
The Analytical Study of the Social Status of Indian Women in Post Colonial India

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Abstract

Women are the backbone of society, the reason behind successful families; they need to be treated with respect and equality with men. The society as a whole has to understand women's capabilities and their contribution to the developmental process. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millenniums. In early Vedic period women enjoyed equal status with men. However later on the status of women began to deteriorate, the situation worsened with invasions of Mughals and later on European invaders. Some reform movements led by reformers such as Guru Nanak, Jainism, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandar Vidyasagar, Pandit Rama Bai etc did give some relief. Britishers also worked for improving condition of women by passing the laws, such as abolition of sati, passing widow remarriage act etc. The real change came after independence as Constitution of India granted equality to women (article 14). This paper will present a historiographical overview of the literature dealing with the much discussed issue of women of India in post-colonial period. The objective of this paper is mainly to investigate the main scholarly trends and patterns which have characterized the study of this extremely significant issue.

Keywords- 1. Women 2. Social Status 3. Social Reformers 4. Women education

Introduction

Throughout the ages women have been the centre point for development of civilizations. They have always been significant contributions in all the aspects of society and economy.¹ Still the status of women in most of the aspects has always been in critical stages. She is dominated by male society, but her vast condition was not a result of few months or years. It was going to change day by day. So historiography of women's conditions was also changing gradually. Before Independence many social reformers such as Guru Nanak, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandar Vidya Sagar, Pandit Rama Bai etc gave some relief to women. Britishers also worked for improving condition of women by passing various laws, such as abolition of Sati, passing widow remarriage act etc.

Social Status of Indian Women in Post Colonial Period

The next major development in Post-Independence period which reopened women's issues and laid out the concerns of the resurgent women's movement of the 70s was the publication of the report of a committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) in 1974.² The investigations of the committee collated a large body of data on different aspects of women's

lives and identified demographic indicators like the accelerated decline in sex ratio and increasing gender gaps in life expectancy, child mortality, literacy and Economic

participation. The doubts over the CSWI expressed serious doubts over the 'development, and 'modernisation' models ushered in after independence and confirmed their failure to arrest the process of economic marginalisation of women.³

In the mid 1970 gender violence exposed but escalated the end of the decade. So the women issues such as sexual harassment or the adjustment expected of a new bride, 'Violence against Women, in the home and as a weapon of political and social control; history and literature on, about, and women. In this decade these issues were highlighted by news, magazines, and media. In 1979 a small group of women in New Delhi began to publish *Manushi*, a Journal about women and society in Hindi and English.⁴ In 1980 the Mathura case was the example of a rape case. On that time women's organizations demanded the case to be reopened. When the Supreme Court dismissed these petitions on technical grounds, women in New Delhi, and Bombay demonstrated in the streets shouting; "Supreme court Supreme court. Against you, where can we report?"⁵

Rape was only one issue that galvanized the contemporary women's movement. "Dowry murders" the term used to refer to the deaths by burning of young married women by their in laws, emerged as a new phenomenon in the last 1940s.⁶ To saw the situation, Pramila Dandavate introduced a private member's bill in 1980 to amend the laws against dowry. The government also responded to the urban campaigns about rape, dowry death and sati murders with legislations. Flavia Agnes discussed on the startling number and extent of the enactment (enforcement):- If oppression could be tackled by passing laws, then this decade would be adjudged a golden period for Indian women..... Almost every single campaign against violence on women resulted in legislation.⁸

The government appointed a law commission to study the problem and suggest amendment to the existing law and in 1980 a criminal law amendment bill was introduced.⁹ So this decade is known as the period of acts. By August of 1982 the joint committee of the houses (chaired by Shrimati Krishna Sahi), appointed to examine the question of the working of the dowry prohibition Act, presented their report to the Lok Sabha.¹⁰ Even as the question of violence against women brought a new and magnificent focus to the women's movements even at the question of violence against women, other issues have fragmented this new solidarity. The greatest challenges have come from a revitalized and gendered communalism as illustrated by the Shah Bano case and the dispute over the mosque at Ayodyha.

So in the decade 1980-90 women became more aware about their rights. Shah bano case is the example of this time. They were award about the law, acts which was granted by the Supreme Court. In April of 1985, divorced Muslim women Shah Bano demanded the financial

support from her former husband although the Muslim community protested. Conservative Muslims argued that this action was attack on their identity. The issue was not so much being complexes by the overall communal in which issues of Muslim identity got twisted

with the simpler issue of women's rights and the Hindu communalists' enthusiasm for Muslim women's rights often left women's rights activities unbalanced and helpless.

Among the 'autonomous' women's groups by the eighties there was a clear less dramatic work like as setting up of women's centres for legal aid, counselling, documentation, research, publication and the like, at the minimum (Partly) because it was felt that the mass legal reform had not really succeeded in solving the problems they had set out to address. So on that time many women's groups such as Saheli in Delhi focused not only women's problems but also their joys and encouraged them to express themselves through music, dance and art. Others brought out magazines, acted as watch dogs on the media for searching advertisements and films derogatory to women, raised issues related to women's health or fought against foeticide, for the rights of the girl child. So in this era media played a significant role for women's.

In 1986 Rajiv Gandhi's congress government introduced the Muslim women's protection of rights in divorce bill denying Muslim women redress under section 125 and naming the natal family responsible for support in cases of desititution.¹¹ A Muslim women named Begum Abida Ahmed, in the congress party, expressed her shock that a self respecting women would want to beg maintenance from a husband who had divorced her.

In 1992-93 the agenda of Ajodhya Mosque was expanded. So the women's wing of hindu right and the members of the forefront of attacks on Muslims. Another issue has been also given a communal twist as Muslim men are accused of raping Hindu women. Tanika Sarkar warns observers of the Indian scene about the 'dazzling "visibility" of Sadvi Ritambara, Uma Bharti, and Vijayraje Scindia. There women, she observes, came out into the streets and engage in violence only when men determine their presence useful.¹² With these type of circumstances, In Hyderabad Anveshi was set up a platform for theoretical studies of women' issues. In spite of this in Delhi the centre for women's development studies promoted research and documentation. Including in later years a journal for Gender studies also launched. Many more university based centres also came up in the nineties, and enough research and writing was available for courses on women's studies to begin to appear in university curricula.¹³ The Government of India passed the dowry prohibition act in 1961, making dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal domestic violence, suicides and murders have been reported. In the 1980s, these types of cases were reported. A report of 1997 claimed that **each** year at least 5000 women in India died with dowry death and in 2011; the National crime records Bureau reported 8618 dowry details. So from the 1900 to 2000 dowry cases were on its peak. "It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." Swami Vivekananda.

So, putting a glance over this saying of Swami Vivekananda. We can peek through the times of 1990 to 21st century and ahead of it to measure the rise and fall of women status in India. We can feel that a lot has been changed since those dark ages of 1950 for the women. Though at some aspects like dowry, rapes, sexual harassment, eve-teasing and discriminations at some social levels are still proving hurdles for them. Yet we cannot deny that situations have improved. Women are representing 48% of the total population of the

country in getting access to education and employment. So, we can say that female- force is contributing in national income with eldest 50% of its pouring in money with its high or low level work-outputs or interiprenaurship. Today names like Arundati Roy (Booker prize Winner) Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shobha de, Jhumpa Lahiri can put any other writer to show. In the field of cinema, women like Rekha, Samita Patil, Shabana Azami and Vidya Balin as such names who not only play feminised roles but have asserted themselves over this male dominated realm. In the field of politics, Indira Gandhi, Shiela Dixit, Uma Bharti, Jayalalita, Mamta Banerjee are the names who prove that women are not weaker in any field, today. But on the other hand some negative aspects can also be seen on the other side of the coin. There is still a large section of women who are uneducated and married off before the age of 18 only 14 % of women are employed on urban sector and 29% in the domestic and agriculture sector. Thus if on one side women are climbing the ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering from the violence afflicted by her own family members. So women still have to travel a long way to get their appropriate place in the society.

For gathering courage, to fly high, females should seek positivity in the adverse situation. For this we can choose to talk about the incident of 23 Sep, 2011, when UN women executive Director Michalle Bachelet declared in his speech in 39th annual commencement 2011 of LaGuardia community, college, that " The 21st century will be the century of girls and women.

And for government, we cannot deny the efforts being taken to secure the women status like in August 2017 the Supreme Court of India has passed a landmark judgement calling instant "triple talaq" illegal and unconstitutional. And with the statement of Simone De Beauvoir, - women are not born but made because with the breath taking efforts of the women from all over the world, there would be only apt to analyse the position and space Indian women occupy today that we celebrate the international women's day with great pomp and show.

In the 21st century women do not need to look at the historical injustice done to her. It's time to put all that behind her and look forward to empower her role in this Aquarian age. Even there must be the names we might never heard but whose hard work and generosity have touched the lives of others. They are the everyday heroes, who cook meal for a neighbour who is sick, who help their children with their homework that assist their parents and grandparents and in doing so give back to their community and country. And in one line, fixing the past with present and future, so on, the women of modern era, reminds of 'The many handed Chandi' of the old mythology, who plays the different role at the same time. Hence, woman-figure is significant for its multiple-qualities and this image will remain more polishing and refining with the passage of the time.¹⁴

The movement suffered from a lack of unity about goals, strategies and methods, from classism which was necessarily the contribution of the left, and a tendency for reacting to immediate crises rather than building a harmony on goals for action. It has also been affected by the economical help received from foreign organisations into taking up the issues concerned to them not to the Indian movements. But some difficult debate on theoretical issues that took the most of the energy of some feminists, suggests that the charge is not without any solid fact. The gap between urban educated and employed. Women and

rural uneducated and poor women remained, thought it narrowed in some instance. The feel of reform in women condition and achievements that was visible in the 30s and 40s was missing in 70s.

Conclusion

From above us cannot say that endeavours were gone in vain. The Government policies were affected and it came up with a national perspective plan for women 1988. This was a detailed plan for women's health, education and political participation. In 1989 Panchayati Raj bill took one third of seats in Panchayats to be reserved for women. For poor rural women the scheme for development of women and children in rural areas was introduced, which enabled them to express themselves because it sponsored Mahila Mandals and Sanghams. With concern to Mahila Mandals, Mahila -Kosh scheme was introduced to enable the Mahila Mandal members to improve their skills and standards of living. But the affectivity of all these programmes depended upon the awareness about the women issues. These government schemes prove to be a protective cover for those who find it difficult to reach the rural women. The attempts to increase and ensure women's role in lower and higher level politics are on its way. Since women got one-third of the seats in village Panchayat but they are in dilemma of performing their role better, because they and their Panchayat members have not given proper training for performing their new role. On this footmark the issue of one- third of seats for women in parliament has been debated and it got a positive support from women groups, political parties, and the goal is not so far. So in examining the images of women, the efforts have been to study the actual position or status of women as reflected by contemporary writings. In doing so, it can be say that there was a lot of variations in the status of women, diverging in accordance with caste, class, family structure and morals.

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