

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH AGES AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women through Ages an Analysis is a much debated topic in the contemporary society. The concept of women empowerment throughout the world has its roots in women's movement. Today the world has gone far ahead in its material progress. Inventions have become popularized, communities have become stabilized and people have become sophisticated. We, the citizen of the new millennium are destined to tune with the new wave of developments happening in the entire world now. It is the apt time to analyze the world from different angles. One of the chief dimensions or angles is to study the role and position and power enjoyed by women through Ages in its true perspective. This study is hypothesized that since women in India are empowered they could participate in all activities such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science, technology and the like. In the midst, our society is still largely male dominated and most women do not have real freedom in their spheres of life. At the same time this study signifies two things. One is that a cultural struggle is needed to sweep away the feudal and medieval mentality from which such a situation stems. The other one is the commendable role and power possessed by women through ages and their contributions to the entire society in the changed scenario. More over this article intends to give an awareness and insight into the problems faced by women over years and their role and position from different angles. After all empowerment of women will lead to a world where women and men ensure that resources are utilized not just equitably, but sanely and safely.

Keywords: Empowerment, independent, woman, deterioration.

INTRODUCTION

Indian culture attaches much importance to woman. India is symbolized as Mother India, keeping in view the exemplary qualities of women namely patience, endurance, love, care, sympathy and generosity. There is a proverb which says the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world. Jawaharlal Nehru once said "to awaken the people it is the women who must be awakened."¹ The Indian woman has passed through various phases of civilization, but she continues to be dominated and ill treated by the male sex. Though the present women are better positioned than her ancestors, but women development has to go a long way to free women for the scales of the dominating society. In the midst we can proudly say that we have a galaxy of empowered women who have served, ruled, lived, and even doing wonders to the entire society. For example Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for a period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister. In the scenario of socio educational and legal aspects women have equal rights with men

STATUS OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT AGE

Scholars believe that in ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life. However some others hold contrasting views. Ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katakana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rig-Veda verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband. During the early Vedic period woman enjoyed a high status as she was considered as goddess and adored by her husband and the other members of the family. She was regarded as the invisible part of her husband and her presence was inevitable in every religious function. With the development of the idea of private property woman gradually lost her independent position. Her physical weakness and other disadvantages gave an excuse for the assignment of an inferior status to her. By 500 B.C again the status of women began to decline with the Smritis especially Manusmriti². The code of Manu summoned her position that she should be protected in all her stages of life from childhood to old age as she is never fit to be independent. It was Manu's Code which became a part and parcel of the Hindu Law.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The medieval period brought further deterioration in the position of women. The society demanded the protection of women from the eyes of the Muslim rulers and led to the system of Purdah which blocked the way of her further progress. Society have taken off her individuality and encouraged her in 'Sati', a tradition of noble sacrifice in which the woman dies in the pyre of her dead husband. The evils of prostitution, female infanticide, early marriages, ban on widow remarriages and polygamy were prevailed during this period. We can notice uniqueness there in the life of women of this age. The Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal Emperors curtailed women's freedom and rights. Though movements such as Jainism and Buddhism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order, by and large, the women in India faced confinement and restrictions. The practice of child marriages is believed to have started from around sixth century. The Muslim conquest of the subcontinent brought the practice of purdah in the Indian society. The Rajputs of Rajasthan practiced Jauhar. In some parts of India, the Devadasis or the temple women were sexually exploited. Polygamy was widely practiced among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have for fifteen years, before she lost her life in a battle with Asaf Khan the general of Mughal emperor Akbar in 1564. Jahangir's wife Nurjehan effectively wielded imperial power and was as the real force behind the Mughal throne. The Mughal princesses Jahanara and Zebunnissa were well-known poets. Shivaji's mother, Jijabai was deputed as queen regent because of her ability as a warrior and an administrator. In South India the Bhakti movements tried to restore women's status and questioned some of the forms of oppression. Mirabai, a female saint-poet, was one of the most important Bhakti movement figures. Some other female saint-poets from this period include Akka Mahadevi, Rami Janabai and Lal Ded.³ Bhakti sects openly advocate social justice and equality between men and women. It was Guru Nanak, the first Guru of Sikhs preached the message of equality between men and women. He advocated that women be allowed to lead religious assemblies and to lead congregational hymn singing called Kirtan or Bhajan. They have to

become members of religious management committees and to lead armies on the battlefield. Other Sikh Gurus also preached for the inclusion and fought against the discrimination of women.

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD

For a long period English East India Company remained indifferent to female education. They did not recognize the promotion of any kind of favour to women. Gradually changes occurred and a new era of development started. The Christian missionaries made earnest efforts for the spread of female education in India. They even brought a revolution in the society by highlighting the social evils existing within the Hindu social institutions. Western education was responsible for the new patterns of thinking leading to rationalism and liberalism. Missionaries like Mr. Play and Ms Mary Ann Cooke deserves great mention in the cause of female education. Many social activists too did great things to the upliftment of women. The first social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated the abolition of Sati and the Act for the abolition of Sati was passed in 1892. The other social reformers also worked for the cause of women. After all they have made everything safe and secure for women. The Purdah system and early marriages were severely condemned by them. The earliest women's organization was women's Indian Association founded by Dr. Annie Besant in Madras in 1917. Furthermore the western system of education and policies generated a new platform for the flourishing of the Indian women. Nineteenth century Bengal especially Calcutta witnessed the rise of women education and the formation of social legislations in order to improve their conditions. Some important legislations namely Hindu widows' remarriage Act 1856, Child marriage restraint Act 1929, Hindu women's right to property Act 1937 were enacted for the upliftment of women from their miseries 5.

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

During the freedom Struggle it was recognized that economic development must include women. Mahatma Gandhi encouraged women to actively participate in the freedom struggle. Gandhi's contribution to the cause of women upliftment was very significant. Gandhian politics allowed greater potential for women to their subjectivity and for empowerment. He had the view that women education was a powerful media. At the same time the Theosophical Society of Dr. Annie Besant had its own programme of social reforms and female education. She pleaded for the rise of the end.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA

The modern age can be referred to the period after independence of our country. The article 15 of the constitution guaranteed equal rights for both sexes. In the light of the provisions of the constitution the social legislation has been passed to improve the education, health facilities and economic position. Due to the new socio economic backgrounds, access towards education, norms and principles lot of improvement took place in certain areas. Let us have a look on the specific ones.

Improvement in Rights and Status

Right to improve the status and position of women it is necessary factor to have the removal of all the anomalies in the rights of men and women the Hindu Code Bill covered all the aspects regarding the rights of women.

Educational Advancement

With the improved social status of women the claim to educational opportunities also received greater attention in the past few decades. The university Education commission (1948) in its report rightly pointed out the importance of women's education, both in home and general. The percentage of girls above the age of 14 years attending high school or university was much less compared to boys. The second five year plans suggested improvements in this accord by opening more educational institutions for women for their integrated empowerment.

PROBLEMS OF WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA

Though Indian women have come a long way since independence they are suffering from untold miseries even in this modern age. The chief problems confronted by the modern women are the following:

Dual role

The present day women are educated and outstanding. Hence she is both the bread winner and the home maker. She is expected to perform these roles without making any compromise at any place. As she has to compete with her counterparts in his workplace, she is striving hard to prove herself. At home she has to do all the household chores and child rearing works as her husband is untrained or unwilling to take part in her burden. She is the guide, friend, philosopher, advocate and to the whole family members.

Dowry Harassment

Even now there are dowry deaths and dowry harassment despite legislation on dowry prohibition exists. The dowry system is still practiced in our society and women are subjected to untold miseries because of dowry demand. Women who brought in less 'Sridhans' or dowry are harassed by in-laws and husbands. Many homicides also take place because of dowry demands. Dowry problem lead to late marriages and some women have to remain single if they cannot afford dowry.

Educational Disparities

The literacy rates of men in the country are substantially higher than those of the females. For every hundred literate men only sixty-two women are literate. Though these figures have been improving over the decades still today a man's education is given preference to woman's education. The boys in the family are encouraged for higher education, whereas girls are discouraged to higher education in rural areas and even in urban areas. Here one thing is notable that the state of Kerala has higher literacy rate and educational level to the women folk as compared with those in the state like Rajasthan and Bihar. Thus women education is viewed as unproductive compared to male education as he would earn and support the parents in later life

Sexual Exploitation

At home, work place, everywhere women are subjected to sexual exploitation. Sexual abuses are growing in number especially girls children are sexually abused in their family by the members themselves. Even now a woman cannot go out in the night. If not exploited, advances are made by men in the work place and in public places. Women are seen as sex objects. Media influences this idea. In media women are portrayed as only a thing of beauty. Sexual violence against women including rape is another major area which badly disturbs the health of women both physical as well as psychological.

Domestic Violence

Violence not only damages the physical but also leaves a deep psychological damage in the shape of constant fear, anxiety, depression, insomnia etc. Basically incidents of violence against women are not reported because of several reasons. They are raped, sexually abused, beaten, tortured and killed. More over domestic violence's are the violation of Human Rights. To build up awareness of human rights of women are the prime solutions against different kind of violence against them.

Divorce

In the recent times so many divorces are taking place. A divorced woman is always looked down upon. Her character is tarnished. She always carries a stigma. Even the remarriage do not bring any relief for her. Even after remarriage she is harassed and punished. This idea of divorce and remarriage is still not accepted in rural areas. Women have to put up with the ill treatments met doubt by her husband and his family members.

Economic Problems & Unequal Income

Though woman claims to be educated and employed, but very rarely they enjoy economic freedom. Still women are considered to be secondary citizens who have to remain in the shadow of a man. They are not allowed to take any decision involving money. Even the right to property or claiming of property from marital home is for the husband and his family sake.. In India most of the women in the lower economic strata are engaged in various types of economic activities but do not get equal treatments.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment through ages is a process of social transformation where women gain control over vital issues which affect their lives and control over resources and benefits. Through empowerment she becomes an important source of energy in the functioning of the society. The process of empowerment begins in the mind, from woman's consciousness, from her beliefs about herself and her rights, capabilities and potentials. Women today are the point of immense debate and discussion initiated, nurtured and maintained by men. Recently things have changed for women to ventilate and mould their ideas and thus build their own images. Women today are not the silent half of the civilization. In the area of women welfare, both Vivekananda and Devananad championed the cause of female education. They were inspired by Atharva Veda and the teaching of Manu which stated the "daughter should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons" and it is the only means for achieving their upliftment. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, providing education to a male is giving it only to a single person, while to provide education to women means

providing knowledge to a whole family and from family to community and likewise. She is thus the educator of the whole family. Through her devoted and sincere services a woman teaches its members. She inculcates good values namely respect towards others, self control and co-operation among the members of her family. She should guide the family which is the pivot of the society. Indian women have done and are still doing extraordinary things. History, literature, religion and politics give examples of women who have inspired others .In all scenario of life women is the elixir of life.

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