

The Role and Analysis of Women from Ancient to Modern Times in India

Preeti^{1*}, Kavita Dua² and Poonam Yadav³

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Family Resource Management,

I.C. College of Home Science, CCSHAU Hisar (Haryana), India.

²Associate Professor, Family Resource Management,

I.C. College of Home Science, CCSHAU Hisar (Haryana), India.

³DES Home Science, KVK Mahendergarh (Haryana), India.

(Corresponding author: Preeti*)

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ABSTRACT: The world history has been bestowed upon the historical evidence and scripts. In the world of different cultures, India has a special place which has a rich and famous history of cultural glory and heritage. Although, our country carries rich cultural diversity on its shoulders, the roles and positions of women has been a roller –coaster for India. The Indian society has always been a patriarchal one which is why women participation and roles in the human civilization has always been a matter of social evil. The power of women has always been regarded as menace by the male dominant society. The journey of Indian women from ancient to modern times has been shifted steadily. From The sacred position granted to women to found themselves in shattered position to the steady decay with the time has led women towards disrespect and injustice. The Early Vedic Period was the finest hour of women empowerment. Women were dignified with a respectable status in Early Rig Vedic civilization. Women were provided the opportunity to attend higher education, to take part in high intellectual and spiritual conferences, also, Women's freedom to participate in political activities, self-defense exercises, educational activities, decision-making has portrayed the nature of women's status in the social canvas during the early Vedic period. In later Vedic Periods, they were given unconditional economic freedom and enjoyed higher roles and responsibility in wars and were given respectable positions, the freedom of political decisions and education were taken away from them. The dark era of women started in medieval times when the basic human rights and fundamental freedom started dented along with; which took together the restrictions from attending spiritual and political affairs and were fenced behind the bars of the house. Introduction of sati and purdah partha, polygamy and child marriage further deteriorated the position of the women in the society. Although, in modern times, Indian women enjoys a much higher respect and status than medieval times with the introduction of modernization, globalization and liberalization, the understanding of civilization and behavior and nature for the women is still obsessed with menace mentality. The sex ratio, women empowerment and equality with men is still an illusion of reality. Women are potentially victimized of various social evils and social dilemma which needs to get notified and society has to be civilized to give women a respectable position which can be commended with the inclusive growth and better social prospectus. The paper highlights the roles and responsibility connected to them. The position, freedom and respect are still a long way apart. This research paper is based on the ancient documents of Indian history which includes Vedas, Upanishads, historical evidence of Mughal era and the inclusiveness of women after independence.

Keywords: Women Participation; Vedic Periods; Historical evidence; Fundamental Freedom; Human Rights; Empowerment; Equality; Inclusiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Women are the backbone for any progressing nation. Ancient literature like Vedas, Brahmana, Upanishad, Grihya Sutra, Dharma sastra and Epics, Smritis and

Puranas have placed women with utmost respect and integrity. Earlier civilization evidence emphasized the status of women were at par with the men. Women

were educated, participated in war, learned various activities like dancing, fencing, painting and were actively involved in intellectual debates and were socially active and were respected. With the passage of time, the position of women started getting deteriorated. From enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period indication and other rights and facilities (Nandal and Rajnish 2014).

The Indian males always find their rights to dominate the social, political and economic life of people in the country. Women were and are never encouraged in any field since the mindset indulged in society after the medieval period. In modern times also, Indian women are not empowered to explore the opportunities in different sectors and socially differentiated. One of the main types of evidence of this metamorphose is Gender based differentiation (Shettar and Rajeswari 2015). Demographically also, women constitute similar population as men and they also seek equal importance and rights with their male counterparts. Most males are not ready to accept that women also play an important identity and they should not seek approval of men. The roles and responsibilities of women in the society is as vital as men. 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 Mishra (2006). Women have proved themselves in every aspect of the society in earlier as well as in the modern times as they are politically active, economically productive and independent. This economical and fundamental freedom not only give women the equal opportunities but also provide them self-respect, esteem and integrity to be a pillar of the society with inclusive growth (Chattopadhyay, 1983).

Ancient times:

In its long-standing history of India, women always catered key roles in the history of mankind. The ancient era when Women were dignified with a respectable status in early Vedic civilization. They were also honored by their participation in all the socio-cultural activities of early Indian civilization (Bader, 2013). Women's freedom to participate in war, gymnastics, archery, horse riding, public activities like religious ceremonies, educational activities, decision making, and debate participation has portrayed the nature of women's status in the social canvas during ancient times (Altekar, 1938). Women were highly skilled in their fields, were having economic freedom and social life. Later Vedic Period depicted women as the root of dharma, pleasure and prosperity. Traditionally, the life and characters of Savitri, Sita, Anusuya, Damayanti, and Arundhati have been widely celebrated as pativratas in the Ramayana and Mahabharata (Kang, 2015). However, in the Later-Vedic period there were outrage in education and other rights and facilities

investigated by (Nandal and Rajnish 2014). After the Vedic Period, the era of Jainism and Buddhism introduced the emphasis of education. Panini mentioned of female students' studying Vedas. Katyana called female teachers Upadhyaya or Upadhyayi. Ashoka got his daughter Sangha Mitra, inducted into preaching Buddhism are some examples of great women scholars. Women did write Sanskrit plays and verses, excelled in music, painting and other fine arts. However, during the Buddhism, there were low economic and political status were given to nuns compared to monks (Pikachu, 2015). However the gender equity and focus on education were the key aspects. Moreover, the age of Dharma shastra and Manusmirti were the initialization of the women status with the education prohibition, child marriage and polygamy resulted in low profile of women In Vedic society, women enjoyed marriage as well as social and domestic life except the later ancient times (Manusmriti, 2009).

The medieval period begin with the entry of Muslim invaders in India and the span was around 500 years from the era of Delhi sultanate to Mughal era. During the medieval period, the position of women faced its worst phases. Women were considered a burden in the families; the Mughal left no stone unturned of barring women from all social representations and pushed them in the mud of pity fall where they were forced of child marriage and widow re-marriage was not allowed. Education was a daydream for women. They were excluded from public gathering or any intellectual deliberation. Sati paratha, polygamy and Parda(veil) became part and parcel of social life in India (Status of Women in Medieval India 2022).

Restrictions on rights and privileges of women were imposed. The major problems faced by the women were discriminatory treatment (Nitisha, n.d.). Male members were believed to be the assets of the family. Birth of female child was not appreciated. The girls were considered as liabilities. Women were not meant to take any decisions as all decisions will be taken by the male members of the family. Women were compelled to stay inside the house and were deprived of their rights to equity with men. The other social issues rose that time were child marriage, deprivation from education, Jauhar paratha in which Rajput women immolated themselves by mass suicide where their sainik husband is sure of going to die in the hands of the enemy and restriction on widow remarriage. However, it has been speculated that though there were lots of social barriers for the women which made women conditions to them most worsen positions, the restrictions were subjected to the Hindus only, the Buddhists, Jains and Christians women enjoyed far more freedom (Kaur, 1968). There society was more liberal and they promoted the culture of education and self-confidence. These religions emphasized equality for all and there should be no discrimination against

any gender. These religions were also focused on the approach of determination of achieving success with the God's faith and that the savior of all is God. In Buddhists theories, during the rule of Samrat Ashoka, women constantly took parts in the religious preaching. According to Hien Tsang, the famous traveler of that time, Rajyashri, the sister of Harshvardhan was a distinguished scholar of her time, but the irony is that it affected the Hindu culture in the worst manner and it can be said that Medieval period as the darkest era of the women civilization. Throughout the medieval times, the women had no identities and they were miserly behaved and were not tolerated to break any rules of the Mughal people, they were treated as things which is to be used. They were either held to be completely untruthful, sexual, innocent, or incompetent, but they can never be a human.

Later Medieval and Colonial Times: With the passage of times the position of women becomes more and more miserable and by the eighteenth century, they were behaved badly and men were considered superior to women. Women of all societies and religions were forced to locked inside the four walls of their homes. Their duties and rights were interpreted and women were considered only house servant whose only identity was to do household chores and to do upbringing and caring of child. However, despite these deadly conditions where women were exempted of even basic living rules, there were some exceptional women also who became prominent in the field of politics, literature, education, administration and religion. Some famous personalities of this period were Rani Durgawati, Rani Karunawati, Kurma Devi, Rani Laxmi Bai, Jijabai, Razia Sultana, Nur Jahan, Jahanara and Zebunnisa (Altekar, 1962). In colonial India anti-imperialist women's movement. Women of India played a significant role in Indian freedom struggle. Gandhi led "Civil Disobedience Movement" of the 1930s, and "Quit India Movement" was highly remarkable which resulted in equal and active participation of women (Jaiswal, 2019). Some of the greatest female freedom fighters like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Kamala Nehru, Sucheta Kriplani, Bhikaji Cama, Amrita Kaur, Nel Sengupta, Captain Laxmi Saigal, Aruna Asaf Ali to name a few changed the conception about women and were given equal emphasis with men. During the 19th and 20th centuries, efforts were made by some famous philanthropists, social reformers, humanists, and some British administrators to eradicate the social evils merged into the mind set of Indians and to improve the condition of the women. The "Sati pratha" and child marriage was abolished, the widow remarriage act was passed and the right to education were given to women with the active participations of Savitribai Phule, Tarabai Shinde & Ramabai Ranade. 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 Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda Sarasvati who helped the women to gain their old charisma in the society by removing various restrictions to have their own identity. However, in all; the status of women, at the dawn of the British rule in India, reached the lowest level in the society. Women in the households were extremely in pity positions and were lived on the mercifulness of the male members of the house. The literacy among women was almost negligible and only a handful out of millions of women were educated. There were no roles positions or responsibilities were given to women except raising the kids and doing household chores.

Modern times: In the era of globalization when civilization has reached into the 21st century and the status of the women is still been defined by patriarchy society of India (Status of Women in India 1974). The women are still finding to have a place in the society. There are various roadblocks that women still in modern India do face on daily basis these includes Malnutrition, Poor Health, Maternal Mortality, Lack of Education, Mistreatment, Child Marriage etc. Women in India are still fighting for their rights. The obvious biological difference does not shortfall them of being not be equal contributor for self and for the country, The responsibility of raising child and doing household duties is still lying on the shoulders of the women. The patriarchal society represents the hollow and innocent face of the women in the system who is miserable and dependent. The literacy level in most parts of the country is still very low. The literacy statistics does not even match the fundamental educational level. There are around 48.04 percent or 665 million females are residing in the country and share of female in higher education is less than 23 percent. The modern women have to fight for their rights in befitting manner. Shamefully, the maternal mortality rank is 103, every third child bride is an Indian, families associate social evils like dowry with women, ranked at 4th of female infanticide. Women working in the offices also have to take care of kids and to do household work which increase stress and workload, lack of power and poor health. Mostly rural women do eat whatever is left after the family has eaten, thus did not take proper nutrition and results into malnutrition. The basic rights and amenities are reach out of the hands of the women of India and this is the harsh reality.

There are various rights that has been given for women empowerment and equity but these constitutional fundamental rights do not imply in the mindset of Indian society. Some of these rights are:

- (Article 14), no discrimination by the State
- (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity
- (Article 16), equal pay for equal work
- (Article 39(d)), it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favor 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), All these are fundamental rights. Therefore, a woman can go to the court if one is subjected to any discrimination.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education-inIndia>

CONCLUSION

Women liberation has crossed many milestones and society has certainly sailed long from the past. Although women have faced multi-difficulties in the last few centuries, but they have been able to successfully establish their own identities. Today's women are adorned with patience, helping them reach the heights of success. Despite the old times when women were only seen as housewives who cooked, cleaned and cared for their families but in today's world women are not only involved in household chores, but are also involved in service industries such as banks, hospitals, airlines, schools, and are beginning to show an interest in entrepreneurship. Women are more focused, having the potential to uphold their own identity in decision-making power in the most focused approach, even at the highest levels, and may be in a better position than men. Needless to say, women have achieved excellent results in each field. Personalities such as PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal, Nirmala Sitharaman, Falguni Nayyar, Kiran Majumdar Shaw, Indira Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj and Lata Mangeshkar are idols. Women should not be limited into the roles of housewives or mothers but they should be encouraged to explore different fields of the modern world that could change the social evils which are sublimed in the patriarchy mindsets. The other side is also a harsh reality that their efforts are overlooked and are never praised for what they are doing. People accept household chores as only women's duty and consider them free servants. This view needs to be changed, people need to understand that she may need work help, what she does is only of their caring nature.

Finally, women should be encouraged to do social experiments in terms of good deed which in turn will help them to a dignified identity and if women want to work in the office to earn their income, no one should stop them. One should always have his own individual identity and must have complete freedom to do whatever they want to pursue in life as their glorified

roles have always been underneath of male dominant society which should be hanged out and women must enjoy their status and move out from the social stigma.

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