

Women from Subordination to Empowerment: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Men and women are the two sides of same coin. Both are the complement to each other. But in the context of the Indian society, from the beginning till now only women have been victimized some forms of exploitation. Women comprise half of the total population in India. But they were deprived to enjoy their equal rights with men. But still this is result of the firm determination of women by which they improved their position and progressed. Now a day, women identify and have proved themselves as teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, architects, air-hostess etc. They reduce their economic dependency on men. But still they are fighting for their rights. There are also some positive components and supportive sections that have helped women to improve their position and fight against injustice and be independent. This paper deals with the study of Indian women and status in different periods of India. The paper also deals with the diverse phases of women's life. It also evaluates the qualitative changes that have occurred in women's situation in modern time.

Key Words : Women, society, Socio-economic and Political status, Government schemes

INTRODUCTION

Indian society is a male dominating patriarchal society in which patriarchal values like regulating sexuality, marriage, reproduction and societal were implemented very radically. But the hardest form of patriarchal society was to be seen when woman had to restrict to enjoy their rights and life as a human being as well as socialized her to be self-surrendered everywhere. In the earlier, women were exploited or oppressed by men because they were females. They have been treated like an object. They have suffered from many problems such as lots of criticism, lack of freedom and stood nowhere next to men (Singh, 2014). It is irony of our country that the women have been shown inferior from the beginning till now. Women were also shown inferior in Manuscript. According to Manuscript "No act is to be done according to (her) own will by a young girl, a young women, or even by an old women, through in (their own) houses in her childhood (a girl) should be under the will of her father, in her youth, of her husband, her husband being dead, of her sons, a woman should never enjoy her own will". But to improve the situation of the women many social reformers, NGOs made every possible efforts which resulted in the improvement of women's status to a great extent now a day.

METHODOLOGY

The study is solely based on secondary data collection according to the need of the study. Secondary data has collected from the books, journals, research papers, Government documents, Census reports, websites etc. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the Indian women situation from subordination to empowerment.

Women during the Vedic period :

During the Vedic period, women were comparatively better in terms of access to education, religious rights, freedom of movement etc. (Altekar 1962:10-13, 196-97). During this period the women participated in every walk of life. Women's position can be judge the way in which the birth of girl was received. The daughter was never considered or unwelcomed guest in her paternal household. If for any reason, the daughter remained unmarried, she was expected to live under the protection of her father and brother. They were provided opportunities to attain religious and intellectual education. Vedic women carried on the study of Vedas, received Vedic mantras, and performed Vedic rites and rituals. The girls were educated like boys. They wore sacred thread (Upanita- Dhaarana) and used to pass through a period of Brahmcharya (Desai and Thakkar, 2001). Women such as Gargi, Maitreyi and Atreyi were well-known scholars of this period. During this phase of society, monogamy marriage was mostly common but polygamy indulge in the richer section of the society (Rout, 2016).

Women position in Later Vedic period :

In the Later Vedic period, the patriarchal family system has declined the women's situation equal to Shudras. The social, family, and religious status of women totally deteriorated in this period. The son was valued more than the daughter. During this period, the Priest who spoke of themselves as a representative of God on earth, indulged largely in sexual debauchees (Kumar and Singh, 1997). Women were not allowed to participate in religious or sacrificial ceremonies. Education of women, which was acceptable in Vedic period, totally neglected or denied in Later Vedic period. In case of marriage, the practice of early marriage had begun, making the women's situation more fragile (Desai and Thakkar, 2001). Women were also forbidden to remarry in case of her husband die or leave her for some causes. According to Altekar "In early history, man is seen excluding women from all religious services, almost everywhere because he regarded her as un-clean, mainly on account of her periodical menstruation...". They were also equated with property in Epic and Purans. Arthashastra imposed more stigmas and dismissed liberation of women (Rout, 2016). But Buddhists and Jainism gave some respect to women. Women never show 'Abla' or oppressed suffering from social conviction in Buddhist Literature. But she was still subordinate and under the control of men.

Medieval Period :

During the medieval period, the situation of women remained subordinate and unsatisfactory (Desai, and Thakkar, 2001). In the Muslim rule the dependency of women on men was enhanced. Women faced a number of hardships and cruelty due to the evil practices like child marriage, sati pratha, Devdasi system, widowhood etc. They restricted to enjoy their rights and freedom. Sati Pratha was very painful tradition of Indian society. In this mischief, after husband's death wife was burnt alive with her husband's pyre. On the other hand, child marriage is an ancient practice of

India. According to this custom people used to marry their children only at young age. Slowly this practice has been terribly terrible. Not only this, evil practice such as dowry system, has female infanticide also existed. The practices like Purdah (veiling customs) and multi-marriages (polygamy) were very famous among Muslims. The practice of purdah became more stiff and women were prohibited even to visit the holy shrines. Not only Muslims women but a large part of Hindu women accepted the practices of veiling. At this time no improvement in the condition of women yet many of women like Chand Bibi, Tara Bai, Ahaliya Bai Holker left their marks with ruling capabilities.

Bhakti movement was also spread all over the country during this period. Women like Mira Bai, Mukta Bai, and Jana Bai were also contributed to the spiritual life of women and men. The founder of Sikhism and the first of the 10 Sikh Gurus, Guru Nanak Dev Ji always believed in the equality of women and men. On women's inequality, he said "*So Kyon Manda Akhiye, Jit Janme Rajan*" means, why call her inferior? From her, the kings are born.

Women in British period:

In the 18th century, when British Empire established in India, the condition of India was very fragile. The people of India were completely trapped in religious traditions. These miscreants had hollowed the rule of Indian society. In these circumstances an urgent action was needed against them. Therefore many social reformers started reformed movements and tried to eliminate this mischief's from society. Raja Ram Mohan Rai, the founder of '*Brahmo Samaj*', drove a wave to improve the situation of women in 1898. His immense efforts led to the Abolition of Sati with British Governor General Lord William Bentinck in 1829. Ishwarchander Vidyasagar's amendable efforts to the reform of widows also led to Widow Remarriage Act. The act was enacting in 1856. The Act deals with the illegal hardships related to the marriage of widows. Jyotirao Phule was also against rigid Hindu caste system and fought for the rights of untouchables and education of the untouchable women. He established '*Satyashodhak Samaj*' which kept the Hindu caste system shaken. Narayan Ganesh Chandervarkar, Madhav Govind Ranade, R.G. Bhandarkar and Mahipatram Rupram collaborately started an organization in order to prohibited child marriage and in favor of widow remarriage and women's education.

During this period, many of the women reformers were also proved very helpful in the cause of women. Pandita Ramabai took a lead in improving the condition of child and widows. She was the founder of Arya Mahila Samaj in 1881. Swarna kumari Devi (sister of Rabinder Nath Tagore) was also formed '*Ladies Societies*' for women's education in Calcutta in 1882. She was the first Indian women editor who edited women journal named '*Bharti*'. Her daughter Sarla Devi Chaudhary, a social reformer was also formed '*Bharat Stree Mandal*' in 1910. The branches of '*Bharat Stree Mandal*' were established in different states of India such as Bombay, Lahore, Hyderabad, and Amritsar in order to promote women's education. In 1917, with the support of Indian National Congress, the first Indian women delegation met with the secretary of the state in order to demand the political rights for women. '*Women Indian Association*' was established in 1917, in order to get political rights of women. This was India's first feminist organization. Annie Besant was the first president and Margret Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa were the honorary secretaries of *WIA*. *WIA* started with 33 branches in different parts of India. But in 1924, its branches has increased to 71 and also had 21 centers and 3800 members in all over India. With the remarkable initiatives of Margret Cousins, the first session of All India Women Association was held in 1927 in Pune. All India Women Education Conference was held in 1927 which played a key role in social change.

The Improvement in the socio- economic and political status of women can be seen and

analyzed after the independence of India.

Constitutional laws for women in India:

To improve the statues of women Laws were framed from time to time which are given as follows:

Hindu Code Bill : Hindu Code Bill was series of Laws which was passed by the Parliament after long debate between 1955-56. The Hindu Code Bill was based on basically two main purposes, firstly to raise the social statues of Indian women and secondly to make void caste inequality in India.

Hindu marriage Act (1955): The main aims of the Act are to codifying the law in Hindu Marriage system. On the place of Polygamy, Monogamy marriage became the law.

Hindu Succession Act (1956): In this Act women are allowed to have a right in Father's property.

Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956): The Act was enacted in order to declare that the persons on who are entitled to act as a natural guardian of Hindu Minor in respect of the person and property of the minor and impose certain restrictions on the power of such guardians

Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956): The main purpose of this Act was to secure one's performance of one's funeral rites and to preserve the continuance of one's lineage.

Suppression of Immoral Traffic among Women: This Law was enacted in 1956 but amended twice in 1978 and 1986. The purpose of law was to prohibit the trafficking of young girls and women for purpose of prostitution as means of livelihood.

National Commission for women:

The National Commission was set up as a statutory body in Jan.1932 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 (Act No. 20 of 1990 of Govt. of India) to:

- Review the Constitutional and Legal safeguard for women.
- Recommended remedial legislative measure.
- Facilitate redressal of grievances
- Advice the government on all policy matters affecting women

NCW took up the issues of Child Marriage, sponsored legal awareness programs, Parivarak Mahila Lok adalats. NCW also reviewed laws such as Dowry prohibition Act 1961, PNDRACT 1994, Indian Penal Code 1860 and the National Commission for Women Act 1990 to make them more effective.

Dowry Prohibition Act (1961):

The Act prohibited giving and taking dowry should be void. If any person demands dowry he/ she will be punished for at least six months but which may extended to two years and he/ she will be paid fine of ten thousand rupees. But the Act was amended in 1986 with new provision that if women commit suicide within 7 year of her marriage, this is punishable for husband and in-laws.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act: Its aim to look up maternal health set-up and also legalizes abortion services.

Parivarak Mahila Lok Adalatas: The PMLA was evolved by National Commission for Women for redressal and speedily disposal of cases under Legal Service Authority Act, 1987. To provide speedy and cost free dispensation of justice to women, generate awareness among the public regarding conciliatory made of dispute settlements and empower public especially women to

participate in justice delivery mechanism.

Pre- Natal Diagnostic Test Act(1994): An Act to provide for the prohibition of sex selection, before and after conception and for regulation of pre Natal diagnostic techniques for the purpose of detecting genetic abnormalities or the metabolic disorders or certain congenital malformations or sex-linked disorders and for the preventions of their misuse for sex determination leading to female feticide and for matter connected therewith or incidental thereto (it is enacted by Parliament in the Fourth-Fifth year of Republic of India).

Domestic Violence Act:

The Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act was enacted in 2005. Under the Act the domestic Violence includes actual abuse or threat to abuse that is physical, sexual, verbal emotional or economic. Harassment by the way of unlawful dowry demands to the woman or her relatives are also covered under the Act. The Act provides for the rights of women to secure housing.

Constitutional provisions: The main constitutional provisions for upliftment of women are given as below;

Article (14): Equality before Law :

The state shall not deny to any person equality before law or the equally provides the law with the territory of India.

Article 15 (I) the state cannot discriminate against any citizens on ground only on religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

Article 39(A) to promote justice on the basis of equal opportunities and to provide free legal aids by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure the opportunities for securing justices are not denied to any citizens by reason of economy and other disabilities.

Article 42

The state to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

Article 46 :

The state to promote with special care of educational and economic interest of the weaker section of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all form of exploitation.

Article 47 :

The state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people.

Article 51(A) (C) :

To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood among all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Article 243 D (3) :

Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayats to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different

constituencies in a Panchayat.

Article 243 D (4) :

Not less than the one third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women.

Article 243 T (3) :

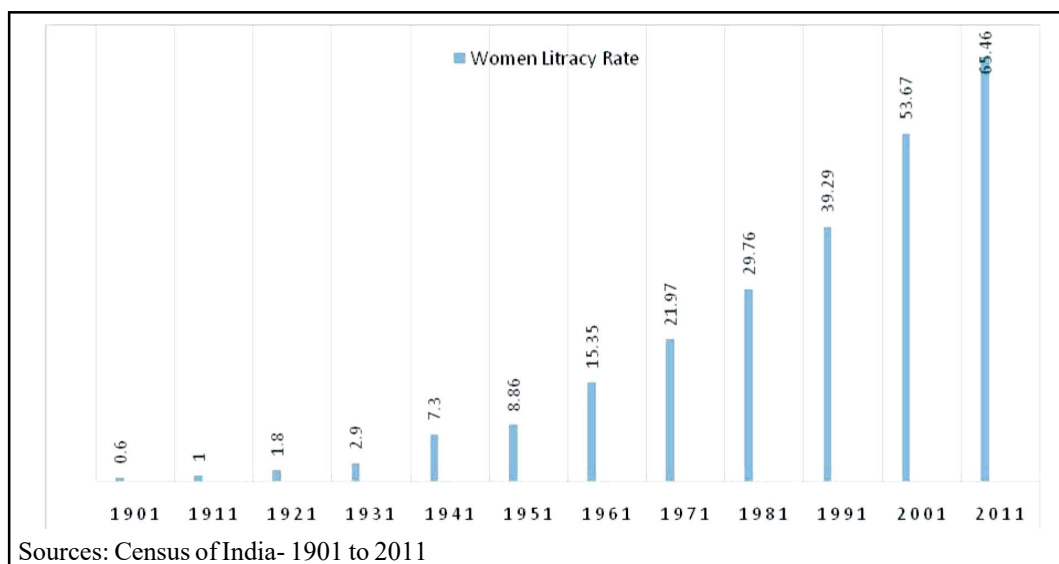
Not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct elections in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies of Municipality.

Article 243 T (4) :

Reservation of offices of chairperson in Municipality for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and women in such manners a legislature of a State may be law provided.

Status of Women in Modern Period :

The status of Indian women has profoundly changed in the Modern era. With the Constitutional provisions, women get equal opportunities in education, employment and political participation. It is extremely pointed that women in independent India have achieved greater progress in all walks of life and occupy high administrative positions very successfully. After independence, the number of the literate women relatively increased. Census of India shows that women literacy rate was just 0.6 in 1901. It is increased to 39.29% in 1991 and 53.67% in 2001. The census of India 2011 shows that women literacy rate has increased to 65.46%.



Economic Participation of Women :

The Constitution of India not only grants the equality of women but also empower women through equal economic opportunities which make them economically independent. Most of women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another. In the agriculturist society,

women plows fields and harvest crops while working on farms, women weave and make handicraft while working in the household industries, women sell food and gather wood while working in the informal sector (Dunlop and Velkoff, 1999). Women's participation in the economy of country is the direct signal of decreasing discrimination and increasing empowerment. In 1991 census, Indian workers has divided in two categories, the 'Main and 'the 'Marginal workers'. The main workers are those people who work for 6 months to one year and marginal workers are those who worked for a short period. The 1991 census shows that the number of male 'Main workers' increased 23 %, while the number of female 'Main workers' increased 40% as compared to census 1981. The majority of the women are involved in informal sectors such as domestic servants, small traders, artisans or field laborers on family farm (Dunlop and Velkoff, 1999). According to 1991 World Bank Report, 94% of women population employed in dairy production in India. However, female comprise total 25.6% in work participation as 14.7% main worker as well as 11% as marginal workers (Census, 2001). As per the census 2011, female's workforce participation is 25.51% against 53.26% of males. On the other hand, number of women employs as a teachers, doctors, engineers, advocates as well as bank employees are steadily increasing day by day (Singh, 2014). For improvement of women's situation economically and socially, Indian government has also launched many of Schemes such as:

1. **Mother and Child Tracking System Scheme:** MCTS was launched in December 2009 with the objectives of monitoring the health care services to pregnant women. This scheme includes pregnancy care, medical care and inoculation. This scheme also spotlight on children up to 5 years of age through name based tracking of each beneficiary, computing services and implementation of the programs and ensure that all beneficiaries have access to range of services.
2. **Indira Gandhi Matriya Sahyog Yozna:** The schemes was introduced and implemented by Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India in October 2010. Under this scheme the Conditional Maternity Benefit (CMB) for poor pregnant and lactating women to improve their health and nutrition status by providing them financial help. The first installment is given in the seven to nine months of pregnancy *i.e.* in the third trimester while the second installment is given after the six months of delivery. This scheme is not implemented on the central and state employee because they are getting paid maternity leave.
3. **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh :** This is a registered society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, was set up on 30th march, 1993. This scheme was sponsored by Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The main objective of this Society is to provide financially help or micro loans to poor women to start income generating business such as dairy, agriculture, Shop-keeping, vending, handicrafts etc. (Annual Report, 2003-04).
4. **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls :** This is centrally sponsored scheme for adolescent girl's age of 11 to 18 years, introduced in 2010. This scheme is also known as Sabla scheme. The main aims of this scheme are to enable adolescent girls for self-development, improve their nutrition status for health, and spread home- based skills, educate them in order to improve their social status.
5. **Nirbhaya Fund :** It is dedicated fund which has set up by Government of India with the objectives of enhancing safety and security of women in the country. Nirbhaya fund was announced by the finance minister P. Chidambaram in 2013 Budget of Indian Government.

It was named after the Delhi gang rape victim Nirbhaya who had raped and died in Dec. 2012.

6. **Kishori Shakti Yozna** : This scheme was a holistic program of Government of India for the development of adolescence girls between the age group of 11-18 years. This scheme was launched under the Ministry of women and child development. The main of Kishori Shakti Yozna is to empower adolescent girls so that they enabled them to lift their own responsibilities of their lives.
7. **Swadhar Greh** : This scheme is launched by Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in tricky conditions. Under these schemes the beneficiaries are women without family support such as widow, deserted by the husband, family or relatives, sexually harassed etc. Under this scheme provides food, clothing and shelter to beneficiaries who are in need.
8. **Support to Training and Employment Program** : STEP scheme aims to provide skills of employability among women in the field of agriculture, horticulture, stitching, handicraft, computers, in order to enable women to become self-employed and entrepreneur.

Political Participation of women :

Political participation means to actively involved in a political sphere and shapes it according to the interest of common people. Women empowerment is not only based on the economic participation of women but also based on the number of women participants in the political system of their country. There are several reasons for women's squat participation in political system such as political structure in which highly dominating male power, less power of decision making, economic dependency etc. India is a democratic country based on the notion of 'for the people, of the people and by the people'. But in this democracy, women are prevented for coming forward politically. There was a time when they neither have the right to vote, nor was the power to make the decision in their hand. But they gradually struggled and made their place in this political system. There are also many provisions available in Indian Constitution for the betterment of women which inspire women to be able to improve economic and social status as well as to compete in the political system also. As per the provision contained in Article 243 D in the Indian Constitution, 1/3 seats of Panchayati Raj Institutes are reserved for women. As per the Economic Survey 2018, women represent in the Lok sabha had elected on 64 seats *i.e.* 11.27% out of the total 542 seats of MPs, as well as in Rajya Sabha the number of the women had 29 seats *i.e.* 11.83% out of the 245 seats in 2014. Even in the states, women share is only 8% in assemblies and only 4% in the state council as on first of August 2014. But women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutes has increased to 46% in March, 2013 (Kazi, 2015). It is the responsibility of the government of country to ensure as much as possible political participation of women for good governance and betterment of the society.

Conclusion:

This study shows that as the changes in society as well the position of women has also changed. Facing the difficulties in the society, they improve their pathetic position. Their immense determination helped in their own development. Their established aims to become economically independent, strength them to fight against the exploitation and make them free from all social evils. Women empowerment is not an unplanned process. But it is full of efforts of Social reformers, Government, NGOS and also women themselves.

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