



## Continuity and Change: Analyzing the Role of Women as Custodians of Indian Knowledge System Thought Ages

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### ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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### ABSTRACT

Women have historically occupied the center of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), serving as the dynamic force behind India's societal and intellectual evolution. Recognized by the Ministry of Education as one of the four foundational pillars of IKS, the feminine energy (Shakti) has transitioned from ancient nation-builders and warriors to modern-day pioneers reaching for the moon. This research presents a comparative analysis of the journey of Indian women, highlighting how they have navigated and overcome systemic obstacles, including gender discrimination, financial dependency, and safety concerns. By synthesizing traditional wisdom with modern milestones, the study evaluates the 'then and now' of female agency. Incorporating data and frameworks from NITI Aayog and United Nations reports, this paper argues that the survival and revival of India's heritage are inextricably linked to the empowerment of women. It concludes that the transformation of women's lives is not just a personal victory but the primary driver for India's future trajectory. This study further examines the profound psychological shift from 'resilience' to 'leadership,' illustrating how women are no longer merely surviving societal constraints but are actively redefining them. By analyzing the intersection of traditional values and digital-era opportunities, the research captures a unique moment in history where ancient heritage fuels modern ambition. It emphasizes that the transition from grassroots contributors to global decision-makers is the cornerstone of India's soft power. Ultimately, this work serves as a testament to the

*fact that when women progress, they carry the entire ecosystem of the Indian Knowledge System into the future. It calls for a policy-driven approach to safeguard this momentum, ensuring that the 'pillars' of our past become the architects of our global tomorrow.*

## KEY WORDS

*Shakti, Tradition, Evolution, Viksit.*

## INTRODUCTION

India is not just a country; it is a living, breathing experience that changes its colors every few kilometers. From the *Pheran* of Kashmir to the *Mundu* of Kerala, and from the spicy *Dhokla* of the West to the sweet *Pitha* of the East, our diversification is our greatest masterpiece. At the center of this vibrant tapestry stands the Indian woman the silent architect who has, for centuries, carried the “Ghat” (pot) of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) on her shoulders without letting a single drop of tradition spill.

As we march toward Viksit Bharat 2047, marking a century of our breathing free, we must look back to understand the “Shakti” that preserved our roots when the winds of change tried to blow them away. This paper explores the journey of women not just as participants in history, but as the very custodians of our civilization.

The story begins in the Vedic Era, where voices like Gargi and Maitreyi echoed in royal courts, proving that the highest philosophical truths were never a male monopoly.

However, as the times grew darker under colonial shadows, the role of women evolved from scholars to **Strategic Warriors**. Figures like **Rani Lakshmibai** and the unsung women of the grassroots didn't just fight for land; they fought to protect the “Dharma” and “Sanskriti” of a nation under threat.

By the 19th century, the battle shifted to the mind. **Savitribai Phule** recognized that for a culture to survive another thousand years, its women must be armed with pens. Her struggle to open the first school for girls was the “home remedy” for a society that had forgotten its own ancient respect for female intellect.

Today, in 2026, that same IKS energy has taken a new form. Whether it is the “**Rocket Women**” of ISRO steering us toward the moon or the modern **Ayurvedic entrepreneurs** bringing *Dadi-maa's* wisdom to global shelves, the essence remains the same. This paper analyzes how the Indian woman has transitioned from the “Preserver” of the past to the “Pilot” of the future, ensuring that as India becomes a global superpower in 2047, she does so without losing her soul.

## Women then

### The Vedic Era

As you noted, the focus was on training the mind. In this era, the mind was viewed as an instrument.

- **Holistic Development:** Education was not merely about rote memorization but about *Atman-Bhodha* (Self-realization).
- **Inner and Outer Growth:** “Outer” growth referred to mastery over subjects like grammar, logic, and health (Ayurveda), while “Inner” growth focused on meditation and ethics.
- **The Role of Creativity:** Knowledge was expected to lead to *Pratibha* (creative intuition), allowing women like Gargi to challenge the most learned sages of their time.
- Sadyodwahas (The Modern Parallels):
  - These women received education until the age of 15 or 16.
  - They were trained in music, dance, and fine arts (*Lalit Kala*), as well as basic Vedic hymns.
  - **The Goal:** To be the intellectual equal of their husbands and the “Home Ministers” of the household,

ensuring the family stayed connected to the Indian Knowledge System (IKS).

- Brahmadhinis (The Intellectual Pioneers):
- These women chose the path of lifelong learning. They underwent the *Upanayana* (thread ceremony), which was the formal entry into Vedic studies. Lopamudra and Maitreyi fall into this category. They were not just “students”; they were Mantra-drashtas (seers who “saw” or composed the hymns of the Rig Veda).

### **Medieval Era**

This era is often characterized as the “Dark Age” for women’s education due to the regression from the Vedic status of public intellectuals to that of “Private Guardians” confined to the domestic sphere. As socio-political instabilities led to the rise of child marriage and the purdah system, men transitioned into the role of sole caretakers, and women were systematically excluded from formal learning institutions like Gurukuls, being relegated to household chores. However, this confinement led to a unique transformation of knowledge: the kitchen emerged as the new, informal center for the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Within this space, women became the curators of applied Ayurveda, preserving medicinal wisdom through “Dadi-Nani ke Nuskhe” and keeping philosophical and scientific concepts alive through oral traditions such as Bhajans, Vrats, and Kathas.

Thus, while institutional education declined, women acted as the “Living Archives” of Indian heritage, ensuring that traditional wisdom survived through domestic practice when public scholarship was no longer an option for them

### **Colonial Phase**

The Colonial Phase marked a transformative “Reawakening” where the focus shifted from women being merely “preserved” to women becoming active agents of their own liberation. This era saw a dual struggle as women fought for freedom both within the domestic walls and in the public political sphere, recognizing that true independence required intellectual empowerment. This period initiated a new “Golden Era” of reform when Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule established the first school for girls in Pune in 1848, effectively breaking the medieval monopoly on education. As formal literacy returned, the informal Ayurvedic wisdom previously held in the kitchen was professionalized; women began to bridge the gap between traditional home remedies and modern medical science. By carrying their cultural roots into these new professional spaces, women didn’t just modernize; they reclaimed their ancestral identity as scholars and healers, laying the foundation for the “Viksit Bharat” vision of today.

### **Women Now**

#### **The Period of Accommodation**

A period defined by a progressive attempt to rebuild the nation through the inclusion of women. Landmark legislations, such as the Hindu Code Bills, were framed to grant women formal recognition and legal parity on the world stage. However, this “top-down” equality faced a stark “bottom-up” reality; the actual implementation remained sluggish as deep-seated patriarchal norms resisted the idea of women crossing the domestic threshold. While the law recognized their rights, a society unready for change continued to view education and public life as male domains, creating a persistent gap between statutory empowerment and social acceptance

#### **The Period of Crisis & Resurgence**

This era marked a pivotal departure in the history of Indian women, as the realization dawned that legislative frameworks alone were insufficient to combat the rising tide of child marriage, sexual violence, and systemic abuse. The nationwide outrage following the Mathura rape case acted as a catalyst, shattering the myth of state protection and prompting the formation of numerous autonomous, informal groups centered on self-reliance and collective defense. Furthermore, the 1973 Chipko Movement redefined the narrative of empowerment, demonstrating that rural women were not merely passive beneficiaries of law, but the primary

“knowledge keepers” of the nation’s ecological and traditional wisdom. By moving from legal dependency to grassroots action, women successfully transitioned from seeking protection to asserting their role as essential leaders in the country’s social and environmental survival.

**The Era of Globalization & Governance**

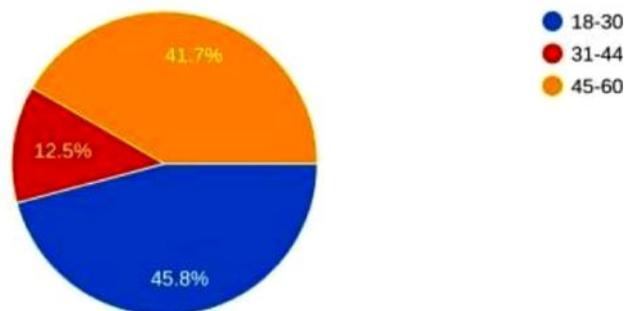
The period between 1991 and 2010, marked a transformative shift from social activism to institutional empowerment. The landmark 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1GG2) dismantled the barriers to political participation, bringing millions of women into local governance and ensuring their voices shaped the grassroots development agenda. Simultaneously, the wave of Economic Liberalization opened the gates of the formal commerce sector, while the rise of the SHG-Bank Linkage Program institutionalized women’s collective financial agency. This era successfully bridged the gap between traditional wisdom and modern economics, transitioning women from being passive beneficiaries to becoming pivotal stakeholders in both political leadership and the globalizing marketplace.”

**The Age of Digital Agency s IKS Revival**

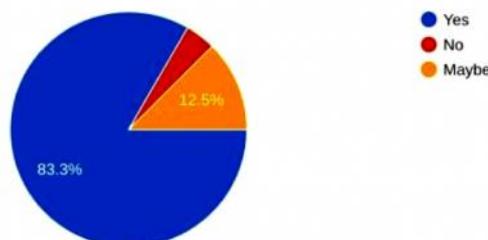
The contemporary era of Nari Shakti represents a radical departure from traditional gender boundaries, signaling a definitive shift from women being confined to the domestic sphere to becoming visible leaders in every professional field. As India marches toward the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, women have emerged as superior managers who masterfully balance the complexities of home, childcare, and high-stakes careers, often outperforming in crisis management and collaborative leadership. The rise of e-platforms has been a game-changer, allowing women to monetize their innate wisdom and cultural expertise into scalable businesses. A landmark milestone in this journey is the Union Budget 2026 announcement of “SHE” Marts (Self-Help Entrepreneur Marts); these community-owned retail outlets empower women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to transition from small-scale credit users to formal enterprise owners. By integrating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into modern commerce for sustainable development, women are no longer just participants in the economy they are the primary architects of a self-reliant and culturally rooted future.

**Results of Findings**

Age Group  
 24 responses



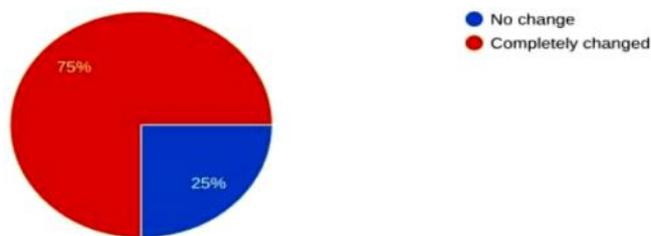
Do you think the Government’s focus on IKS (Indian Knowledge System) will help young girls feel more confident about their heritage?  
 24 responses



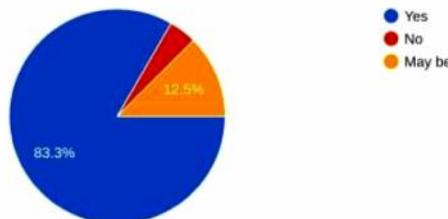
What is one piece of ‘Grandmother’s Wisdom’ you will definitely pass on to the next generation?

- **Character and Decision-Making:** Advice included believing in oneself, doing the right thing, thinking twice before acting, and not making big decisions when hungry, angry, or tired.
- **Values and Ethics:** Loyalty, good behavior, kindness, respecting elders, and the principle of ‘Kar bhala ho bhala’ (do good, receive good) were emphasized.
- **Knowledge and Education:** The importance of education, both academic and traditional/life experience-based, and the need to share knowledge with fellow women were highlighted.
- **Personal Well-being and Confidence:** Respondents mentioned self- independence, discipline, being confident in decisions, remaining satisfied, and resting when the body needs it.
- **Practical Wisdom:** Passing on home remedies was also mentioned.

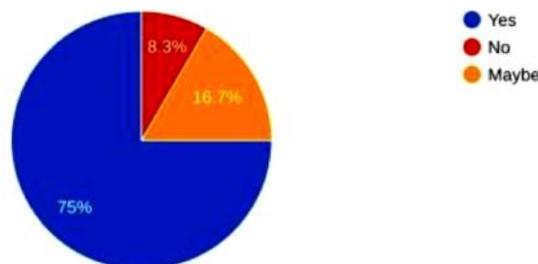
How much has "Financial Independence" changed your status in your family?  
24 responses



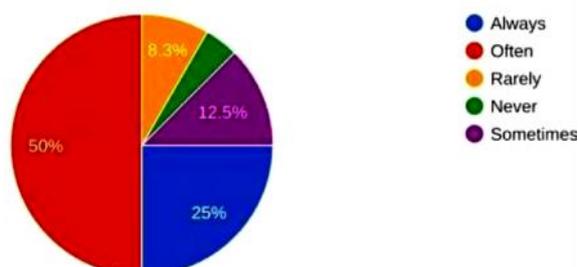
"From the kitchen to the Moon"—do you believe the core strength (Shakti) remains the same, or has the nature of women's strength changed?  
24 responses



Do you believe that women are the primary "keepers" of Indian cultural heritage?  
24 responses



How often you use traditional Knowledge in your daily life  
24 responses



## CONCLUSION

The journey of women in India since 1947 reveals a profound transformation from seeking legal recognition to asserting national leadership. While the current era of Nari Shakti has seen an immense increase in facilities and a robust legal framework that has propelled women to the highest echelons of professional life, the reality on the ground remains a complex tapestry of progress and persistence. Society has begun to respect women's decisions and recognize their contributions; however, a critical "implementation gap" remains in the form of the Double Burden. As women walk alongside men in every field, they are still primarily expected to shoulder the weight of domestic management and childcare. For the efforts of the past decades to be fully realized, the next wave of empowerment must focus on societal awareness that encourages the sharing of domestic responsibilities. True equity will be achieved only when women are not just "allowed" to work, but are supported by a society that values their time and professional contributions as much as their roles within the home.

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