
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND RELIGION CONCERN FOR INDIAN WOMEN - A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ASPECT

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ABSTRACT

This article clarifies the concept of women empowerment and religion related to women in India. The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality or equal status with men. Evaluation of awareness among women is one of the most prominent feature. Empowering women aims to inspire them and persuade them to come out from different adverse conditions, be it societal and religious that have traditionally kept them suppressed and unable to see their power, strength and beauty. If religion could be defined by gender, they would definitely be female. Inequalities between men and women have also been age-old issues all over the world. Thus women quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. Women have demanded equality with men in matters of education, employment, politics, field of religion (in Hinduism and Islam). In India there is paradoxical situation has such that women have been worshiped as goddess and at other times merely as “sati” and “slave” too. The Vedas suggest that a women’s primary duty is to help her husband in performing obligatory duties and enable him to continue his family traditions. Her primary duty is to give birth to his children and take care of them. From early twenty century movement their status have been changed slowly and gradually. The money in the hands of mother (as opposed to their husbands) benefits children. Indian women of today are not afraid of voicing their opinions or joining forces with other women in the local community to fight against social maladies and injustice. They have opportunities to take bold decisions or lead unorthodox lives, which might have made them vulnerable to social ridicule and family pressures few decades ago. Undoubtedly, women of today in India enjoy better status and freedom than women in the past. This paper will specially highlight the present and past perception regarding the women in Indian society.

Keywords:- women empowerment, religion.

Women in India

The value of a civilization can be understood by the place provided to women in the society. True Indian women face many problems and are subject to the same social pressure which women experience in other parts of the world. The Ancient Indian Patanjali and Kalyayana point out that women were educated in the early vedic period. The Rigvedic verses tell that the women married at mature age and were free to select their life Partner. During the early vedic period women enjoyed equal position and rights, but later around 500 BC position of women started to decline with Manu's

and with the Mughal invasion of Babar and later Christianity cut the freedom and rights of women. Even though penitentiary movements like Jainism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order and faced captivity and restrictions around sixth century, the Practice of child marriages started.

The position of Indian women in society further deteriorated during the medieval period. because practices like sati, child marriage and ban on remarriages of widows became part of social life. The Muslims conquest brought Purdha practice in the Indian society. The practice of devadasi was started to sexually exploit women in some parts of India. Among Hindu rulers polygamy was widely expand. Women were restricted to Zanana area in many Muslim families. The situation is gradually changing. It is difficult to draw generalization about the status of present day women because the society becomes complex. In general presently the life of women in rural areas different from urban area. We have much studies which shows status of women in present scenario. They face restrictions in rural areas, like love marriages outside caste or community are spurn and sometimes the couples are killed by the community of that village. On the other hand in urban areas these kinds of problems are less but they face numerous challenges in their professions and personal lives too. But overall at present life is better than the past. The marriage customs and security of women have also undergone change. There are now age restrictions on marriage. The law gives them clear affirmation as to their rights and their independence in the society.

Two Acts have been acted to emancipate women in India. These are: Protection of women for Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and the Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, 2006.

Women Empowerment

The subject of empowerment of women has becoming a burning issues all over the world including India since last decades. Empowerment is defined as the improvement of talent and capabilities of an individual or group. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. A better educated women, better informed and who can take rational decisions could only contribute to the empowerment to be more relevant. Many agencies of United Nations emphasized on gender issues. It is held that women in present can not be wait for any equality in the society. Empowerment of every country depends on its optimal usage of efficient and healthy human resources. Empowerment is a process by which persons lacking access and social resources gain greater access and control over those resources and improve their life circumstances (WHO,2010). Rural women with disabilities are probably the most dis-empowered of all rural women because they face discrimination , poverty and related societal risks and are often ignored in policy planning. Women are still observed as burden, some kind of property and responsibility. These kind of thoughts contribute in the evil of violence against women. So enhancement of women empowerment should only be possible if violence against women is stopped in the society. Psychological empowerment occurs when a person is enabled to participate in decisions affecting him or her and to exercise some even limited -control over life choices.

Women Empowerment has Five Components

1. Women's sense of self worth.
2. Their right to have and determine choices.
3. Their right to have access to opportunities and resources.
4. Their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home.
5. Their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic orders, nationally, internationally and universally.

Religion in Context of Women

According to hindu religion, the women is created by brahmans as part of the dualism in creation, to provide the company to male and give birth to their children and continuation of their family. Some kingdoms in ancient India had traditions such as nagarvadhu ("bride of the city"). Women competed to win the coveted title of nagarvadhu. Amrapali is the most famous example of a nagarvadhu. If religions could be defined by a gender, they would definitely be female.

Hinduism

- Hindu society is divided into castes.
- Manusmiritiis text describing hindu law. Women were prohibited to listen holy scripture.
- Women were considered bad due to thinking that they cause bad thought in men.
- A menstruating women considered bad.
- Even a good wife is expected to serve a bad husband like God.
- Today in India Women are still victims of rape and violence. They are also banned from taking highest spiritual positions.
- A Hindu widow is doomed with mishap and is neglected in many activities. She is exclude from participating in socio - religious functions like marriages, pujas, birthday celebration etc. which may bring problem to them as well as to others.

Buddhism

- This is very popular way of life.
- There are many different types of Buddhism such as zen, Mahayana, Theravada etc.
- 2500 years ago equality was not a very big issue.

However tantric buddhism provided opportunity for women to function more equally.

Christianity

- The position of the church influenced by mosaic law.
- In the past church has been responsible for: Affirming the inferior status of women and deprive their legal rights.

- Recently church has been dealing with the controversial issues of women priest.

Islam

- Initially this religion provided many benefits to women including her right to own Property.
- Woman cannot be a priest nor can she do the prayers. She has no place in the formal religious institutions and legal affairs of the community.
- She cannot be a kazi .Women is also deprived of participating in community prayers.
- However in Islam women cannot lead the congregation into prayer:
- Testimony of 2 women= testimony of 1 man
- A man is allowed to have 4 wives but not vice versa.
- A menstruating women is considered impure. It places specific restriction on women clothes.
- Muslims men have sexual rights over women and any slave girls.

Working Women

Jessie Bernard (1981) argued that we should not be compared the status of women with that of men. It is generally said that men have better educated so they have higher status and have more organizational and working skills and experience than women. According to the international labor organization, (ILO), India ranks among the bottom 20 countries in a list of 131 in female labor force participation (FLFP). The proportion of women in private sector companies is 24.5% of the total workforce compared to just 17.9% of the public sector. In central government jobs, women accounted for 7.6% in 1991.

Women have been provided their services praise-worthily as doctors and nurses in India. Lady doctors have been perform effective surgery by morality of their soft heart and accurate fingers. They have worked in the hospitals and in nursing homes. Men have not been compete with women in this area because they have natural tendency to serve others and clean their environment. It is the tendency of women which influence Florence Nightingale to make nursing popular among the women of the upper classes in England and in Europe. She showed the world how nobly they can clean and change the world by their services.

It is an open truth that working women have to face problems just by virtue of their being women. Working women here are referred to those who are in paid employment. Social attitude to the role of women lags much behind the law. This attitude which considers women fit for certain jobs and not others colors those who recruit employees. Thus women find employment easily as nurses, doctors, teachers, the caring and nurturing sectors. But even if well qualified women engineers or managers or geologists are available, preference will be given to male of equal qualification.

Need for Women Empowerment

The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or at least to reduce gender gap considerably. Without empowerment certain social roles cannot be performed. Today we have noticed different acts and schemes of central government as well as state government to empower the women in India. but in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of society whether it is social participation, political participation, access to education and also reproductive health-care. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Indian women are slowly getting empowerment in the sectors like education, politics the work force and even more power within their own households. Women play a distinct role in the economic development .

Constitution for Empowering Women

Dr. Ambedkar was the determined fighter and a deep scholar. He made selfless efforts to lead the society onto the path of liberty, equality and fraternity. Dr. Ambedkar was of belief that movements are always led by women. He insisted that every activity of person should be accompanied by their counterparts as friend.. But she has to show the courage to deny the life of slaves. He believed that if all women follow it they will get the real respect and their own identity. In 1920 he started his movement. he stated “we shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with education.” He strongly advocates for family planing measure for women in Bombay legislative assembly. In 1942 , being a labor Minister of Executive council of governor general, he produced a maternity benefit bill. Dr. Ambedkar tried an adequate inclusion of women right in the political vocabulary and constitution of India. i.e.

Article 14- Equal rights and opportunities in Political, economic and social sphere.

Articles 15- Prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex.

Article 15(3) enables affirmative discrimination in favor of women.

Article 39- equal means of livelihood and equal for equal work.

Article 42- Human conditions of work and maternity relief.

Article 51 (A)(c)- fundamental duties to renounce practice, derogatory to the dignity of women.

Article 46- the states to promote with special care, the educational and economic interest of weaker section of People and to Protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Conclusion

The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality or equal status with men. Women have demanded equality with men in matters of education , employment politics, field of religion (in Hinduism and Islam). Educated women now feel that there

is more to life than marriage. They can get most of the things they want (Income, status, identity) without marriage, while they find it harder to find a suitable accomplished male.

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