head of the Household

Socially constructed norms create differences between men and women based on cultural expectations and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity which further defines the role of head of the household based on their gender identity. The role of ‘*Karta*’ is delineated by traditional customs and norms, as the head of a family. The patriarchal Indian society is considered the norm and hence households are supposed to be headed by male members based on socially constructed values. The ‘*Karta*’ is a distinguished position within the family who has the authority to take major altruistic household decisions that will benefit all members. The literature on gender, development and planning explicitly articulates the importance of women-headed households and the connection between female headship and poverty (Buvinic and Gupta, 1993:24).

The case of Prabhati Praharaaj aged 55 years from Ratanpurpatna village of Tangi block shows how exposure and experience influences women’s perception regarding their household contribution and improves their bargaining power both within their family and society. Prabhati, a widow of a martyr in the Indian Army had a broader outlook

towards the position of women. After the death of her husband, she took complete charge of responsibilities of the family. She struggled to find employment and had to undergo physical and mental stress. Today, Prabhati encourages her daughter-in-law Gayatri to pursue a career of her choice and is willing to share household tasks to support her.

Moreover, Prabhati believes that there is value attached to each work done by women whether paid or unpaid. But it is financial independence which determines the bargaining position of women in society. She emphasized that if women's unpaid work gets recognized, they would get their due respect. This corroborates the Delhi court's Justice Najmi Waziri's verdict: "*If a male member of a Hindu Undivided Family (HUF), by virtue of his being the first-born eldest, can be a Karta, so can a female member*".

6. 'Savitri': The Life Saviour

Women's contribution to her family is not quantifiable in terms of time or money. Indrani Bose (which place?) until the age of 57 years had successfully accomplished all household responsibilities. Her role became further crucial, when her husband due to prolonged illness lost his ability to move and had kidney failure. The medical condition of her husband demanded a kidney transplant. Indrani donated one of her kidneys. She was always reminded of the work of Sri Aurobindo's '*Savitri*' published in the year 1950, that symbolizes the triumph of man over the powers of destruction and darkness. It is based on the legendary tale of Savitri and Satyavan from the Mahabharata, a story of love conquering death. The case of Indrani symbolizes Savitri in real life. After the donation of a kidney to her ailing husband, she courageously took charge of the responsibility of taking care of him, fulfilling official formalities at hospitals along with other household responsibilities. It continued for seven years until his death. This took a toll on her own health and she is suffering from arthritis currently. This case also shows how women ignore their well-being while caring for others in the family.

Besides, women are also expected to keep fast in festivals like 'Karva Chauth' and 'Vraat Savitri'. They pray for the well-being, prosperity, longevity of their husbands. Like Savitri, Karva also struggled with the Lord of Death, Yama, to bring back the life of her husband who was killed by a crocodile. The case of Indrani signifies the perfect role she played of '*Savitri*' where she is expected to become an embodiment of selflessness and sacrifice for welfare of the family. However, unlike the legend she could not save her husband.

7. 'Adarsh Griha Badhu': An Epitome of Sacrifice

The societal norms influence the gender identity of women, where they are personified as keepers of the family's tradition and culture, responsible for the health, education, and well-being of their children, husbands and in-laws. Women's contribution to the household as '*Griha badhu*' is not only restricted to physical work, but also reflected in a range of sacrifices they make. Puja from Khordha town happens to be the eldest daughter-in-law of a joint family with twelve members having strong patriarchal ideologies. During the interview, Puja shared her story of how she was compelled to give up her studies after class 10 and got engaged in household chores with a large family of parents and five siblings. Further, due to the influence of societal and financial pressure, she got married at the age of 21 years. Puja was expected to take charge of the domestic activities, and the burden of the entire household responsibilities fell upon her shoulders soon after her marriage. Like any other conservative household, she was the

first one to wake up early in the morning and often the last person to go to bed at night after finishing all household duties.

Puja expressed:

“I always try to keep all my family members happy. But I am really sad that irrespective of all my efforts if I happen to commit any small mistake or get delayed in serving food to my family members, then instead of helping me they abuse me and my parents.”

She broke into tears expressing her mental agony and how she was not allowed to touch the body of her dead father because she was expected to perform certain rituals in her in-law's place preceding the marriage of her younger brother-in-law. As eldest daughter-in-law, she was supposed to be like a mother figure and hence had to fulfill certain duties required for family ceremonies. Her emotional well-being was not given any importance. There are several instances, wherein the name of cultural practices, women are deprived of their rights and their sacrifices are often overlooked and considered as norms. This reiterates the fact that though society is changing, the status of 'bahus' or 'daughters-in-law' in Indian society remains the same as they are considered to be keepers of cultural values and traditions. Irrespective of their sacrifices and services rendered to the family members, daughters-in-law are still considered as outsiders, who should always shoulder all household responsibilities selflessly. The threat of divorce is a compelling deterrent to women's self-assertion. This validates the fact that the fear of divorce and desertion has an alarming effect in the minds of women (Patel, 2010). In Indian society, removing the 'married' label and getting tagged with 'divorcee' label is considered a curse, which not only leads to their economic vulnerability but also deprives women from social, physical and other securities (*ibid*, 2010). The fear has resulted in women tolerating everything quietly where only 1.1 per cent of women are divorced in India, the largest proportion being in urban areas (UN Women, 2019). It is important to note that the bargaining power of women within the household is influenced by her fallback position (the outside options that determine how well-off she would be if cooperation failed), also termed as the 'threat point' (Agrawal, 1997). Apart from taking up the household accountabilities, as 'Griha badhu' women also take up responsibility of earning income for the sustenance of the family.

8. 'Breadwinner': The Livelihood Securer

Women's role within the household has gone through transformation from homemaker to breadwinner of the family not only in India but also, worldwide. This was impossible to think and an anomaly that women would take up the role as breadwinner in such large numbers a few decades back. The gradual advancement of society and modernization have led to women's economic empowerment. According to Census 2011, there has been a rise of 8 percentage 'graduate and above females' as main wage earners from 2001 to 2015 (Tiwari, 2016). Therefore, the role of breadwinner is no longer restricted to men alone. A woman plays a significant role of earning livelihood for sustenance of the family particularly in lower income households (Chhachhi, 2011). The case of Prativa of Bhubaneswar is an example, where she ventures into a profession that is considered to be in the male domain. She is one among the three lady conductors selected to be part of the Dream Team Shahara (DTS) public transport bus service in Bhubaneswar. She expressed that during the initial days when she took up the profession of

a bus conductor six years back, she had to face taunts, physical abuse and objections from her family members and the society. Prativastuck to her stance and continued with the job to support her family because her husband's income was not enough to take care of the needs of the family. Besides, she was also expected to fulfill her domestic responsibilities, irrespective of her engagement in paid employment. The duty of a bus conductor is a strenuous job, which demands 12 hours on the road. This affected Prativa's health. Irrespective of this hardship, Prativa's character has often been questioned by people around her. She is unable to get rid of the gendered ideologies that surround her, despite the fact that she is contributing economically to the well-being of the family. Despite all odds, Prativa's role as breadwinner of the family has strengthened her household decision making capabilities. This practice establishes women as breadwinners as well and reinforces the decision-making authority of younger women in the household (UN Women, 2019).

III. Discussion and Concluding Thoughts:

The above cases provide an insight on how the position of women is controlled within the broad framework of patriarchy and culture in Indian society. It describes how the position of women within the household have been glorified using comparisons from the early Rig Vedic period. Women were considered as the epitome of goddess. However, from the later Vedic period, there has been a shift in practice and the position of women started to decline. The position of women in the early Vedic period was dignified which gradually got reduced to subservience during the age of *Dharmaśāstras*, and *Mānusmṛiti*. The changes in various religious and cultural practices, resulted in a range of social problems such as poverty, caste system worsening the position of women. Though the position of women has been glorified and positioned in the pedestal of goddesses, the irony is that that is not associated with freedom and emancipation. The case of 'Sita' in Ramayana and 'Draupadi' in Mahabharata corroborates how in the name of culture, women were dishonored and publicly insulted repeatedly. This shows how cultural norms have undergone several shifts under the guidance and patronage of patriarchy. In spite of transformation and modernization of Indian society, certain practices in the name of tradition and culture bring down the status of women. Women are expected to be keepers of culture and preserve the traditional values.

The research brings out the significant roles played by women in the domestic sphere with household responsibilities. On the basis of the case studies, it can be understood that when circumstances demanded, for example, widowed, destitute, single breadwinner of the household, or even as mothers, particularly single mothers, wives, daughters-in-law, women pro-actively take charge of responsible roles and tend to be assertive. It can be inferred from the empirical research that household is a mix of authority, nurturance, struggle, sustenance, security and reverence. Hence, to assess the quandary of women, it is necessary to understand the various connections between the individual household and the socio-religious conditions, history, structures and culture of the society. The position of women throughout history has been very complex because of the contradictory proclamations in different scriptures and sometimes in the same text at different places. Women's position in society deteriorated early in India's ancient period and their subordination continued into modern India. Today in the 21st century, despite advancement of women in several fields and modernization of the society, violence against women, both in

the private and public domains, female foeticide, dowry, misogyny and related discrimination continues unabated in both rural and urban areas of India. Deification and disempowerment of women therefore go hand in hand in Indian society. Full emancipation of women still remains a far cry in India.

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