

**VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE
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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: Women and the Restoration

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Name of the Teacher: Nabankur Roy

Name of the Department: English

Women and the Restoration

Many of the social preoccupations of Restoration England centre on women; their wooing, their dowries, the way they are used. Women, from queens to actresses, have little legal power. Some progress is made, slowly, in this time. Real change will take another century.

Status of Women in 17th and 18th century England

- Marriage among the upper classes was viewed as a financial negotiation between two families. A price was set for the value of a daughter (her dowry), which would be given to her husband to control.
- In return, the future husband would be expected to provide a jointure, which would guarantee that his widow would receive a set amount of money annually if he should die.
- The woman's virginity was considered ~~to~~ the property of her father up until her marriage day, at which time it was bequeathed to her husband as his by right of purchase. A woman who was not possessed of her virginity was not considered a saleable commodity.
- Very little consideration, if any, was given to love or even companionship in these unions. The act of marriage was almost entirely a business agreement arrangement.
- Marriages were considered to be life-long, as the only means by which a divorce could

be secured was through an appeal to the Parliament, and then only because of adultery. Divorces were rare since the resulting scandal was not worth the price of freedom for either party.

□ The social stigma attached to either the adulterer or the cuckold was often threat enough to cause both parties to maintain their silence about the affair.

□ Also, with marriage, the woman lost all claim to any property that she may have owned before she became attached to her husband.

□ As property herself, she could not own anything in her own name. If a married woman chose to work, her wages belonged not to her, but to her husband.

□ If a husband wished to keep his children away from their mother, this was his right.

□ Legally, it was often the case that if a woman sought to bring charges of assault against her husband, she would not be allowed to testify on her own behalf. At times, a disagreement between a husband and wife which resulted in legal intervention would end with the woman being accused of a crime tantamount to rebellion against the king.

□ It has been noted that, in an age when a woman could become queen, there is a sense of bitter irony to the fact that, in spite of this potential for power, she was still viewed as an inferior being who could neither serve as a member of a jury nor hold public office.