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Status of Women in India: A study of ancient to modern History

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Abstract:

The present study is said to status of girls in Indian society from ancient days till today. It gives importance on the position of girls in various fields like family life, social life and work situation. It highlights on female feticide, low literacy level of girls, women's low nutritional status, women's role in deciding, their position as per Indian tradition etc. The status of girls in complex society like India isn't uniform. As of late, the traditional roles of girls have experienced a couple of changes due to financial needs and a couple of endeavours were made to convey perceivability and standard women's commitment to the general development and improvement of society. This paper research whether the Women's in India are having same status and rights as we are asserting in regards to Equality, Education Health, Labour, Employment, Marriage and Family life, Race and Gender related, Religion and Culture then on. This paper also gives emphasis on number of women in total workforce, torture of them by men in family life, social life and in other fields where they are participants. Lastly it concludes on importance of girls and role of society for the emancipation of girls from male dominated society and their oppression and suppression.

Keywords: Status, Women, Society, Ancient, Post-independent, Empowerment,

Introduction:

Any study of society is incomplete without study the status, role and even position of girls in it. Women constituted the keystone within the arch of Indian society. No doubt the Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society and their condition was good. Even the ladies were provided opportunity to achieve high intellectual and spiritual standard. There was no sati system or early marriage. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig- Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities (Nandal and Rajnish, 2014). Indian society based on the spirit that

women's cause is men; they rise or sink together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free. There is little question that we are within the midst of an excellent revolution within the history of girls. The evidence is everywhere; the voice of women is increasingly heard in Parliament, courts and within the streets (Sreenivasa, 2006). 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. Women are the gift to the society. During ancient period of India, women played a big role. The Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed status in society. Their condition was good. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were many girls Rishis during this era. Though monogamy was mostly common, the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy. There was no sati system or early marriage. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions within the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women's position. The epics and Puranas equated women with property. Even Buddhism did little for women. Though the Maurya king often employed female bodyguards, spies and 'Stri-adhyakshamahamatras', their status was still quite bad. Upper caste ladies had to accept the purdah. During this era men were polygamous and widow burning was an accepted norm. Arthashastra imposed more stigmas on women as Kautilya dismissed women's liberation which they weren't free even to travel elsewhere without husband's permission.

Objective of the Study:

The present manuscript is aimed to (a) To study the role and status of women from ancient time. (b) To investigate whether the status of girls in modern Indian society regarding Equality, Education, Marriage and Family life, Race and Gender, Religion and Culture is maintained or deteriorated. This paper also intends to give an awareness and insight into the problems faced by women over the years and their role. The study will help us to imagine the participation of girls in social, religious, economic and household matters within the past.

Methodology:

The methodology of this paper is purely descriptive and required information are collected from different secondary sources like Epics, Vedas, Smritis and Puranas and other publications relating to women in the ancient age. Hindu religious books like Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata depict true picture of ancient Indian society. Manuscript, Rigveda Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Smritis and Puranas have also been the sources of information to examine the social, domestic, economic, educational, religious and political status of women in ancient Indian history. Vedas, the most adored Hindu scripture highlighted the respectable position of women in the ancient society and provided valuable. Position of Women In Ancient Period: Every human

society is invariably characterised by social differentiations. Gender based differentiation is one. Men had the role of earning and ladies had the role of reproduction of heirs and residential making. A historical understanding of status of girls in early Indian society shows a declining trend within the position of women. The historical analysis of the position of women in ancient India shows that women did not share an equal position with men. Women were recognised only as wives and mothers. Their position was as subordinate to men. The Indian patriarchal society that dominates the social, political and economic lifetime of people within the country has never encouraged its women in any field, except kitchen! Indian women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy inferiority than that of men from times immemorial.

A) Women in Pre-Vedic Period:

Historical studies and therefore the scriptures indicate that Indian woman enjoyed a relatively status during the first Vedic period (2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.), surpassing contemporary civilizations in ancient Greece and Rome. The Aryans, who were mostly busy fighting wars, regarded woman as useful and productive members of society. The condition of Vedic Woman was good. Woman also enjoyed religious status like that of men, especially in Vedic initiation and studies. The Rig Veda provides ample evidence to prove the concept of equality of woman with men as regards access and capacity to accumulate the very best knowledge, even absolutely the knowledge.

The Rig Veda had rendered the very best social station to qualified woman of these days. But status of woman fell within the later Vedic and Epic period. They weren't in the least treated equally with men or we will say that they weren't enjoying equal rights and privileges as compared to men.

B) Position of woman in Vedic Age:

As we've studied position of woman in Pre-Rig Vedic period was very high. In later Vedic period, the position enjoyed by woman within the early Vedic society, wasn't retained. In Vedic society participation of wives was required in many rituals. Woman

C) Position of woman in Hindu Dharma:

The roots of Hindu religion are in Aryan society of patriarchal system. The relatives were large one, generally extending over three generations and with the male off springs cohabitation. The birth of a son was especially welcomed within the Aryan family for the son's presence was essential and one among the important ceremonies. At an equivalent time the position of woman was on the entire free. Hindus considered that the person and woman represent the 2 aspects of 1 person. Scriptures says that Lord Shiva consists of a body of a two halves – one is of male and other is of female and he is called 'अर्धनारेश्वर'. Woman was considered more powerful than man and treated as Goddess of 'शक्ति'. The society was

governed by certain established norms approved by यशस्त्र .The highest social ends in ancient Indian society were four, Arth, Kaam and Moksha. Woman along with man participates in all activities equally and hence she was considered as 'सहर्मचयारणी'.

D) Woman's Education in ancient India:

In the golden age of Aryans wherein the men were free, brave, vigorous, fearless themselves civilized and civilizing others, noble and deeply spiritual: and thus the lady were learned, free and highly cultured; conjointly they offer sacrifices to the gods, listening sweetly to discourses, and preferring spiritual uplift to the pursuit of mere riches. Additionally, woman represented the simplest example of conjugal love, offering the supreme sacrifice of their lives as an indication of their feeling for his or her partners within the brief journey of life. This was to be an everlasting legacy of Vedic woman who performed sacrifices to the gods by the side of her husband as an equal partner in offering oblations. There were two types of scholarly women firstly the Brahmavadinis, or the woman who never married and cultured the Vedas throughout their lives; and secondly the Sadyodvas who studied the Vedas till they married. Panini mentioned of female students studying Vedas. Ashoka got his daughter, Sanghamitra, inducted into preaching Buddhism. From the Jain texts, we study the Kousambi princess, Jayanti, who remained a spinster to review religion and philosophy. Women did write Sanskrit plays and verses, excelled in music, painting and other fine arts. It clearly shows that our kings were conscious of woman education and even they were also interested to teach their children without the discrimination of male or female.

E) Concept of Abortion and birth control in ancient time:

Abortion was also there in ancient time. Families also aborted the fetus in different ways. It was mostly found in tribal people. The woman who performed an abortion against the desire of her husband was subjected to severe punishment and therefore the higher caste woman, who performed abortion with the assistance of slave, that slave was also punished with hard punishment. At that point religion and community always criticized the abortion and preferred preparation or self-punishment for abortion and infrequently enforced other punishment. In ancient time, pregnancy can be terminated by way of consuming some herb by using injurious weapon, by creating abdominal pressure and many other ways.

Status of Women in Modern India:

According to India's constitution, women are legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men (Indian Parliament). Because of lack of acceptance from the male dominant society, Indian women suffer immensely. Women are liable for bearing children, yet they're malnourished and in poor health. Women are also overworked in the field and complete all of the domestic work. Most Indian women are uneducated. Although the

country's constitution says women have equal status to men, women are powerless and are mistreated inside and outside the home. India is a society where the male is greatly revered. Therefore, women, especially the young girls, get very little respect and standing during this country. The women of the household are required to prepare the meal for the men, who eat most of the food. Only after the males are finished eating, can the females eat. Typically, the leftover food is meagre, considering the families are poor and have little to start with. This creates a major problem with malnutrition, especially for pregnant or nursing women. Very few women seek medical care while pregnant because it is thought of as a temporary condition. This is one main reason why India's maternal and infant death rate rates are so high. Starting from birth, girls do not receive as much care and commitment from their parents and society as a boy would. For example, a new baby girl would only be breast fed for a short period of time, barely supplying her with the nutrients she needs. This is so that the mother can get pregnant as soon as possible in hopes of a son the next time.

A. Empowerment of Woman:

Woman Empowerment not only point towards their material development, but is oriented towards mere economic growth which generally plays an important role in the overall developmental strategy as has been conceived of in the case of other underprivileged classes. Woman Empowerment should be construed as the overall development of their faculty of self-realization, self-image and identity and the economic development which holds the keys to their real development.

B. Maternity Benefit:

Maternity is a natural thing for woman. Maternity coverage is more extensive than sickness coverage as maternity is entirely different from sickness. Maternity benefit is required only to the lady workers. The Indian Government has also passed the maternity benefit act 1961. This maternity benefit is also giving all the woman under the employees of state insurance to protect the health of mother and her children and to all eviate part of the financial hardship caused by the birth of the child. In this way the Government also protected not only the rights of the woman after giving birth to a child but also empower every working woman to protect herself and her child.

C. National Commission for Woman Act, 1990

Beside all these enactments made by the Government the position of woman in India is as it is and to improve the position of woman in every walks of life Government decided to enact separate commission for Empowerment of woman. Because as history shows that many reformist and social workers fought for there dressal and improvement of condition of woman in India still everything was going on vague. Therefore, several commissions have been set up by the

Government to look into the matter of status of woman in the Indian society. All the commissions reported about unequal status of woman in every sphere of life. Hence the Government has decided to set up a Commission for woman and enacted the National Commission for Woman Act, 1990 with goal to achieve full Empowerment of woman in India.

D. Educational Opportunities:

In the present existence, individuals belonging to all communities and backgrounds have recognized the significance of education. Education not only enables girls and women to hone their academic skills, but they are able to generate awareness in terms of other aspects as well. Girls too are getting enrolled in schools and higher educational institutions to pursue education. The acquisition of education has enabled women to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate. An educated woman or a girl will be able to work towards encouraging education and development of literacy skills among women and children, who are experiencing setbacks, due to lack of education. There are establishment of government and non-government organizations, who are working for promoting education among the marginalized, deprived and socioeconomically backward sections of the society. Improvements in educational opportunities are considered one of the indispensable aspects that have contributed towards promoting well-being of girls. Education enables women to acquire independence and not entirely be dependent upon others. Household management is regarded as the first task that ladies are engaged in. Education enables them to implement all house hold responsibilities in a well-organized manner. These include, household chores, maintenance of the house, child development, health care, taking care of the requirements and requirements of the elderly relations then forth.

E. Population:

- * As per Census 2011, India's population was 121.06 Cr and the females constituted 48.5% of it.
- * The gap in sex ratio in rural and concrete India is decreasing over the decades.
- * The States like Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu have better sex ratio while the Daman & Diu has sex ratio less than 700.
- * There are 918 females to 1000 males in the age-group 0-6 years, the disparity is high in sex ratio of rural & urban area existing in Daman & Diu and Gujarat, these state/UT are having less females as compared to males in urban Area.
- * In the last decade, state/UTs of Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Mizoram and Delhi have improved the sex ratio substantially, but sex ratio has worsened in major states/UTs like Dadar Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu.
- * The Sex Ratio is least for the Girl Child (0-19 Years) but 1033 females over 1000 males in the age group of 60+ indicating athreat of less economic activity by a sizable population. The economically active age bracket (15-59) has 944 females to 1000 males.

* As per 2016, Civil Registration System, the sex ratio at birth is highest in Sikkim followed by Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The lowest sex ratio at birth is observed in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan.

* Women's mean age at marriage at all India level in 2016 is at 22.2 years and the same in rural and urban areas are 21.7 years and 23.1 years respectively. The women's mean age at marriage has shown an increasing trend altogether the major States and in the least India level it's increased from 21.1 to 22.2 years during 2012 to 2016. The same is highest in Jammu & Kashmir (24.8 years) and lowest in West Bengal (21 years).

F. Health:

* anticipation for female increased from 69.3 in 2009-13 to 69.6 in 2010-14.

* By and enormous no matter when anticipation is measured, at birth or later ages, women outlive men. Age Specific Mortality Rate for females is a smaller amount than that of males for all age bracket apart from 0-4 years.

* The Crude Birth Rate (CBR) is showing a declining trend as in 2014, 2015 and 2016, these rates were 21.0, 20.8 and 20.4 respectively.

* The total fertility rate is observed at 1.8 in 2016 as compared to 2.3 in 2015.

* In 2016, highest age fertility rate is recorded for the females belonging to the age group 25-29 years at 166, while the age specific fertility rate stands at 135.4 for the age group of 20-24 years. As per SRS 2016, the infant death rate rate has decreased from 37 in 2015 to 34 in 2016. IMR has been lower for males compared to female births. The difference in IMR for female and male has been narrowing down.

* As per SRS 2016, the maternal mortality rate has declined significantly from 301 in 2001-2003 to 130 in 2014-16. In 2016, among the major states, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) has been highest for Assam at 237 per lakh live births and lowest for Maharashtra at 61.

* In 2015-16, for maternity care, the highest percentage of mothers who had full antenatal care is in Lakshadweep with 66.4% followed by Goa (63.4%) and Puducherry (55.6%). The highest percentage of mothers who received post-natal care from doctors/ nurses etc. was in Lakshadweep (92.6%) followed by Goa (92.1) and Chandigarh (89%).

* In 2015-16, the percentage of home delivery conducted by skilled health personnel is highest for Nagaland (8.9%)

while, rock bottom percentage is noticed for Kerala, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

* In 2015-16, the share of Non pregnant women within the age bracket of 15-49 years, who were anaemic is 53.1%. The pregnant women with the age group 15-49 years who were anaemic was 50.3%

* As per NSS 71st Round, the highest average total expenditure for non-hospitalized treatment per

person has been for the urban male at Rs 741 as compared to Rs 629 for urban females

* As per NSS, 71st Round, the highest percentage distribution of spell of ailment treated on medical advice over level of care in India has been for private hospitalized in male and female are 51.3% and 49.7 % respectively.

G. Literacy and Education:

* As per Census 2011, the literacy rate in the least India level was 72.98% and therefore the literacy rate for females and males are 64.63% and 80.9% respectively. During the last decade, the very best improvement in literacy rate was observed for rural females (24%).

* As per 2011 census, the highest female literacy rate is in Kerala (92.1%) followed by Mizoram (89.3%) and Lakshadweep (87.9%)

* At all India level, the adult (15 + years) literacy rate was 76% and that among males was 78.8% and females was 59.3%. Rural – Urban gap existed in Adult literacy rate for both females and males. The adult literacy rate for females in rural areas was 56.8% vis-a- vis 74.8% in urban areas whereas for males the same in rural areas was 72.3% vis-a-vis 83.7% in urban areas.

* Gender Gap in literacy rate has declined from 21.6 in 2001 to 16.3 in 2011. The gender gap in literacy rate has declined by 24.7% in 2011 in respect of 2001.

* During 2014-15, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at Primary level for females and males are 101.4 and 98.9 respectively; at middle class level the corresponding figures are 95.3 and 87.7; at higher secondary level, the status was at 65.8 and 63.8 respectively.

* In 2014 - 15, there are 93 girls per 100 boys in primary class, 95 in middle class, 91 in secondary class and 90 in senior secondary class.

* In the year 2016-17, the average annual dropout rate was highest for male and female in secondary level at 19.8 and 20.0. As per HRD data, the no. of female teachers to 100 male teachers was 105 for primary level, which is the highest as compared to other educational levels.

* In 2015-16, the highest number of female teachers to 100 male teachers in university education is at 157.1 for medical sciences

* Enrolment of females in Higher Education through regular and distance learning mode has marginally increased from 45.96% in 2014-15 to 46.23% in 2015-16.

* The percentage of foreign female students enrolled in India has decreased from 34.06% in 2014-15 to 33.62% in 2015-16

* The median number of years of schooling completed for female stands at 4.4 years as compared to 6.9% for males in 2015-16 (NFHS)

* The number of females per 100 males in University education in major disciplines was highest in Medicine (90.9), followed by Arts (86), science (72.7), commerce (67.3) and Engineering & technical (40.3).

Usage of Technology:

Technology is regarded to have rendered a significant contribution in reforming the lives of the individuals. Women, who have not been enrolled in educational institutions, or possess less education or no education at all, are generating information in terms of usage of technology. With the use of technology, they not only are able to get engaged in leisure activities, but also are able to work and generate a source of income. The benefits of technology is numerous. Individuals in the present existence, are depended upon technology for carrying out number of tasks and activities. These include, paying bills, making purchases, etc. they are able to acquire knowledge and knowledge in terms of varied areas then forth. Research has indicated that elderly women, who are even above the age of 90 years are learning technology. The reason being, women, belonging to all age groups and backgrounds have acquired an understanding that it's essential for them to acquire technology education to not only cause improvements within their socio-economic conditions, but also to enhance their overall quality of life. The changes that have come about revolutionary changes have taken place in the status of Indian women after independence. Cultural and Structural changes reduce exploitation of women to an excellent extent and supply equality of opportunities to women in various fields. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battle field of life, fully armoured with their talent. Now, there is no arena which remained unconquered by Indian women. Female activists also united over issues as female infanticide, gender bias, women's health, women's safety and women's literacy. Some notable positive changes which happened during this era are as follows:

- * In 1966, Indira Gandhi becomes the first- women Prime Minister of India and served on that post for an aggregate period of fifteen years and becomes the worlds 'longest serving women Prime Minister.
- * 11,332 women and girls are becoming trafficked per annum. Rape in India has been described by Radha Kumar together of India's commonest crimes against women.
- * In India, acid attacks on women who dared to refuse a man's proposal of marriage or asked for adivorce are forms of revenge. The numbers of acid attacks are increasing.
- * A 1997 report claimed that every year a minimum of 5,000 women in India die thanks to dowry. In 2011, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 8,618 dowry deaths.
- * According to Renuka Chowdhary, former Union Minister of women and Child Development, around 70% of women in India are victims of domestic violence.
- * According to UNICEF's 'State of the World Children-2009' report, 47% of Indian's women aged 20-24 were married before the legal age of 18, rising to 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.

* The birth of the girl child was considered inauspicious. In villages as well as in cities, the girl child was killed before or after death.

* Common Indian sayings like, ‘May you be blessed with hundred sons’ represent the low status of women in India.

* In 2011, Government stated India was missing three million girls and there are now 48 less girls per 1000 boys. The gap between the 2 gender may be a direct response to the gender bias within India. Men and Women in India have unequal health and education rights. Male education and health are made more of a priority. So women’s death rates are increasing.

Conclusion:

It may thus be concluded that in Vedic India, women did not enjoy an inferior status rather the occupied an honourable place. They had ample rights within the social and therefore the religious fields and limited rights in the economic and the political fields. They weren't treated as inferior or subordinate but equal to men. We have honoured our country as our Motherland —Bharat Mata and our nationalism has grown up from the seed Mantra —Vande Mataram. Position of women in society is the index to the standard of social organization. Through this study welcome on conclusion that as the women have equal participation in human development. There has been a gentle transformation within the status of the ladies as compared to earlier periods. Women of today participate completely in areas like politics, status, military sectors, economic, service, and technology sectors. Moreover, they have contributed wholly in sports too. Thus, they have occupied a dignified position in family and society. However, ending crimes against women remains a challenge. We can prevent ills by ensuring women autonomy, also increased participation and decision making power in the family and public life both. Today, if there is an idea spreading across national limitations, it is women’s claim for equal opportunity and political power. Women are creating waves in every field but the area where their participation dwindled, was the country’s political life.

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