

Women's Importance in Hinduism

In all religions, men and women have different roles. In ancient times, women and men were equal in the principles and practices of their religion. This is especially true in Hinduism. Women played a key role in many aspects of Hinduism. Indeed, the entire principle of Hinduism was living a *dharmic* life. In modern times, however, Hindu women have gradually lost their importance. I want to demonstrate that throughout human history, the importance of the average Hindu women has gradually changed from a significant to a negligible one.

If a non-Hindu glimpses at the Hindu Gods and Goddesses, one finds that all goddesses are of equal stature or importance as the gods. It is said that all gods, regardless of gender, sprung from one *Shakthi*, or main feminine power. The feminine power is reflected in all of the counterparts of the male gods, each having their individual specialty. All the main concepts that humans need to survive stem from the powers of the goddesses. *Bhoomi Devi*- Mother Earth, was the home of all humans. Knowledge, Language, Speech and Talent come from Devi *Saraswathi*. Wealth, Prosperity and Progeny are attributed to Goddesses *Lakshmi*. Food, Grains, and Agriculture come from *Parvathy Devi*. The energy and power (*Shakthi*) needed for all humans is invested in different Devis-*Durga, Kali, etc.* The quintessence of beauty and poise is reflected in all goddesses, and they are respected and offered devotion. Hence, the roots of the importance of women in Hinduism are obvious, and quite significant in our goddesses and our Hindu culture.

Women were highly revered and held in high esteem. In the olden days, Brahmin women were allowed to wear a *poonal* and participated in and conducted poojas. Now, only male Brahmin priests do so, and very few poojas and festivities such as Navarathri glorify women or demonstrate their importance. With time, however, and throughout the modern history of Hinduism, this importance gradually declined. As years passed, the role of women was pushed farther down the ladder to that of a home-maker and a child raiser. There was a gradual lack of respect for girls and women, and in some instances, Hindus considered it unfortunate to have a girl child. This ignorance and eventual degrading attitude continued.

The duty of women today, is to a man. As soon as a girl was married, she was expected to obey her husband's wishes, living a life somewhat similar to that of a slave. She had to put his life and priorities ahead of her own. Women were not educated or given importance in political or social matters, and were often treated in a humiliating manner. A woman, once married might as well be a servant in chains.

Another main blow to the importance of women is the topic of widowhood or divorce. Regardless of the time period, a widow was scorned and mistreated by society. If a Hindu man died, in the past, the widow committed sati. While the Indian constitution has outlawed the practice of sati, the widow is still expected to live the rest of her life in mourning and sorrow. Wearing only white, and no bindi or jewelry, she is never happy. Widows are not welcome at Hindu poojas or auspicious occasions (although these instances are slowly becoming more socially acceptable). Once a woman's husband is

