

## **Status of Jain Women in Family, Outside and Society in Karnataka**

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### **1.1 Introduction**

The socio- economic status of women is an important indicator to measure the development of either community or nation. Most of the religions have accord women inferior status and relegated them to a secondary position. Jainism is one of the most ancient religions which emphasizes on independence of spirituality and equality of souls of all living creatures. So not surprisingly, it accepts that women are equally important as men. Though the religion has liberal attitude towards women on spiritual, education, political, economic and social grounds, there is a prevalence of patriarchy in Jainism. The present paper analyses how women were depicted in Jain tradition and focuses on status of women in Jain community. Though it is a minority community, an attempt made to gather data from primary and secondary sources and the status is analyzed with their contributions, their participation in various religious, socio-economic, political activities and degree of participation in decision making at the house hold level. The study covers the geographical scope of Jain population of Karnataka only

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 Nation 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.

### **1.2 General View on Status of women in India**

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 and due to various historical changes, the status of women in India has been fluctuating and it has gone through several changes. From the early Vedic age until today, her status and position has been changing with the passing of time. Early Vedic (Rig-Veda) period was the period of highest stage

of civilization and women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life and greatness of India's ancient culture lies in the honorable place granted to women. It began to decline with the introduction of Manusmriti. Manu deprives the social and economic rights of women. Medieval India was the Dark Age for them due to many foreign conquests. The Indian women started using purdah to protect themselves from forcible polygamy norms of foreign invaders. Even under British India, the breakdown of social institutions and economic depression in the country has greatly contributed to a general decline of socio-economic life of people in general and women in particular. After independence, though the Indian constitution guarantees of equal rights for Indian women, still treating women in general only at receiving end.

### **1.3 Status Jain Women in their community.**

Jainism is one of the oldest religions among ancient religions and it has contributed some original ideologies to the world. The most significant aspect 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 quite natural for such a religion to cultivate an attitude of respect towards women.

From the inception of Jainism, the followers are divided into four groups known as chaturvidhaSangha .Viz ,Muni(Monk), Aryika (Nun), Shravaka (Lay man),and Shravaki (Lay women). The first two groups of ascetic renounced their households and next two are those of householders. Such four fold orders of Jain Sangha existing even today among Digambar and Svetambara cult and are accepted in the monastic order.

The Digambar and Svetambara cult accept the principles of Jainism but they differ in certain notions. Digambar regard that women cannot obtain liberation because complete renunciation is impossible. On the other hand Svetambara's believe that women can attain liberation, because monks can also wearing white cloths and begging bowls. The monastic organizational system provided avenues of religious, cultural, social, economic and political services. Compare to Svetambara, the women in Digambarsect are traditional and who are living in rural areas are less exposed to the society compare to urban women.

## **1.4 Objective**

The present paper analyses status of women the Jain minority community in family, Outside and Society in Karnataka.

## **1.5 Data Collection**

Secondary data have been collected with the help of books, journals, canonical texts, reports, internet information and survey reports. The primary data have been collected from 50 Jain women selected on different criteria. With the help of well-structured questionnaire and personal interview of respondents, in-depth information is collected on three indicators.

## **1.6 Indicators of Status of Jain Women**

- **Degree of participation in decision making at the household level**

Like other religions, Jainism is a patriarchal religion from its inception. The seeds of patriarchy were highly prevalent among the Karnataka Jains. Since Jainism believed that all souls are equal, women are par with men and the status of Jaina women as a mother, wife was auspicious. Since she was looked upon as the most important member whose influence helped to mould her children's behavior, their education, marriage, caring of grandchildren, allowing of daughters to take up job, going for higher studies within the country or outside, women are par with male counterpart and play a primary role on all above issues.

The ethical value Ahimsa principle of Jainism promotes socio-economic and gender equality which provide equal opportunity and status to women and to their education. Hence, women education is very important from its inception. In many Jain scripts, it is mentioned that Rishabha, the first Tirthankara, who was a king earlier imparted 64 disciplines of Knowledge to her own Daughter 'BRAHMI' (and hence the script Brahmi in India) which is continuing even today.

**According to data presented in LokaSabha on July 21 ,2016 Average LiteracyRate of Urban and Rural Jain Men and Women in India is** Urban Male-94.95% ,Urban Female 91% while in rural areas it is 89% and 79% respectively.

This shows that urban male and female literacy rate is high compare to rural area. Rural area it is low because of existence of first-generation Jain population. Against this, in this study out of 50

respondents, only 10 percent of them were studied up to PUC and remaining 90 percent of the respondents were completed degree and professional courses. Apart from this out of 50 respondents 40 percent of women were housewives, another 40 percent were working in government and private institutions and remaining 20 percent were self-employed. From the respondents it is interpreted as whether housewives or they working, all women play a primary role and taking decisions together with male counterparts on all family related issues.

- **Participation of Women in Social, Cultural, Economic activities outside the Family**

The equal status of women in society and their education in Jainism made them to withstand in the society as brave warriors, administrators, in military campaign, literary works, trustees, poetess, philanthropists, custodian of Indian culture and fine arts, commissioned temples and built tanks and monasteries. Hence, in Karnataka since ancient period Jain women dominated and contributed to the political, social, economic and cultural life of the people of Karnataka with their participation. The right to education for women starts from them as they were educated at their young age and became very knowledgeable in various fields. Brahmi created her own script, the brahmi script and Sundari was a proficient mathematician. Later ages also Attimabbe, Queen Abbbakkka, Chennabhairadevi of Gerusoppe and many women were educated and empowered women and served the nation politically, socially and economically. Even today Gommateshwara Bhagwan Bahubali Mahamastakabhisheka Mahotsav 2018 was presided by women Smt. Saritha. MK Jain. Such foundation laid by ancient Jain women influenced and motivated present women to participate in social, cultural, economic and political activities.

In Karnataka, each temple is attached with women organizations and through these organizations women involve themselves in various spheres of religious, social and economic life. The women organizations like **Akhila Karnataka Jaina Mahila Vakkuta, Chakreshwari Mahila Samaja, Jain Milan women's wing, Padmamba Mahila Samaja, Tumkur, Anuvrat Mahila Mandal, Bangalore** and many more organizations in different parts of Karnataka women involve in various social, political, cultural and economic activities. Prof. Nadoja Hampa Nagarajaiah, a well-known international scholar, in his book "Rastrakutas: Re-visit" is of the opinion that Jain temples are cultural centers, which provide opportunities for women to participate in different activities.

Hence, the community accorded an important place for women in all family, religious, social and economic activities outside the family. More than 12000 women from different Jain organizations from all over Karnataka participated in the rally organized during Bhagawan Bahubali Mahamastakabhisheka-2018. No restrictions imposed by the male member about participation of women in the activities outside the family. From the respondents it has been interpreted that to undertake income generation activities and in responsible issues, both husband and wife discuss with each other and will take a decision. Almost all 50 respondents were of the opinion that they are free to take part in all the activities and even they are free to cast vote in educated urban women.

- **The Degree of Dependence of Women upon Male Members**

Coming to the broader area of socio economic status, there is dependency of women on male members of the family due to factors like family bondage, security from society, though they are financially empowered. Out of 50 sample respondents, 20 of them irrespective of working or house wife, all women depend on male or other family members.

- **The Degree of Vulnerability to Domestic Violence, Negligence, Desertion, Divorce**

Religious, ethical values can influence well-being of individuals, families, society and nation. The doctrine of karma, regular practice of ethical codes among Jains prohibits and keeps them away from involving economically important social evils like dowry, blaming of women, harassment, and divorce and related to that addiction to alcohol and other bad habits in the name of women. In this study, all 50 women respondents irrespective of working women, house wives completely rejected the vulnerable condition of women, dowry harassment by family members, divorce, blaming of wives for his business failures, failures in family matters and the like. This does not mean divorce does not exist among Jains, now a days a small percentage of divorce have been increased among educated class not because of dowry harassment or blaming women, but because of lack of understanding between couples. Hence, the degree of vulnerability of women in Jainism is very negligible compared to other community.

### **1.7 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.
- Education had provided an enormous impact on Jain women where they are found to hold respectable positions in various educational institutions, organizations, social economic and capable of running their own small firms more in urban areas than rural.
- From its inception, until date women in Jain community proved her ability in the areas of education, organization, social welfare activities, practicing daily rites and rituals and now even in economic status, **though the patriarchy prevails in Jainism.**

In present era, the status of Jain women is at par with men in terms of education, religious participation and social and economic services. Thereby it can be concluded that though the patriarchy prevailed among the Jains of Karnataka, the status of Jain women which was affected during later Vedic period have been improved due to historical development. Higher literacy rate and education has also produced an enormous impact on Jain women in urban areas than rural. Though the past records indicated the predominance of patriarchal norms, yet present society has become sophisticated with the increasing importance given to women's occupation and their roles as daughter, wife and mother within the family.

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