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Editorial Message

Greetings to all,

I have a great pleasure in releasing this issue. I congratulate all the scholars and colleagues for their active intellectual pursuits and sending research papers for publication. I am very happy to say that issue carries good research papers for review and publication. This book is of immense use for teachers and researchers in Commerce and Management faculty.

Our editorial team will work for quality in promoting this book. We request all the readers to contribute their original research papers in Commerce and Management for favor of publication in our book.

EDITORS

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The Socio-Economic Status of Women in India - Ancient to Modern Era

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Abstract

There are two main pillars of human life-man and woman. Both share equal responsibility in the making of society and hence both are supplement to each other. From the very beginning, the women in various societies of the world are exploited in many ways except ancient Indian societies. The status of women improved a little bit during the Buddhist period. During the post-vedic period, women started losing the status in society. The Medieval period also proved to same way that Indian women are highly disappointed. After the fall of Mugal empire, the quality of life of women more or less the same, some substantial progress was achieved in eliminating inequalities between men and women. After attaining independence, the Government of India planned to provide women equal status as men by means of developmental programmes. But, despite much efforts Indian women are still ill treated and occupy a low status as compared to males. However, author attempts to analyze the changing socio-economic status of women in India and is based on purely secondary data. The analysis shows that although women in India have made a considerable progress in every sphere of life, they still have to struggle against deep-rooted patriarchal mentality of society. The Indian constitution grants women equal rights as that of men but they were never been effective to bring a remarkable change in the status of modern women.

Introduction

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a great revolution in the history of women. The evidence is everywhere; the voice of women is increasingly heard in Parliament, courts and in the streets. While women in the West had to fight for over a century to get some of their basic rights, like the right to vote, the Constitution of India gave women equal rights

with men from the beginning[1]. Unfortunately, women in this country are mostly unaware of their rights because of illiteracy and the oppressive tradition. Names like Kalpana Chawla: The Indian born, who fought her way up into NASA and was the first women in space, and Indira Gandhi: The Iron Woman of India was the Prime Minister of the Nation. Beauty Queens like Aishwarya Rai and Susmita Sen, and Mother Teresa are not representative of the condition of Indian women.

Methodology

I. Ancient Indian Women

Scholars believe that in ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life. However, some others hold contrasting views. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rigvedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their husband. Scriptures such as Rig Veda and Upanishads mention several women sages and seers, notably Gargi and Maitreyi.

Some kingdoms in the ancient India had traditions such as nagarvadhu ("bride of the city"). Women competed to win the coveted title of the nagarvadhu. Amrapali is the most famous example of a nagarvadhu[2]. According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However, later, approximately 500 B.C., the status of women began to decline with the Smritis (esp. Manusmriti) and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later Christianity curtailing women's freedom and rights.

Although reformatory movements such as Jainism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order, by and large, the women in India faced confinement and restrictions. The practice of child marriages is believed to have



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started from around sixth century.

2. Medieval Indian Women

Medieval India was not women's age it is supposed to be the 'dark age' for them. Medieval India saw many foreign conquests, which resulted in the decline in women's status. When foreign conquerors like Muslims invaded India they brought with them their own culture. For them women was the sole property of her father, brother or husband and she does not have any will of her own. This type of thinking also crept into the minds of Indian people and they also began to treat their own women like this. One more reason for the decline in women's status and freedom was that original Indians wanted to shield their women folk from the barbarous Muslim invaders. As polygamy was a norm for these invaders they picked up any women they wanted and kept her in their "harems". In order to protect them Indian women started using 'Purdah', (a veil), which covers body. Due to this reason their freedom also became affected. They were not allowed to move freely and this led to the further deterioration of their status[3]. These problems related with women resulted in changed mindset of people. Now they began to consider a girl as misery and a burden, which has to be shielded from the eyes of intruders and needs extra care. Whereas a boy child will not need such extra care and instead will be helpful as an earning hand. Thus a vicious circle started in which women was at the receiving end. All this gave rise to some new evils such as Child Marriage, Sati, Jauhar and restriction on girl education.

Initially sati was not obligatory for the women but if she practiced such a custom she was highly respected by the society. Sati was considered to be the better option than living as a widow as the plight of widows in Hindu society was even worse[4].

The condition of widows in medieval India was very bad. They were not treated as human beings and were subjected to a lot of restrictions. They were supposed to live pic-

life after their husband died and were not allowed entry in any celebration. Their presence in any good work was considered to be a bad omen. Sometimes heads of widows were also shaved down. They were not allowed to remarry. Any woman remarrying was looked down by the society. This cruelty on widows was one of the main reasons for the large number of women committing Sati. In medieval India living as a Hindu widow was a sort of a curse.

The veil or the 'Purdah' system was widely prevalent in medieval Indian society. It was used to protect the women folk from the eyes of foreign rulers who invaded India in medieval period. But this system curtailed the freedom of women.

The girls of medieval India and especially Hindu society were not given formal education. They were given education related to household chores. But a famous Indian philosopher 'Vatsyayana' wrote that women were supposed to be perfect in sixty four arts which included cooking, spinning, grinding, knowledge of medicine, recitation and many more.

Though these evils were present in medieval Indian society but they were mainly confined to Hindu society. As compared to Hindu society other societies such as Buddhism, Jainism and Christians were a bit lenient. Women in those societies enjoyed far more freedom. They had easy access to education and were more liberal in their approach. According to these religions gender was not the issue in attaining salvation.

The status of women in Southern India was better than the North India. While in Northern India there were not many women administrators, in Southern India we can find some names that made women of that time proud. There was one major evil present in South India of medieval time. It was the custom Devadasis.



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3. Women's Struggle and Reforms

Though women of India are not at par with her counterpart in Western world but she is struggling hard to make her mark in men's world. We can count on certain names from the British India where women put the example of extraordinary bravery which even men might not be able to show. Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi was the one such woman[5]. There are certain men who took the cause of women in India. There have been social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekanand, Swami Dayananda Saraswati who have helped women gain their previous status in society.

4. Independent India

Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

The Constitution of India guarantees equality of sexes and in fact grants special favours to women. These can be found in three articles of the Constitution. Article 14 says that the government shall not deny to any person equality before law or the equal protection of the laws. Article 15 declares that government shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of sex. Article 15 (3) makes a special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favour of women. Moreover, the government can pass

special laws in favour of women. Article 16 guarantees that no citizen shall be discriminated against in matters of public employment on the grounds of sex[6]. Article 42 directs the State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Above all, the Constitution imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen through Articles 15 (A) (e) to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

All these are fundamental rights. Therefore, a woman can go to the court if one is subjected to any discrimination. When we talk about constitutional rights of women in India, we mainly pertain to those areas where discrimination is done against women and special laws formulated to fight those bigotries. In 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs. Self-help groups and NGOs such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in women's rights in India. Many women have emerged as leaders of local movements. For example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy for the empowerment of women came was passed in 2001.

Conclusion

Thus, a number of efforts have been made for women's social, economic and political benefits, yet they were never been effective, to bring a remarkable change in the situation. Yet one can't deny that the situation has improved since the earlier times. As compared with past, women in modern times have become powerful in various fields and have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way.

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