



# Honouring Her: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Women's Respect in Indian Vedic, Modern and Western Traditions

<sup>1</sup> Aditya Hemantrao Akolkar, <sup>2</sup> Dr. Zaker Ul Oman, <sup>3</sup> Uma Bakshi, <sup>4</sup> Sumit Patel

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of Sanskrit, Departments of Languages, Avinash College of Commerce, Himayathnagar, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Departments of Commerce & Business Management, Avinash College of Commerce, Himayathnagar, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, Departments of Commerce & Business Management, Avinash College of Commerce, Himayathnagar, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

<sup>4</sup> Associate Professor of Sanskrit, Departments of Languages, Avinash College of Commerce, Himayathnagar, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

ljaisriram1993.aa@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>zakeruloman@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup>uma.bakshi@gmail.com, <sup>4</sup>sumitpatel002017@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The study examines the parallels and discrepancies between Indian and Western cultures' views on women's respect. The research explores how women's status and respect are shaped by customs, historical events, and modern social systems. This study examines how women's position has been shaped in India via the use of ancient texts, spiritual rituals, and socio-political movements. It focuses on the veneration of feminine energy in the form of deities and cultural activities. On the other hand, feminist movements, gender equality, and the development of women's legal and social rights are used to analyze Western traditions.*

*This study uses a comparative analysis to show how respect for women is exhibited in both cultures; these expressions frequently take various forms, but they share themes of empowerment, reverence, and subjection. Research on the symbolic and practical manifestations of women's rights in both civilizations provides insights into the continuous fight for gender parity and the necessity to balance traditional values with contemporary notions of human rights and dignity. In the end, the research hopes to overcome cultural barriers and provide a better knowledge of how respect for women may be fostered and improved on a worldwide scale.*

**Key Words:** *Intercultural Analysis, Roles of Gender, Indian Customs, Cultural Parity, Women's Rights, Patriarchy Women's Empowerment Historical Views, Effects of Colonialism on Gender Roles*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The book explores how respect for women is created, expressed, and changes throughout time by exploring the diverse cultural, philosophical, and theological frameworks of both locations. It draws a comparison between the highly spiritual devotion found in India's Dharmic and Vedic traditions and the sociopolitical gains for women's rights in Western philosophy, which are influenced by ideals of enlightenment and movements like feminism. This cross-cultural comparison examines important similarities and variations between cultures, looking at topics including gender roles, the morality of the law, religious views, and social standards that influence how women are seen. The book seeks to provide a better understanding of how respect for women may be universally accepted while preserving the subtleties of cultural settings by illuminating these viewpoints.



## 2. OBJECTIVES / AIMS:

The aim of this research paper is to investigate and contrast the ways in which women's respect is viewed, articulated, and established in Indian and Western societies. The research tries to comprehend the evolution of women's roles and the notion of honour in these two unique cultural contexts by looking at historical, theological, social, and legal frameworks. It addresses current concerns about women's rights and gender equality as well as the parallels, contrasts, and influences that exist across the traditions.

1. **Historical Context:** An examination of women's roles in Western traditions, especially Greco-Roman culture, and ancient Indian traditions, such as Vedic civilization.
2. **Religious and Cultural Viewpoints:** How religious writings and customs, such as the Bible and the Vedas, have shaped the status and roles that women are given in both Indian and Western communities.
3. **Social Constructs:** Analyzing how patriarchal standards affect women's autonomy, respect, and social position in both traditions and how they diverge or coincide with them.
4. **Legal Frameworks:** An analysis of the laws that define and safeguard women's rights in both cultures (e.g., the Indian constitution vs. Western legal systems).
5. **Current Concerns:** Gaining insight into the ways in which modernity and globalization have impacted women's roles in both societies, with an emphasis on movements that support women's equality, gender parity, and social respect.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

A study of the literature on "Honouring Her: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Women's Respect in Indian and Western Traditions" will look at the body of research on the value and respect accorded to women in various cultural contexts, particularly when contrasting Indian and Western settings.

The following is a summary of some possible major themes, research, and writers that might serve as the foundation for the review:

- **Indian Hindu Tradition's View on Women's Respect Texts from Ancient India:** Indian epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as philosophical and theological writings like the Upanishads and Vedas, frequently show women in dignified positions, even though these roles may be limited by social and religious conventions. Researchers who have examined gender dynamics in these works include Wendy Doniger (2009) and A.L. Basham (1954)
- **Hindu Sanskrit and Vedic Scholarship:** The writings of Sanskrit academics, particularly those of contemporary researchers, frequently shed light on the treatment of women in ancient texts, both in terms of their divine and social functions.
- **Hindu Bhakti and Shakti Traditions:** In contrast to some patriarchal societal institutions, women's positions in religious movements such as the Bhakti movement or in goddess worship (e.g., Durga, Kali) stress feminine divinity. Respect for Gender in Indian Society
- **Historical Evolution:** Scholars have examined how colonialism, modernism, and political movements (such as the nationalist struggle) altered gender roles. Indian culture has seen varying degrees of regard and veneration for women across time. Tanika Sarkar (2024), Partha Chatterjee (2019), and Lata Mani (2022) are among the authors who have explored these changes in their writing.
- **Modern Feminist Discourse:** Women's respect in contemporary Indian culture has been a topic of discussion for feminists such as Uma Chakravarti (2002) and Kumkum Sangari (1999). They have drawn attention to the differences between cultural reverence and practical difficulties such as discrimination, dowry, and honour murders. Western Philosophical Traditions and Women's Respect
- **Greek and Roman Influence:** Western attitudes of women's respect may be traced back to Classical Greek and Roman philosophy. Thinkers such as Aristotle and Plato discussed the role and worth of women in society, frequently placing them in subordinate positions.
- **Christian Influence:** Christian teachings influenced women's regard in Western culture. Figures like as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas provided ideas that exalted and constrained women's responsibilities, and their teachings affected Western society standards for centuries.

## 4. FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S RESPECT IN WESTERN CULTURE:

- **First-Wave Feminism:** During the battle for suffrage and fundamental rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women's respect was defined as legal and civic equality. Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony were prominent advocates for women's rights.



- Second and third waves of feminism attacked not only legal, but also cultural and social standards. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* were key writings that challenged traditional Western depictions of women and advocated for more respect in all parts of life.
- **Intersectionality and Postmodern Feminism:** Scholars such as Bell Hooks and Judith Butler highlighted the need of respecting women while taking into consideration race, class, and other intersecting identities.

#### 4.1 COMPARATIVE AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES:

- **Cross-Cultural Feminism:** Postcolonial feminist theory is frequently used when comparing Indian and Western viewpoints on women's respect. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes* criticizes how Western feminists frequently impose their views on non-Western cultures.
- **Global Feminism:** Scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak say that comprehending respect for women necessitates negotiating many cultural contexts rather than imposing a single, global norm. There are insights on how global feminism might overcome cultural divides while preserving local identities.

#### 4.2 CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE AND GLOBAL MOVEMENTS:

- **#MeToo Movement:** This worldwide movement for women's respect, safety, and justice originated in the West but has spread around the world, including India. Scholars and activists examine how this movement has raised women's rights in both India and the West.
- **Cross-cultural Feminist Activism:** Authors such as Nivedita Menon and Leila Ahmed investigate how women's movements throughout the world learn from and affect one another, particularly in their attempts to promote women's respect, dignity, and equality worldwide.

#### 4.3 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN VAIDIK RITUALS AND RELIGION :

- **Hindu Women's role in rituals:** In early Vedic civilization, women were considered essential to religious and spiritual life. They took part in major ceremonies with their spouses, notably home rites (Grihastha rituals). Some writings, including the Rigveda, reference women who were informed about the Vedas and capable of making sacrifices.
- **Rishikas and Brahmavadinis:** Several women, known as rishikas (female sages) and brahmavadinis (women who studied the Vedas), were highly regarded for their intellectual abilities. Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, and Ghosha are notable people who have contributed to intellectual and theological disputes.
- During the Vedic period, education was available to both men and women, and women who were interested in learning and philosophical inquiry were encouraged to pursue it. This openness allowed some women to become prominent scholars, particularly in the fields of metaphysics and Vedic philosophy. Gargi Vachaknavi, a renowned philosopher, participated in philosophical debates.
- **Notable Figures in Hindu Vedic Period (1500–500 BCE):**
- **Women's Status:** During the Vedic period, women were treated with dignity and respect. They were educated and qualified to perform religious ceremonies (Yajnas), study the Vedas, and become scholars (Rishikas).
- **Gargi Vachaknavi:** Gargi, a highly known philosopher, disputed Sage Yajnavalkya in the court of King Janaka. Her intellectual aptitude secured her a prominent position in Vedic discourse.
- **Maitreyi:** Maitreyi, a philosopher and scholar, was one of Sage Yajnavalkya's wives. She had in-depth conversations about immortality and the meaning of life.
- **Epic Period (Ramayana, Mahabharata)**
- **Ramayana:** Sita, Lord Rama's wife, is admired for her strength, dignity, and dedication. Despite the difficulties she encountered, her character demonstrates the high moral standards that women were held to in society.
- **Mahabharata:** Draupadi, a key character in the Mahabharata, exemplifies a woman's fortitude in the face of hardship. Despite being humiliated in the Kaurava court, her spirit of justice and fairness ultimately contributed to the unjust's demise.

#### 5. BUDDHIST AND JAIN PERIOD (6TH-5TH CENTURIES BCE):

Buddhism and Jainism are two religions that support gender equality and allow women to become nuns. The Bhikkhuni Sangha, an order of nuns, was formed by Gautama Buddha. Influential women, such as Mahapajapati Gotami (Buddha's foster mother), rose to prominence in Buddhism.



Jainism acknowledges Mallinatha, the 19th Tirthankara, as a woman in one of its traditions, demonstrating appreciation for female spiritual power. During the medieval period, women played a significant part in the Bhakti Movement, which prioritized personal devotion to God over formal activities. Meerabai, a Rajput princess and poet-saint, is famous for her devotion to Lord Krishna, disregarding conventional boundaries, and advocating for her spiritual convictions. Akkamahadevi, a well-known poet and mystic from Karnataka, renounced earthly attachments and used poetry to proclaim her devotion to Lord Shiva.

### 5.1 WOMEN QUEENS:

**Manusmriti and later texts:** While Manusmriti (c. 2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE) mandates a more patriarchal position for women, it also emphasizes the need of treating women with respect: "Yatra Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devata" — "Where women are honoured, the gods rejoice."

Throughout Indian history, heroic woman queens such as Rani Durgavati and Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi resisted foreign invasions and defended their kingdoms with heroism and bravery.

During India's independence fight, women such as Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Kasturba Gandhi, and Rani Lakshmi Bai shown leadership and held recognized positions in society. The Indian Constitution (1950) enshrines gender equality and provides fundamental rights, establishing legal acknowledgment of women's dignity and respect in modern India.

### 5.2 SOCIAL STATUS AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN:

- **Equality in marriage and family life:** Women enjoyed some autonomy throughout the Vedic period, and marriages were viewed as equal partnerships. A woman, known as Ardhagini (the "better half"), shared equal responsibility for domestic chores and decision-making with her husband. The Vedic teachings encourage reciprocal respect between husband and wife.
- **Property and inheritance rights:** Some early Vedic scriptures show that women had the right to hold property, namely stridhan (a woman's riches), which was under her supervision. However, these rights were not as well defined or practiced throughout all levels of society.

### 5.3 THE DECLINE OF WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD:

- **A shift in gender norms:** Women's standing fell with time, notably during the later Vedic period and the post-Vedic Smriti literary era (c. 500 BCE-200 CE). Ritualistic acts like as the Upanayana (holy thread ceremony), which were formerly available to both boys and girls, were now confined to males alone.
- **Rise in patriarchal norms:** Texts like the Manusmriti represented more strict and patriarchal ideas that confined women to domestic tasks, limited their educational possibilities, and emphasized male power.

### 5.4 . RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM:

The Qur'an explicitly states that "women have rights similar to those of men" (Qur'an 2:228). In his final parting speech, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated, "You have rights over your wives, and they have rights over You," and "the finest among you are those who are best to their spouses" (Ibn Hanbal, No.7396).

**Prophet Mohammad (PBUH):** Women's positions and status have been significantly enhanced. His fundamental concept was to instill "respect for women." xviii Therefore, the gap between Islamic philosophy and Muslim behaviors must be bridged, and women must be granted equal rights in marriage, Education, politics, employment, and economic sectors.

**Women in Education and Careers in Islam:** It is the duty of every Muslim to pursue knowledge, and there are no limitations on the educational opportunities or career paths available to Muslim women. Given that women bear equal responsibility for their acts before the creator, it is imperative that they pursue education and knowledge just like men do. In their roles as family members, women have the right to a life of responsibility via education, therefore saving oneself from hellfire. The Qur'an's first revelation began with requiring everyone to read (Iqrah), and women have an equal obligation to pursue knowledge from birth to death as do males. Women nowadays have more and more freedom to choose; they have the right to work in fields that interest them, to engage in occupations, and to participate in other social activities. Muslim women with educations hold positions as instructors, educators, engineers, attorneys, and even in the armed forces and police.

As stated, "Muslims are commanded to respect all human beings and show humanity, kindness, mercy to everyone from the elderly, the young and weak, and all of Allah's (SWT) creations, including the environment." Women are also employed in the medical and related fields as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and physiotherapists. When considering the history of Islam, "Rufaidah bint sa'ad" might be considered the first woman to work as a professional



nurse since she educated other nurses to care for injured troops and treated patients in her tent outside the Medina Mosque. e. Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), is regarded as the first individual to accept Islam and is a prosperous businesswoman. Similarly, Ayshah, the Prophet's second wife, is renowned for being a scholar and one of the main sources of the majority of the al-hadith found in Islamic literature. Throughout human history, several well-educated, professional women have made significant contributions.

## 6. CONCLUSION :

In ancient times, women held positions of respect and autonomy in both Indian and Western traditions. In Vedic India, women actively participated in religious rituals, intellectual pursuits, and were considered equals in household responsibilities. Similarly, in ancient Greece, Rome, and early Christian traditions, women played vital roles, particularly within the family and spiritual spheres. However, as both societies progressed, patriarchal norms became increasingly restricted.

Women were frequently honoured as celestial manifestations in Indian traditions, particularly those based on Vedic and Hindu customs, such as goddesses like Durga and Saraswati. Similarly, Western religious traditions, notably those of Christianity, stressed the purity and moral power of figures such as the Virgin Mary. While both cultures preserved some ideas of feminine virtue, these beliefs frequently restricted women to certain responsibilities, such as motherhood or domesticity, restricting their overall involvement in society. However, the prominence of women in mysticism, spiritual leadership, and intellectual debate in both faiths demonstrates the continued respect for women in specific cultural or religious circumstances.

In contemporary times, both India and Western countries have seen tremendous developments toward gender equality and women's empowerment. Western feminism, which gained traction in the late nineteenth century, advocated for women's rights in the areas of suffrage, employment, and reproductive rights. Meanwhile, in India, movements for women's education, legal rights, and political engagement have revolutionized the socioeconomic landscape, albeit deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs remain prevalent in many areas.

The feminist movements in the West and the women's empowerment movements in India have taken different paths, but they share the objective of eliminating patriarchal systems and guaranteeing equal opportunity for women in all aspects of society.

The meaning of "respect" for women varies across cultures and time periods. Historically, it was associated with their roles as mothers, wives, and moral guides. However, modern understandings of respect emphasize individual autonomy, intellectual freedom, and equal rights. Today, honouring women involves not only valuing traditional roles, but also embracing their contributions in leadership and science.

The cross-cultural study of women's regard in Indian and Western cultures emphasizes the flexibility of gender norms and the changing nature of respect for women. While both traditions have had periods of patriarchal domination, the continuous fight for gender equality continues to affect public ideas. Respect for women is increasingly more generally defined to include their rights, freedoms, and contributions outside of conventional roles, reflecting worldwide movements toward more equality and appreciation of women's many roles in society.

## REFERENCES:

1. Doniger, Wendy. (2009). *The Hindus: an alternative history* / Wendy Doniger. New York: Penguin Press
2. Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies Author(s): Kumkum Sangari Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 23, 1995, Vol. 30, No. 51 (Dec. 23, 1995), pp. 3287-3310 Published by: Economic and Political Weekly Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4403590>
3. Chakravarti, U. (2012). Re-thinking the Goals of Education: Some Thoughts on Women's Education and Women's Development. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 9(2), 223-243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097318491200900205>
4. Antoinette Burton, Lata Mani. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1998. Pp. xiv, 246. Cloth \$47.00, paper \$18.00, *The American Historical Review*, Volume 104, Issue 4, October 1999, Pages 1281–1282, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/104.4.1281>
5. Author(s): Judith Butler Source: *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 519-531 Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>



6. Chatterjee, P. (2022). State and Nation: Shall the Twain Ever Meet? *Studies in Indian Politics*, 10(2), 164-175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230221135825>
7. Reddy, D. S. (2024). Book review: Amrita Basu and Tanika Sarkar (Eds.), *Women, Gender and Religious Nationalism*. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(1), 137-142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09715215231210699>
8. Daniel H. H. Ingalls, *The Wonder that was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent before the Coming of the Muslims*. By A. L. Basham, Reader in the History of India in the University of London. (London: Sidgwick and Jackson; New York: Macmillan Company. 1954. Pp. xxi, 568. \$9.00.), *The American Historical Review*, Volume 61, Issue 4, July 1956, Pages 945–946, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/61.4.945>
9. Shrimali, K. M. (2010). [Review of *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, by W. Doniger]. *Social Scientist*, 38(7/8), 66–81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27866725>
10. <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/more-focus-areas/resources/gender-and-culture-in-india/>
11. [https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Women%E2%80%99s%20Rights%20in%20India%20complete\\_compressed.pdf](https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Women%E2%80%99s%20Rights%20in%20India%20complete_compressed.pdf)
12. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/scatteredthoughts/womens-empowerment-in-india-from-ancient-period-to-modern-time-period-46689/>
13. <https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/news/hinduism-and-women-glimpses-from-a-feminist-perspective/>
14. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2461&context=jiws>
15. <https://www.quora.com/What-would-it-take-for-Indian-culture-to-equally-value-women>
16. <https://iwwage.org/>
17. <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/status-of-women-in-india>
18. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41305-018-0119-6>
19. <https://library.law.utoronto.ca/womens-rights-india-bibliography>
20. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3097260/>
21. [https://www.aicte-india.org/downloads/woman\\_empowerment.pdf](https://www.aicte-india.org/downloads/woman_empowerment.pdf)
22. [https://www.academia.edu/37547452/Women\\_in\\_cultural\\_society\\_in\\_India\\_particularly\\_focuses\\_on\\_Bihar](https://www.academia.edu/37547452/Women_in_cultural_society_in_India_particularly_focuses_on_Bihar)
23. <https://www.nextias.com/blog/women-empowerment/>
24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/645113>
25. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>
26. <https://www.vitalvoices.org/program/womenleadersindiafellowship/>
27. <https://hindrise.org/resources/women-empowerment-in-india-and-its-importance/>
28. [https://ihds.umd.edu/sites/default/files/WP2021-04\\_EducWLF22ndAug2021.pdf](https://ihds.umd.edu/sites/default/files/WP2021-04_EducWLF22ndAug2021.pdf)
29. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377859.locale=fr>
30. <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/sdi/article/id/4344/>
31. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/india>
32. <https://www.ipi.org.in/texts/others/kavitakishore-women.php>
33. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3097260/>
34. <https://www.britannica.com/list/6-cultures-that-recognize-more-than-two-genders>
35. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352261370\\_Masculinity\\_and\\_Challenges\\_for\\_Women\\_in\\_Indian\\_Culture](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352261370_Masculinity_and_Challenges_for_Women_in_Indian_Culture)
36. <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/powerful-women-in-indian-history-1646720722-1>
37. <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/powerful-women-in-indian-history-1646720722-1>
38. <https://scroll.in/article/975151/why-do-women-in-south-india-have-more-freedom-than-their-northern-sisters>
39. <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/34926/1/SEOW,%20Dana%20Y.,%20Ph.D.,%202020.pdf>
40. <https://www.toppr.com/guides/essays/essay-on-status-of-women-in-india/>