



## Women Property Rights During MahaKavyaKalin Society: A Study

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### Abstract

The position of women in a society has always been the main criteria through which it is judged. Women have always played an important role in Indian society. In Indian *Dharamshastras*, women have always been regarded as an all-powerful being. Her role in the family is the most important as a man is considered incomplete without a woman.

Women had different property rights when they took on the role of a daughter or a wife. As a daughter, usually, she did not have any rights to her paternal property but retained complete ownership of gifts received during her marriage. As a wife, a woman had complete ownership of the household goods and she was also free to use her gifts as she wanted. Widows did not have too many property rights though they could utilise the property through her sons. This paper explores the property rights of women as daughter, wife and as a widow.

**Keywords:** paternal property rights, women property rights in Ramayana and Mahabharata times, stree-dhan, widow property rights, Mahakavyas

### Property Rights of Daughter

Daughters did not have any paternal property rights. As per *Rigveda*, only a daughter without any brothers had any right to her father's property. In such a situation, a woman's father gave away the property to his son-in-law to carry on his daughter's family. Only unmarried women with brothers were given a part of the paternal property for their own livelihood. Girls were given an appropriate amount of money on marriage. Usually, married women did not have any rights to paternal property. The main reason for a woman to not have paternal property rights was her inability to perform *Pind-dan*.

There is no clarity on paternal property rights of women in *Mahakavyas*. One thing is clear that an unmarried woman's responsibility lied with the father. The father and brother(s) of the girl chose an appropriate groom for the girl and gave enough money as *Kanya Dhan*. This money given by the girl's father belonged to the girl.

*King Janak* gave lacs of cows, silk and cotton clothes, various types of ornaments, elephants, chariots, soldiers, slaves, one hundred girl friends, gold and silver coins, pearls as *Kanya Dhan* in the marriage of his daughters. In *Mahabharata*, this gift to girls in marriage was known as *Gyatiday-haran* and *yottak*.

*King Drupad* gifted gold chains, one hundred chariots, one hundred elephants, expensive make-up, embroidered clothes and one hundred slaves in the marriage of his daughter, *Draupadi*. *Krishna* and *Balram* gave a lot of dowry in the marriage of *Subhadra* and *King Virat* also gifted huge amounts in the marriage of his daughter, *Uttara*.

In the *Anushashan Parva* in *Mahabharata*, it is mentioned that a woman had right to paternal property. It was due to the reason that the son of the daughter was allowed to perform *shraddh* of his maternal grandfather. *Anushashan Parva* also mentions that the son is equivalent to the soul of the body and daughter was equivalent to son.

If the firstborn of a man was a girl and she was accepted as a son, and the second child was a son, the son and daughter had equal rights to the property of the father. However, if a son was adopted, only the daughter had the right to the paternal property. Unmarried women lived with their father. If the father passed away or the



father was unable to care for their daughter, the responsibility passed on to the eldest son. Unmarried girls without any brothers used to live in their parent's house after the demise of their parents. *Vedvati* lived in the ashram after her father passed away and was the sole heir to the paternal property. A few examples of unmarried women in these times include *Sulbha*, *Shabri* and *Swayamprabha*.

### Property Rights of Wife

Women were entitled to property rights in the society. *Taittiriya Samhita* has mentioned that the wife is the owner of all the household goods. *Satpath Brahman* has clearly mentioned that a woman is the heir to her husband's possessions.

It is mentioned in *Ramayana* that *Kaushalya* performed holy rituals at the time of *Ram's* vanavas and she did not need to take anybody's permission to spend her money. It shows that women were allowed to spend their money as per their wishes.

*Kaikai* also gifted a necklace to *Manthra* at the time of *Ram's* coronation. She got this necklace as a gift from *King Dashrath*. It shows that women had complete ownership over their jewellery. They had complete freedom to donate their jewellery to anybody.

It seems that in *Mahabharata* times, women did not have any property rights. *Vidur* tells *Dhritrashtra* at a place that wife, daughter and slaves do not have any property rights. Their money belonged to the person who ruled over them. This is why when *Draupadi* looked after official work, she used to refer to it as King's or *Yudhishthir's* work. As per *Anushashan Parv*, wives could use the money given by their husbands for their personal use and they had no right to donate that money.

*Mahakavyas* also mention the term *Stree-Dhan*. It includes all the jewellery, clothes and other valuables a woman was gifted during her marriage or special occasions by her parents, brothers or husband. As per *Ramayana*, *Sita* was gifted a variety of clothes, animals, slaves and silver and gold coins at the time of her marriage. *Kaushalya* was gifted one hundred villages to take care of her dependents. However, it is not clear whether she received this gift from her father or her husband.

A girl was gifted a variety of things on the occasion of her marriage. In *Mahabharata*, these gifts were known as *Haran*, *Gyatidey*, *Yottik* and *Parichadam*. This wealth gifted by parents was later known as *Stree-Dhan*. In addition to marriage gifts, women also received gifts from family members and friends, and women had complete ownership of these gifts. *Sita* was gifted necklaces, sacred clothes and a lot of jewellery by *Ram*. She also received valuable clothes and jewellery from her father-in-law. *Maharishi Atri's* wife *Anusuya* also gifted her expensive clothes and jew

As per *Mahabharata*, *Chitranghda* and *Ulupi* received a lot of valuable gifts from their mother-in-law, *Kunti* and other female members of the extended family. *Draupadi*, *Subhadra* and others also gifted valuables to them. This makes it clear that only the wife had the ownership of *Stree-Dhan*. It was different from her husband's property and she was free to donate or gift her *Stree-Dhan*.

### Property Rights of Widow

A widow did not have any rights to her husband's property. She led her remaining life after her husband's death in her son's care.

As per *Ramayana*, after killing *Bali*, *Ram* and *Hanuman* told *Tara* that *Angad* may rule on the land under her care. It shows that a widow wasn't a direct inheritor of her husband's property but she could use the property through her son.

### Conclusion

Even though the property rights of women aren't clearly defined in the *MahaKavyas*, it is clear that women were dependent on their father for their day-to-day care. However, unmarried women and daughters without any brothers were entitled to their father's property. As a wife, a woman had complete ownership of her *Stree-Dhan*.

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