



STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN IN THE PERIOD OF ANCIENT, MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN.

Sanjeev Kumar
Assistant Professor of History
Govt. College Chhachhrauli (Yamuna Nagar)

Abstract :

Most of the social reformers tried to uplift and restore the women's glory through preaching, press and platform. Among them a few notable reformists are Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarachandra Vidya Sagar, Swami Dayanad, Kandukuri Veersalingam, Duragabai Deshmukh, Jyotiba Phule and Ramaswami. Raja Ram Mohan Roy succeeded in making Viceroy Lord William Bentinck, to declare the sati system illegal. In the patriarchal family and society of our country for centuries, the law of Manu in regard to the role and behavior of women have been rigidly adhered. The state never set out to restructure relations of authority within the family or other resources. For many political and academic reasons the specificity of women's oppression and exploitation and role of the state remained substantially unexamined to bring an end to the oppression of women in our country, several reformers tried their best to influence the state. Nevertheless, it was Ambedkar who had been successful to influence the state to come to the rescue of the women of our country. The purpose of the present chapter is to examine Dr. Ambedkar's efforts in understanding the complete reality about the status of women in India through a comprehensive Hindu Code Bill. His pragmatic approach to recognize, restructure and reform the patriarchal family for repairing the dilapidated component of Indian society, namely, the women.

Introduction :

Social structure can stimulate certain trends of change, but at the same time, it can also prove to be an impediment in their path. In India, there is diversity of culture, tradition, and norms, castes religion that influence situating gender in the society.

Women In India :

The Constitution of the Republic of India ensures equality for women and men in every sphere of life and activity. Women in India have been given equality of opportunity in all matters relating to education, employment, and legal status, and they can aspire to grace the highest offices of the state. However, this is indicative of the existence of women in the country. Though legally and constitutionally all women have equal access to and right to venture in every walk of life, a vast majority of them are still illiterate and uneducated. This is a paradoxical situation which must be understood and seen in its historical perspective. The status of women and their activities can be divided into three main historical periods, the ancient, the medieval and modern.

Women In India Ancient Period :

From the available documentation, it is revealed that women enjoyed a fair amount of freedom and equality with men in the fields of education and religion during the Vedic period. In the Vedic period, women from higher sections of society were given equal rights in the field of religion, and they attained distinction in the realm of theological studies and philosophy. Distinguished women such as Gargi and Maitrayee are well-known names of this period who excelled as scholars in their own right. During the ancient period, there were icons such as Sita, Damayanti, Draupadi and three of the Panchkanyas, Ahilya, Tara, Mandodari, who are still remembered with great reverence in Indian society. It was in the later period, approximately 500 BC, the status of women gradually declined with the Smritis and other religious texts giving dictats which adversely affected women's freedom and rights. With the rise of Brahminism and due to conflicting religious and social thoughts, the place of women remained subordinate and unsatisfactory. Buddhism and Jainism, however, continued to give a place of honour to women. Women were eligible for admission to the religious order in both Buddhism and Jainism. Bhikshuni sanghamitra was one of the main proponents of Buddhism of her time.

With the coming of Muslim rule, medieval India witnessed enhanced dependency of women on men. The Islamic custom of Purdah (veiling of women) forced the public world to be separated from the private world, with women confined to the latter. Following its subjugation by the Muslims, and fearing adverse outcomes for its women, a large part of the Hindu India accepted the practice of veiling. Through this privatization, Indian women were forced to trade their mobility for safety. Repeated invasions by the Muslims further pushed.

Indian women towards inhuman “traditions” such as child marriage, the dowry system, purdah and sati (the immolation of the widow on the dead husband’s pyre). The challenge of Islamic aggression also made Hindu India defensive and introverted causing a desperate return to orthodox Hindu beliefs and practices and further constraining the status of Indian women. Thus, during the medieval period, Indian women lost their earlier status and were at the lowest ebb.

However, women like Razia Begum rose to become a ruler, Chand Bibi, Tara Bai and Ahaliya Bai Holker, left their great imprints for their ruling capabilities. In Bhopal also, Begums or princesses ruled. With the advent of Islam, once again, women like Jahanara, Begum Mumtaz and Noor Jahan enjoyed respectable positions in the country. These remarkable ladies though strict Muslims, publicly administered justice with their faces covered by veils or burkas.

Women In India Modern Period :

In the modern period, the status of Indian women can be divided into two distinct periods, the British rule, i.e. Pre-Independent India and the Post Independent India.

Pre-Independence Period :

The British Rule in the 18th century brought in some degree of political orderliness, but the social structure, customs and practices remained unchanged. It was mainly during the 19th century that the reform movement undertaken by enlightened thinkers and leaders of Indian society.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy who understood the importance of women's participation that the status of Indian women started changing for the better. Though initially all the leaders were men, women gradually came into the scene and played their role not only in changing history but also the society as a whole, through their efforts in different areas of work such as education, politics and freedom movement. Mrs. Annie Besant, Dr. Sarojini Naidu, Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, Mrs. Nellie Sengupta, Durgabai Deshmukh and many others gave a change and betterment. Indian women actively participated in the freedom movement to highlight the importance of the elevation of the status of the Indian women which also had different thrusts. The founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent movement not only led to the political emancipation but also was a step in the direction for social reconstruction. Women took equal initiative and participated in all types of struggle for national freedom, i.e., non-violent movement advocated by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, as well. Women's enthusiasm in participating in the armed revolution helped Netaji Subash Chandra Bose to set up the Rani of Jhansi Regiment of the Indian National Army. Women's participation in the freedom movement was very extensive. Smt. Kasturba Gandhi, Madam Bhikaji Cama, Sarla Devi, Muthu Lakshmi Reddy, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani, Durga Bai Deshmukh, Priti Lata Waddedar, Captain Lakshmi and Janaki Davar of INA, Jahanara Shahnawaz, Randhabai Subbarayan, etc., are only a few to have out of the many.

Post-Independence Period :

In 1947, India won freedom from foreign rule. In 1949 a Constitution was drafted which gave equal rights and status to all Indian citizens. Independent India has seen various programmes for the uplift of women of all communities. Indian women have played an important role from the very beginning of Independence in different walks of life. Women have taken bold steps in all nation building activities, which started with education and have now blossomed into women's involvement in every activity of India. They have participated in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, services sector, and technology.

Conclusion

Through this research we have found that as the time changes women's rights also have undergone a wide change. Indian women have mastered anything and everything which a woman can dream of. But she still has to go a long way to achieve equal status in the minds of Indian men. With the changes in policies, women have become more powerful in various fields, but crimes against women have grown much with the increase in various rights of women. Women are still treated, in some respects, in the same old way, yet the perception that women are second to men has not been erased. Mushroom growth of crimes against women has been seen, and also women's own perception is responsible for changing but not respectful status of women in India. Still, lots of new policies, and awareness is needed. Many new tribunals and public institutions are to be established to guarantee women effective protection against discrimination.

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