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## A Historical Analysis of Women Development in India

**Dr. Anand B.**

Assistant Professor

Department of History,

Government First Grade College, Sunkalbidari,

Tq. Ranebennur, Dist. Haveri (Karnataka)

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper deals with a historical analysis of women development in India. The women movement in India has been one of those never ending discourses that has been taken not so seriously but still has a social, economic and political significance. In Indian context women had always been in a disadvantageous position in our social and political system due to deeply entrenched patriarchy. But despite of all odds women power had been a very potent force of social movements in India. Indian experience of women movement proves that patriarchal hierarchy could not become an impediment to women leadership. There is a long history of women movement in India.*

**Keywords:** women development, Women movement, women leadership,

### **Introduction:**

Our Indian culture attaches much importance to women as she is symbolized as 'MOTHER INDIA' keeping in view the endurance and power which the women keep intact within them. India is a place where goddesses like Kali and Durga are worshiped, which represents 'NARI-SHAKTI' (The power of the women). Despite of the fact that India celebrates womanhood in the form of goddesses, since time immemorial the Indian women are being oppressed and dominated by the same male sex who worship these deities. Though present women are better positioned than her ancestors but women development has to go a long way so as to free women from the shackles of male sex/patriarchy and social constraints.

### **WOMEN IN ANCIENT PERIOD:**

Manu, the great law-giver, said long ago, 'where women are honoured there reside the gods' Women in the ancient age were free to choose their husband and used to marry at mature age, as says the Rig Veda. The incidence of free choice can be seen in epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana,

where the respective maharani's Draupadi and Sita choose their husband through 'Swayamvara' ceremony. In this, the well-to-do grooms assemble at the bride's house and the bride selects her spouse. But we can still not claim that women were empowered in that society. It was the same society where on one hand freedom of choice was given but on the other hand, Draupadi who is 'de-robed' in the meeting of counsellors and Sita went through the 'Agni -Pareeksha'

### **Women Development and Buddhism:**

There was this special quest in the Buddhist society to generate egalitarianism. There was this emphasis as to how women could come as equal in the society. Given the Buddhist perspective there was always a space for women in moral, social, spiritual and leadership aspects. Buddha taught about the law of karma, according to which One is responsible for one's own actions and consequences. This generated a belief that it's not the fate but karma. Therefore It somewhere helped to ease the situation of the women and afterwards it also helped the women to stand and support the birth of a girl child. Buddhism helped to enhance the property rights of the women and they held possessions. The Buddhist teaching helped in a lot of way to emancipate the women in the society.

### **WOMEN DURING THE BRITISH RULE:**

During the British rule, people were indifferent to women as they were again confined to the four walls of patriarchy which depresses them within. Continuing the old age tradition of suppression and ignorance, women were not given their basic right to education, civil rights and political rights until the Christian missionaries took desired steps for the female education in India. Along with women empowerment through education, they also brought forward the social evils existed in Indian society. The long suffered and marginalized section of society was now given voice, not by her own people but missionaries.

### **WOMEN: DURING THE STRUGGLE:**

Any freedom struggle cannot be a successful outcome without involving women in it. Either it was Trojan War or India's independence. Women have been the guiding spirits, sometimes in person and sometimes a shadow. During the freedom struggle, lower caste women were illiterate and superstitious. It was Mahatma Gandhi who stood up for women upliftment. He realized that to meet the economic crisis, women must be involved in freedom struggle so as to gain economic development. So he brought women out of four walls of their houses and explained them the importance of 'Khaadi' and 'Charkha'. He motivated them to come out and take spinning in their hands, which can free the country from the web of Britishers and also we as well as women as an individual can gain self-independence. Gandhi on the other hand had firm faith in their abilities and worked for their emancipation. Indian social system in Pre Independence era had a very little scope for Women activism. Most of the time the life of a women was restricted within the four walls of Family House. Women have little or no contact with the public sphere. Moreover Lack of Education

and Rigid social customs strengthening Patriarchy made their life difficult. However, some 'exceptional' women have left profound imprint on the pages of recorded History. These women challenged the norm of that time to display the potency of their extraordinary leadership and scholastic capability. The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one. Rani Lakshmibai was one of the leading warriors of India First war of freedom who laid an outstanding impact on the succeeding women freedom fighters. Her remarkable courage imbued many men and women in India to rise against the colonial power. Begum Hazrat Mahal was a great Indian freedom-fighter who played a major role during India's First War of independence (1857-58). Begum was a symbol of bravery, patriotism, perseverance, and resistance to British rule. She led a band of her supporters against the British, and was even able to seize the control of Lucknow. Rassundari Devi was also one of these exceptional women who recorded name in history. In 1876 Rassundari's autobiography Amar Jiban was published.

#### **Women in India's National Movement:**

The History of Indian National Movement would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of these women. The sacrifice made by these women of India will occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and steadfast courage and faced various torment, exploitation and encrustations to earn us freedom. Women actively participated in the Swadeshi Movement in the early 1900s and continued to play a crucial role in the struggle for independence from British colonial power. During the years of Mahatma Gandhi's leadership in particular, women's participation in the political struggle multiplied. Mahatma Gandhi was very much successful in encouraging women to step out of four walls of home to contribute in India's struggle for Independence. When most of the men nationalist were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The following quote from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's Discovery of India best illustrates the role of women in the struggle for Independence: "Most of us menfolk were in prison. And then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there, of course, but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British government but their own menfolk by surprise."

#### **WOMEN: SINCE INDEPENDENCE:**

Modern India refers to period after independence where education plays an important role in every sphere of life; women were educated but with modernity came more violence. To her utter shock, she was not free from the shackles of patriarchy and society. Modern India though modern in action was not at all modern in mind. But with women education also came their 'voice'. Education played an important role in shaping their lives and they started raising their voice so as to free her from the years of patriarchal torture. Since time immemorial women have been singing the songs of



their pain and agonies but no one paid heed. They now decided not to starve in silence and break these years of oppression. They started making groups so as to fight against males and this is where 'Feminism' stems in. With education women started questioning their basic rights; they ultimately raised voice and spoke when pushed to ultimate margin. Women during the early 19th century, suffered under the patriarchal system and those who tried to break this patriarchal cover with the hope and dream of free new world, face uncertainty and are crushed by their heads. It was during the late 19th century that the umbrella term 'FEMINISM' came as a movement of revolution and as a savior in lives of women.

### **Objective of the Study:**

- ❖ To identify the historical development of women in India.
- ❖ To analysis the government efforts for improving the women status at present time.
- ❖ To identify the changing role of women from ancient society to modern society.

### **Methodology of the study:**

This study is based on secondary sources of data provided by government reports, internet sources, review of some selected articles, periodicals etc.

### **Historical Women Development:**

Traditionally India had seen a woman as a member of the family or a group and not as an individual with an identity or right of her own. The Mahabharata further says that there is no guru like themother. In earlier Vedic, age a woman held higher and honored situation in gender relationship. Manu in his Manusmruthi, who was the first to codify the laws in India, also write about this, "Where women are verily honored, there the gods rejoice, where, however, they arenot honored, there all sacred rites prove useless".The most important issues that formed the base of social reforms during the freedom struggle were the abolition ofsati, widow remarriages, and restraint on child marriages and women's education. Thus, history tells us that the freedom struggle that interwoven around the question of gender equality, free India incorporated this principle inthe constitution in 1950.The term 'development' assumes a greater significance inthe specific context of woman with the secondary positionat all levels, in spite of her inherent strengths and capabilities.

### **Modified Global-Indian Women:**

Modified Global-Indian Woman is displaying the 'shift' in the stereo typing of the image of the Indian woman. The'shift' in the image of the Indian woman is a result of the socio- economic transition- a period of liberalization of the economy and apparent encouragement of private investment in industry and infrastructure, inducing sustained high growth in the service sector. Thus, therewas growing the emergence of a 'new' middle class, whichwas essentially urban, with unlimited consumer is aspirations, desires and dreams- a class, which was soon toculminate in the present-day 'dot.com generation'belonging to a global community. Thus, over the last thirty years or

so, some percentages of women have asserted their development. According to the estimate of employment in organized public and private sectors', published by the national human development report 2001, (planning commission, government of India), the number of women employed in the public sector in 1990 was 22.50 lakhs in 1990 to 1999. Due to equity and equality enshrined in the constitution, women have found place in the opportunities given citizens in educational and economic fields. With more and more women going in for 'paid work' outside of the 'private space' of the family, a new image of the middle class woman started dominating the cultural milieu of emerging consumer capitalism. This image is that of an independent citizen of India-intelligent, decisive and an active agent in the micro narrative of the consumer capitalist economy that is in constant transition under the project of globalization. Therefore, the represented image of the Indian woman no longer remains that of an overtly traditional Hindu (Hindi) housewife relegated to the private spheres of the feudal family, and existing as the living embodiment of codes and notions of 'prakriti', 'pativarta' and 'sati'. But the gender politics behind these advertisements demands that the woman of the household be kept in good health so that she might smoothly perform her duties and ensure that there is no disorder in the comfortable lifestyle of the other members of the family who are 'destined' to enjoy the fruits of her labor. This is notoriously encapsulated in the micro narrative of the advertisement for 'Moov' pain relief ointment-with the copy line 'kamar fit to parivar fit' (riddance of backache for the house wife makes a happy family). At last there is recognition to her gender role. However, globalization and modernization reconstructs the image of the woman exactly to that extent of which she is required certain socio-economic roles necessary for their structuring of the national economy, without any violation to the existing gender ideology.

### **Conclusion:**

Even though women have got so many policies, provisions towards development of women, but the beautiful long haired look of the 'true' Indian woman remains un-changed. Yet, all these factors do not enable the 'Modified Global-Indian Woman' to question the system of values that still designates gender-specific qualities, although these have been redefined and regenerated, with the good old hierarchical implications embedded in them. This is due to the changing structure of society, with the increasing number of women earning members in the family, with the enhancement of the purchasing power of women. Modified image of the homebound wife, mother has undergone some very important changes- a process that had already begun, although at an incipient stage in the 1970s. To sum up, Development is a process that all members of a society to the same extent, according to their individual needs. Since women are generally excluded disadvantaged in relation to social and economic resources and decision making. The nations and states therefore try to achieve this through constitutional, legal, political and development frame works. These policies are designed in such a way that they help to channelize the resources to ensure development of both women and

men. In spite of these policies women are not able to respond to the development process due to their Disadvantaged position that is evident from the statistical data of the country.

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