

Society and Status of Women: Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Despite all the tumults the women have not only survived but also flourished through the ages. They have seen all kinds of handling and mishandling with different fervor and intensity with the changing times. Derided, demured and denigrated in one age, and cajoled, cuddled and cared for in the other while sometimes they were treated with stark indifference; yet they thrived through the times heads down, slogging all the way and even demanding very little. Even in the present times they have remained enigmatic despite all the simplicity largely because of the gross mismatch between the expectations and commitment from them.

KEYWORDS: women, changing times, enigmatic, slogging.

INTRODUCTION

GODDESS KALI... GODDESS DURGA... GODDESS LAKSHMI. MOTHER MARY AND MORE ADOLATIONS ACROSS CIVILISATIONS, TIMES AND WHERE NOT., AND YET, 57% WOMEN FROM A US SURVEY 10 YEARS AGO BELIEVED THEIR BEING BEATEN BY MEN WAS JUSTIFIED.

The agenda of today is a mixed bag of a journey on a path punctuated by sticky and slippery patches.

OUR GUT FEELING - MEN AND WOMEN ARE UNCONDITIONALLY EQUAL. IF ONE SUBSERVES for the sake of the family. , THE OTHER MUST TREAT THE FAMILY AS NOT A PART OF LIFE BUT THE LIFE ITSELF.

So my observation is based on the historical facts as they confer to my ideology or differ from that.

In the previous times, the status of women in India was stated to be inferior than men in the practical life. However, they had a higher status in scriptures. They are considered as the perfect home maker in the world. With their incomparable quality of calmness of their mind, they can easily handle even the toughest situation. Indian women are completely devoted to their families. They're preached in the names of Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Durga, Parvati & Goddess Kali.

Their condition remains unchanged even during the modern times with only little changes. In India, women were never given any right of liberty & equality. Their condition becomes even worse when they gave birth to girls. Men treated them in a humiliated manner. They were not only permitted not to step outside their house but also abstained from being educated.

They were also supposed to eat after their husbands or even sometimes to eat their husband's leftovers. Women were prohibited from taking external matters as well as domestic matters. They were under the influence of their parents before marriage & their husband after marriage. However, their status varied a lot depending on the period which they were living is illustrated below:

WOMEN STATUS IN THE ANCIENT INDIA

It's said during the ancient India, women enjoyed equivalent status & rights like their males counterparts. In addition they were properly educated in the early Vedic period. These references are available from the works of Grammarians such as Katyayana and Patanjali.ⁱ Women also had the freedom to select their husbands. This system was known as 'Swayamvar.' In fact during this time, women had superior position than the males.

WOMEN STATUS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

The status of women in India deteriorated during the medieval period with the entrance of the Muslims. Several evil practices such as female infanticide, sati and child marriage were practiced during this periodⁱⁱ. 'Purdah' was introduced to the societyⁱⁱⁱ. Women were also forced to practice 'zenana.' Polygamy was also common during this period. Women also excelled in literature, music and arts. They were also rulers during this period.

(Polygamy of then can be understood as acceptable because of the unfavourable sex ratio as the population of men in the villages was always less because of wars, business and other outward journeys.)

Some great-women rulers were Razia Sultana who was the only women-monarch to rule the throne of Delhi, NurJahan, Gond queen Durgavati who ruled for fifteen years before she was defeated in a battle by Ali emperor Akbar's. NurJahan is still considered as the most effective ruler by the society. In spite of these powerful women, the condition of poor women remained the same. At this time girls were forced to get married at a very tender age. The society also practiced Sati where women were forced to jump over the burning bodies of their husbands during funerals. The southern India also practiced Devdasi tradition where girls were forced get married to trees or deity.

WOMEN STATUS IN MODERN INDIA

During this time there was a little development in the women status. There were many women reformers in India who worked for the uplift & betterment of their female counterparts. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's effort led to the abolition of Sati practice in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar's Crusade for the improvement in conditions of widow's led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856.^{iv} The begun of Bhopal discarded the 'purdah' & fought in the revolt of 1857. Their education was elevated and English was introduced during this period. Various female writers emerged in the society.

In the relatively modern times, women in India were given freedom & right such as freedom of expression & equality as well as the right to be educated. Various prestigious positions at this period were held by women. They're enjoying the 'ladies first' facility in different fields. However, some problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide are still prevalent. Preventive measures needs to be taken to ensure that women are empowered in India.^v

DOWRY: A DISTORTED FORM OF A SYSTEM OF PROPERTY DIVISION: BOYS KEEP IMMOVABLES, AND GIRLS MOVABLES FOR SMOOTH RUNNING OF THE FAMILIES SYSTEM.

HOW CAN WOMEN BE EMPOWERED?

An empowered woman knows who she is. Many women today feel as though they have lost themselves. Maybe they gave too much in a relationship that didn't work out. Maybe they put too much time into work and not enough time into themselves. Maybe they feel lost in the challenges of motherhood. Regardless, many women need to spend some time getting to know themselves. Knowing oneself goes way beyond what they do or who they are. Knowing oneself means understanding her own strengths and weaknesses.

Freeing and expanding mind is one of the most imperative step toward empowering women.

An empowered woman knows what she wants. This means that she has goals and dreams for her life. They may or may not include marriage, a family, or rising up the career ladder. Regardless of what the goals are, the empowered woman knows what she wants out of life. This enables her to act in ways that will move her closer to these goals. If she has a goal of getting married, then she will date with that goal in mind. If she has a goal of advancing in her career, then she will work with the idea of earning an eventual promotion. No matter what the goals are, having them clearly mentally defined enables the empowered woman to go after what she wants.

An empowered woman makes deep connections, both personal and professional. This means that she knows people, but it goes deeper than that. The empowered woman has a network of people that she has relationships with and can count on. They may be business relationships or personal ones, but she knows that she can count on these people. The business relationships may be people she can count on to help with a project or give honest feedback. The personal relationships may be friends that she can rely on when she needs them. The connections that an empowered woman makes are with people whom she can help and who can in turn help her to become a better person.

An empowered woman empowers others. This is maybe the most difficult but most rewarding of all. An empowered woman can encourage other women to strive for what they want. She doesn't pull people down but instead helps them to discover their full potential. This enables her to contribute positively to the lives of other women that she knows.^{vi}

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Women are educated about the social benefits including awareness about the existing social problems in the society, good recognition & image in the family & community, role in making important decision in their family, plan & promote better education for their children, taking care of health of the aged and the children just to mention a few.

Women are also allowed to participate in political and public life. Therefore, they are given a chance to serve the community including fighting for the basics amenities & welfare needs of the village community such as:

- Safe drinking water
- Public sanitation
- Street light
- Chance to help the weaker people like disable and the aged

EMPOWERING INDIAN WOMEN BY EDUCATION

Most women are given a chance of finishing their education to the degree level. They are discouraged from getting married and raising a family when they are young. There are number of women education grants that offer help to women from poor background in order to give them a chance to be educated.

The concept of boys only and only women's schools and colleges have not helped as boys emerge as bulls and brutal consumers and girls as palpable commodities, preconditioned to hate men at all times, no matter what.

There're various scholarships that benefits women in India to achieve their career by going back to school or various training institutions where they can further their education. Also, many NGO's in India offer support to women in order to benefit them in education. The government of India is also setting aside funds that are used to empower women & other initiatives that will empower them.

Women who have the desire to improve their lives are allowed to take these grants from the government and NGO's to empower themselves with the help of their spouses or without for single mothers to get education to the degree level, post graduates, Ph.D just to mention a few. These grants for women get most supports from different companies after realizing that women can perform better than men if they are well educated and equipped.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN BUSINESS

The government of India set aside some reasonable amount of money which women who have business ideas can borrow in order to start businesses. Women are encouraged to start small business in order to have their own source of income thus they become independent. Various non-governmental organizations also offer financial support to women in India and encourage and teach them how they can be making their own money by starting various business activities.

The status of the women in India has greatly improved and there are many women who are holding high position in the government offices. This has proved that women can be even better than men if they are given an opportunity. Women are given equal opportunity like their male counterparts by the government.^{vii}

It is the responsibility of us to help government and government also needs lot more things to do for women.....and I would like to request our society please understand the power of women don't underestimate it....

Empowerment of women should start by banning gold jewelry being worn on the wedding day. Dowry is usually given in the form of gold jewelry to show off a woman's family's status and wealth, which is again followed by not-so wealthy families too. Men and women should undergo premarital counseling to learn about each other's rights and laws regarding the marriage. They should be properly educated about the ownership of the gifts received for the wedding. All property acquired after marriage should be considered marital assets and should be kept in both wives and husband's name. Single ownership of any property should be discouraged and joint ownership should be encouraged, so that women feel more respected and

valued by marriage and the society. If single ownership of a property is desired by the husband or wife it should be approved by the other party. This should greatly diminish the burden on legal system with ongoing property division wars during divorce. At present, a woman's right on property acquired during the marriage, starts only when the divorce procedure is initiated. Till then, it is the husband who owns everything. Indian culture enforces that wife relocates to husband's family after marriage. If the wife resides in husband's ancestral family owned by his father or grandfather and contributes to the household in any way she should be given right to inherit his family's ancestral property separately from the husband. The property rights of women should start at the time of marriage, not at the time of divorce. The irony is that Indian laws are more geared towards the welfare of women after a divorce but not during the marriage. Women seek divorce because their emotional or financial welfare is not taken care during the existence of marriage. Having more personal and financial freedom during the existence marriage should ensure a stronger bond between the married couple and reduce the incidents of divorce.

Women themselves need to encourage one another to go out and explore their desire, destiny and to let them be independent. And this is not possible without the support from their male counterparts.

CONCLUSION:

Women are contributing a lot to the society as is visualized in the picture but there is only a need to give them recognition and the men of male dominating society should contemplate about their self. In Ancient India the status of women was equal to that of men and they were educated and had more freedom. The name of Brahmavadini Gargi, who was a Vedic scholar and her arguments were respected by all the other scholars during that time. No one should say that 'someone since times immemorial' has decreed that women are not equal to men. People should follow the ancient Indian thought process of treating women as equals and humans rather than subscribing to the medieval thinking. Women empowerment does not necessarily mean educating women, giving them jobs and helping them get equal rights as men. Somehow, in a country like India that is not possible...where women are objectified, looked upon as sex toys and raped only so that a few men can satisfy their carnal desires. Women empowerment is something else.

Here's another example of how women empowerment (as we think) is gonna change India. The gang rape incident in UP, where 2 minors were brutally gang raped and then hanged had somewhere nothing to do with women empowerment per say. They were raped and killed when they went out to defecate in the fields for they had not no toilets at home.

With every war and any other social change women are thrown more vulnerable than anybody else. Religious places, parks and places of entertainment are coming up faster than toilets.

Ridiculous?

So, we help people crowd fund to provide basic human needs like toilets and clean drinking water to people in rural India. It may not empower women as the term goes, but yes they are provided a sense of relief, a sense of dignity and a sense of freedom. This is women empowerment for us. From time immemorial women were dominated by their male counterparts not only because they are physically weaker than men but

also because the women's lot don't possess the much required unity and courage to give a strong opposition to male dominance. Modern times grant women more freedom than the 20th century but still women are subjected to discriminations, violence, inequalities and oppressions. Its hard time women put up a brave fight against these atrocities and built up a more respectable and equal position in our society.

In a nutshell the tumultuous past of the women has cast an indelible mark on the present status of women but women themselves to blame. In pursuit of a monarchy in the household in her hands, she has long forgotten the art of teamwork with other women, thus making her even more vulnerable than before, aloof and sulking.

They have to SHOUT in order to be heard.

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