

Changing Status of Women in Modern India: A Sociological Study

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Abstract: *After attaining independence, the Government of India planned to provide women equal status as men by means of developmental programmes. But, despite much effort Indian women are still treated and occupy a low status as compared to males. This paper attempts to analyze the changing status of women in modern India and is based purely on secondary data. The analysis shows that although women in modern India have made a considerable progress in every sphere of life, they still have to struggle against deep-rooted patriarchal mentality of society. The Indian constitution grants women equal rights as that of men but they were never been effective to bring a remarkable change in the status of modern women. Equal footing with men is still an illusion for females because male dominance still prevails in the society.*

Keywords: Exploitation, Society, Status, Participation, and Initiatives, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Without women nothing is possible for men. A woman is the basic unit of society. She makes a family, family make a home, home a society and ultimately society make a country. A country cannot progress until and unless its women take initiatives for development works. Swami Vivekananda has also said, "it is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved." The status of women in India has been subjected to great changes over the past years. The status of women social, economic, political and general- in India today is much higher than in ancient and medieval periods. Though the status of women has been raised in the eyes of law, but they are still much far from equality with males. Theoretically the condition of modern women was high however practically it was low. Women's are still exploited and humiliated in modern Indian society. Historically, the period after 1750AD is known as the modern period. Status of women in this period changes radically and can be studied in following two stages. 1. Status of women during British rule in India and 2. Status of women in post independent India.

II. STATUS OF WOMEN DURING BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

After the fall of Mugal Empire, the British established their supremacy over the Indian people. During British rule, lots of changes were made in the economic and social structures of our society. Though the quality of life of women during this period remained more or less the same, some substantial progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women. Social evils such a child marriage, Sati Pratha, devdasi system, Pardah pratha, prohibition of widow remarriage etc. which were great hurdles in the path of women's progress, were either controlled by the efforts of reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidya Sagar or removed by suitable legislations. Many women reformers such as Pandita Ramabai also fight for the disabilities of women. Women like Bhikaji Cama, Dr. Annie Besant, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani etc. played an important role in India's independence struggle. Sarojini Naidu, a poet and freedom fighter, was the first Indian women to become president of the Indian National Congress and the first women to become the governor of a state in India.

III. STATUS OF WOMEN IN POST INDEPENDENT INDIA

A revolutionary change has taken place in the status of Indian women after independence. Cultural and Structural changes reduce exploitation of women to a great extent and provide equality of opportunities to women in various fields. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battle field of life, fully armored with their talent. Now, there is no arena which remained unconquered by Indian women. Female activists also united over issues as female infanticide, gender bias, women's health, women's safety and women's literacy. Some notable positive changes which took place during this period are as follows:

- In 1966, Indira Gandhi becomes the first- women Prime Minister of India and served on that post for an aggregate period of fifteen years and becomes the worlds' longest serving women Prime Minister.
- In the field of politics, women like Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Mayawati, Vasundhra Raje, Uma Bharti, Shiela Dixit, Mamta Banerjee etc. proved themselves and make Indian women feel proud.
- From a time when there were no woman writer in India, today names like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri etc. can put any other writer to Shame.
- Kiran Bedi, Mother Teresa, Bachendri Pal, Kiran Majumdar, Kalpana Chawala, Meira Kumar, Pratibha Patil etc. are those names from different fields which set examples for others.
- Along with being achievers, women of modern India are fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers.
- Women are now regularly performing duties that are traditionally assigned to males. The income of one man is no longer enough in the modern expensive culture, so fluctuations in the economy have made it necessary for a woman to obtain a career, in order to provide the essential funds to support and maintain the family.
- In the 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women oriented NGOS. Self help groups and NGOS such as self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in the advancement of women's status in India.
- Many Women have emerged as leaders of local movements, for example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachan Andolan.
- The Government of India declared 2001 as the year of women's Empowerment The National Policy for the Empowerment of women was also passed in 2001.
- Women are actively participating in the democratic process and elections which is quite impressive in enhancing their Status.
- Today modern women in India are entering into all kind of professions like engineering, medicine, politics, teaching etc. They are joining the universities and colleges in large numbers. In fact, India has the largest population of working women in the world, and has more numbers of doctors, Surgeons, Professors than the United States. Thus, on one hand women are climbing the ladder of success, on the other hand, they are also suffering from atrocities of male dominated Indian Society. Lets now have a look at the darker Side:
- According to UNICEF's ' State of the World Children-2009'' report, 47% of Indian' s women aged 20-24 were married before the legal age of 18, rising to 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.
- The birth of the girl child was considered inauspicious. In villages as well as in cities, the girl child was killed before or after death.
- Common Indian sayings like, " May you be blessed with hundred sons" represent the low status of women in India.
- In 2011, Government stated India was missing three million girls and there are now 48 less girls per 1000 boys. The gap between the two genders is a direct response to the gender bias within India. Men and Women in India have unequal health and education rights. Male education and health are made more of a priority. So women's death rates are increasing.
- A 1997 report claimed that each year at least 5,000 women in India die due to dowry. In 2011, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 8,618 dowry deaths.

- According to Renuka Chowdhary, former Union Minister of women and Child Development, around 70% of women in India are victims of domestic violence.
- 11,332 women and girls are getting trafficked every year.
- Rape in India has been described by Radha Kumar as one of India's most common crimes against women.
- In India, acid attacks on women who dared to refuse a man's proposal of marriage or asked for a divorce are forms of revenge. The numbers of acid attacks have been increasing.

IV. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

Numerous legislative measures have been enacted by the Government to uplift the status of women in India. Some of which are as follows:-

- (i) The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
- (ii) The Plantation Labour Act, 1951
- (iii) The Family Courts Act, 1954
- (iv) The Special Marriage Act, 1954
- (v) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- (vi) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005
- (vii) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- (viii) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995)
- (ix) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- (x) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- (xi) The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976 290
- (xii) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 (xiii) The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- (xiv) The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983
- (xv) The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986
- (xvi) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition), Act 1986
- (xvii) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- (xviii) The protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

Besides legislative provisions, a number of welfare schemes and programmes, both at central and state levels have been operated by different department and ministries. Some are as follows:-

1. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY), 1993
2. Indira Mahila Yojana, 1993
3. Swadhar, 1995
4. Support to Training and Employment programme for Women (STEP), 2003
5. Ujjawala, 2007
6. Dhanalakshmi, 2008
7. Sabla scheme, 2010
8. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW), 2010
9. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
10. Women Development Corporation Schemes (WDCS)
11. Indira Priyadarshini Yojana
12. SBIs Stree shakti schemes.

Thus, a number of efforts have been made for women's social, economic and political benefits, yet they were never been effective, to bring a remarkable change in the situation. Yet one can't deny that the situation has improved since the earlier times. As compared with past, women in modern times have become powerful in various fields and have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way.

V. CONCLUSION

Gandhi ji once said, “Women is the noblest of God’s creation, supreme in her own sphere of activity”. These words are blossoming now. Increased awareness and education has inspired women to come out of the walls of home. The modern woman has started caring for her social, emotional, cultural, religious and economic needs. She has now become tool for social change in India. It can be said that women have more freedom than earlier however not true in many respects because prejudice still remains in the society. Though the status of today’s modern women in India is high, the overall picture of women’s position in India is not satisfactory.

Last but not the least, we should not forget that progress of a nation cannot be achieved until and unless there is active participation of its mothers, wives, sister and daughters, So each and every man Should thoughtfully decides to bring a revolutionary transformation in his attitude towards women and accept the women to be the equal participants in the country’s progress.

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