

Ancient and Literary Figures of Indian Women; Role of Education in their Empowered Status: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract– When we talk about women empowerment, it means to make women skillful, earning hands and enable them with lots of tasks of livelihood. It is only possible through education. With regard to women education, we should give our attention to the Indian ancient era. In that period, there were so many educated women whose valuable contribution proved a landmark in writing Vedas. Actually, the concept of women empowerment is not new to India. Here women were always been empowered. The present research aims to see the role of education in empowering women and analyzing their position in ancient, colonial and post-colonial period. To have education one needs to be developed, to have share in development one needs to have education.

Key Words: Education, Women Emancipation, Ancient Era, Literary characters

Introduction

Women Empowerment means to make woman free from the shackles of patriarchy and develop them into a perfect figure, and enable them with lots of tasks of livelihood and. It is only possible through Education. Regarding Women's education, first we have a look on the ancient period of India. There were so many examples of ancient women whose valuable contribution proved a landmark in writing Vedas.

Background

India has always been a land where we worship feminine divine for health, wealth, prosperity, education and every other requirement whether it is material or spiritual. Actually, the concept of women empowerment is not new to India. Here women were always been empowered. Even the princes of Ancient India were known from their mothers' name ex. Kauntaya that is Arjuna, Radhey that is Karna. Women were never treated equal in Indian Ancient text. They have always been considered supreme to men as they are one who give birth to men. So, the feminine is the character of nature, there is nothing without her.

The present research has gone through various examples of empowered women mentioned in our Vedic texts.

Ghosha was an Indian female philosopher and seer in ancient Vedic period. She authored two hymns of Rigveda efficiently. She gained recognition as Brahnavadini or speaker or proclaimer of Brahmana. Akka Mahadevi, a prominent female poet in Kannada Literature. *Mantragopaya* and *Yogangatrividhi* are considered her most notable contribution to Kannada Literature. So, traces of women education were there in ancient India. The earlier women who obtained educational degrees were Chandra Mukhi Basu, Kadambiri Ganguli and Anandi Gopal Joshi. In Ancient India, Women Empowerment was there. Kittur Chinemma, Abakkka Rani, Laxmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal led the freedom struggle movement of 1857. We had such a glorious past in terms of women Empowerment which made us think what actually happened that made the conditions of women so miserable in last 400 to 300 years back. Long term of Invasions whether it be Islamic Invasions or be British Colonialism; Many bad practices came to India like polygamy, Purdha Pratha, Prohibition of girls from going to school. Simone De Beauvoir has rightly said that "men define themselves

as the exemplary case of humanity and they define women as dependent on men". A critic Kreps argued that how social structures and cultural beliefs shape women's subordination.

In Indian Freedom Struggle, many women participated. With freedom struggle many struggles have started side by side; struggle for women education, women emancipation and so on. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chand Vidhya Sagar, Jyotir Phule worked a lot to eradicate various social evils which were designed to subjugate women culturally and socially. Jyotir Phule worked a lot for women education. Many NGOs were established to work for equal political, social, economic upliftment of females. They did their best in bringing the notion of female's emancipation. In 1990s women- oriented organizations were settled with the financial helps of foreign agencies. These organizations worked on various issues and helped in bringing reforms. After freedom, women touched almost maximum fields for their self -development and participated in skill enhancement programs. It is a long and relentless battle of women to strive for the equal status and establish their identity in this male dominated society. Still she has so many challenges in her life. Even today the birth of a girl child brings no happy sign on her family's face. No doubt Education is an instrument for freeing women from a state of subordination and exploitation and enables them to play the role of an agent for social liberation. Many social reformers realized that it is illiteracy that is responsible for the low social esteem of women leading in the perpetuation of crimes like child marriage, widow burning etc. To have education one needs to be developed, to have share in development one needs to have Education. The biggest hurdle to women's education is the social attitude which treats it as being unnecessary irrelevant and unrelated to her future roles as a wife, mother and home manager. This is what the present research is analyzing the role of education in Women's empowering status through the study of literature as well.

As literature is a mode of expression and it reflects all the social, cultural and political aspects of life. Before sharing examples of female protagonists from Literature, the study explores the previous survey of The Hindu regarding the literacy rate of Girls. The survey highlights that despite progress, girls and women continue to face discrimination in getting education and in developing countries teen-age girls, especially in villages are more likely to drop out of secondary school than boys. During colonial period many women's organizations were formed and they worked in favour of women's education. Observing the slow growth of literacy even after forty years of independence, and the continuous gender gap in literacy, the constitution of India led to the formation of an Education Committee in 1971. The committee suggested that women's education should be regarded as a major program for years to come and a bold and determined effort should be made to face the difficulties involved and to close the existing gap between men and women as quickly as possible. Now the time has come when women can develop professional skills through education and develop their language proficiency to enhance their opportunities and empowerment.

The fictional works of Indian Women Writers study the problems of women in a patriarchal structure when men are dominant sex and the cultural construction and social mechanism perpetuate gender inequality. These writers reflect various facets of struggle of women's autonomy. Although women, being pivotal person of their family play various roles and attempt hard to preserve its integrity and harmony.

Literary Analysis:

‘Virmati’, a female protagonist from Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, ‘Nisha’ from Manju Kapur’s *Home* and ‘Rosie’ from R.K. Narayan’s *The Guide*, belong to middle class society and we see how education leads these female protagonists to independent thinking and how they liberate themselves from the repressions of patriarchy.

Difficult Daughters is beautifully written a story of young woman and her life around the time of India’s Independent struggle and is based on the life of Kapur’s own mother. Virmati, the heroine of the novel entangled in her own desires and wants to come out from this patriarchal web which always keep women suffocated and subordinated. This novel has also earned Commonwealth Award (1998). “The inspirational source for Virmati is her cousin Shakuntala who ride horses, smoke, play cards and badminton, act without her mother's advice, buy anything she wanted”(p.15). Virmati longs for a meaningful and independent selfhood. But she was taught to do some traditional domestic works that compelled her to remain inside the threshold. Virmati refuses to accept the established social code for women. She starts seeking new form of life that causes a sense of unbelongingness and isolation. Manju Kapur has won to bring out successfully the miserable conditions of women in three phases i.e. pre-independence phase, during independence and post- independence. In the novel, the life of Virmati is portrayed elaborately in comparison of her daughter, Ida. She is aware of the fact that her mother “studied more than any other girl in this family”(5). Many times, Virmati shows her agitation towards the duties imposed upon her by her mother to take care of her younger siblings as she was the eldest of them. Her mother frequently inquires "Have you seen their food milk-cloth-studies"(6). The story of Virmati is similar to every girl’s situation of that time. They were all conditioned to follow all the established norms of society and not allowed to seek education and enhanced their skills. But Virmati create a passion to get education and come out of that web which retain women inside the threshold. As Gurpyari Jandial states that “It would be a mistake to devalue Virmati’s struggle because she failed, for what mattered is that she tried to break the patriarchal mould and she had an inner urge for independent existence and in the forties, it was her great achievement (Gurpyari 2003 4.3). Virmati's desire to study like her cousin Shakuntala. Freedom associated in developing various skills and attending to academic deliberation thrills the ignorant mind of Virmati. “I want to be like you pehnji...” (17). Shakuntala is a successful teacher and an independent woman. She becomes an inspirational source for Virmati regarding education. By associating herself with Shakuntala, Virmati gets the opportunity to realize how much she hated the idea of a housewife. She is not happy with her engagement with

Inderjeet due to her passion for education. Somehow, she managed to refuse to that marriage in favour of further education. Virmati was committed to studies and sent to Lahore for further studies against her mother's will. Shakuntala helps Virmati in this regard. She will become a teacher and help others. After completing B.T from R.B.S.L college in Lahore, Virmati returned to Amritsar. After few days, a fantastic offer visited to her. The offer was of principalship at Nahan, the capital of Sirmaur in Himalaya state. Finally, she wins and empowers herself with education.

In *Home*, a traditional joint family set-up has been shown who restrict women to live within the threshold and busy with domestic tasks only and it believes that it is Nisha, who is going to preserve the strong foundation and hold the tradition and culture in order to defend the family esteems. The family doesn’t believe in women’s education. At the age of ten, her mother asks her to have fast for the future husband. Her mother’s orthodox views prepare Nisha to know household chores instead of getting education. Because “a

girl has to marry, if not today then tomorrow” (Mehta). But Nisha proves to be a rebellious girl. “She didn’t want to spend the day without food and water.” With the great help of her aunt, Rupa, she joins Durga Bai College. Nisha is iconoclast and thinks that Education is her first priority and it makes a woman independent.

The next example of Rosie from R.k. Narayan’s *The Guide*. She is the daughter of a Devadasi. Being her daughter, she is well versed with the art of dancing but at the same time has a low position in the society. A devadasi’s daughter had been considered a public property in Indian Society. She had to serve God as well as public. All this means that Rosie is not a respected figure in this society. Marco a reputed figure in the society gave an advertisement in the newspaper: “Wanted an educated, good-looking girl to marry a rich bachelor of academic interests. No caste restrictions; good looking and university degree essentials.” She accomplished both the qualities ‘beauty and education’ as demanded by Marco. In *The Guide*, Narayan totally disapprove all the accepted social norms which deny women from decision making powers, dignity and self-esteem. Rosie is a standing figure who arouse the mobility of thoughts and scope for analyzing all feminine issues. Though she is a daughter of devadasi yet she was given the privilege to receive formal education and is an M.A. in Economics. Rosie’s community was so impressed with her marriage to Marco, they said: She is going to get such reputed marital status only because of her education.

Summing up:

Ancient female personalities proved exemplary figures for the common masses for their empowered status as gained by them through education. All the three female protagonists strive hard for seeking education and empower themselves. They will provide a feedback and guide the female folk to achieve the goal of perfection in educational skills and help to obtain the empowering status for themselves. No doubt, these protagonists, Virmati, Rosi and Nisha as shown by the writers have to undergo various challenges to reach their educational and empowered status but eventually they win and become the role-model for the readers in this process of maintaining their own self-esteem. As Simone De Beauvoir rightly states “One is not born, but rather becomes, a Woman.”

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