



Status of woman in ancient, medieval and modern period

Neeta Singh Gaharwar

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, A.K.S. University, Satna, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

The fight is not for woman's status but for human worth. The claim is not to end in equality of woman but to restore universal justice. The bid is not for loaves and fishes for the forsaken gender but for cosmic harmony. Which never comes till woman comes.

Keywords: woman's, ancient, fight, justice, human

Introduction

As we all are very well aware from the fact that, all over the world 50% of population is constituted by women. But in our country only, there is decreasing ratio of woman on the basis of sex selection abortion. The situation of decreasing sex ratio of male to female is the reason of unequal social status of woman with men. On the other hand in western countries women's in reality are equal with men. But in India the situation is not so in fact it is just on paper that we provide equal status to women in our country also. It is evident from our culture that at one side we treat women as goddess in form of Lakshmi, Saraswati, Durga and very next movement all the heinous and illegal offences being committed against them like rape, sexual exploitation, kidnapping and most importantly nowadays 'Female foeticide'. On the other hand, we can say that everybody treats them like a salve who work without any wages.

-By Dr. Bir pal singh, National Law Institute University, Bhopal, India

Today as per our constitution we provide equal status to woman on the basis of equality principle. But to achieve or gain this equality Indian woman have to struggle for a long time. Our ancient era is the witness of this inequality, for example Draupadi, wife of five pandavas was, used by them on the dice like goods. Women were also used for dance to please the kings and other male members of kingship, Women was also not having right to speak loudly in home or public places, these are some instances which shows that in ancient period also women was not being treated equally with men. Even she was not having right to participate freely in economic, social, political and personal activities.

But in rise of 20th century Mahatma Gandhi has started national movement for liberalization of women. During that time only Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and many other social workers started a movement for education of woman prevention of sati system^[1], restrain of polygamy marriage etc. The result of this was that, Parliament enacted laws for sati Prevention, Restrain of child marriages, Dowry prohibition, Equal rights of woman^[2] in property and Remarriages of widow^[3] etc.

After the independence of India, Parliament had made sufficient effort to give equal status to women with men by removing inequality for fulfillment of this purpose they

have also created a firm by making enactment for Hindu marriages which define the age for marriage, prevent polygamy and make monogamy marriages mandatory. They have also enacted adoption laws so that any men or women competent to adopt the child children, parents etc. Through constitution of India they have also protected equality of women under article- 14^[4], 15^[5], 15(3)^[6], 42^[7], 51(A) (E)^[8]. In this way the Government on their level makes sufficient efforts to remove inequality of woman with men by providing equal status. Till today situation is as it is or we can say they, it becomes worse by committing crime of 'female foeticide' which results in to decreasing rate of woman in society.

The occurrence of offences of 'female foeticide' and Infanticide is rooted in long back culture which results into death on the basis of sex selection. The most important things is that, the crime rate of commission of these offences is in the two largest countries in universe much high, *i.e.* India another is china and it's very disgraceful our society. It is vicious and harsh demonstration against woman by the patriarchal supportive society.

In this way status of women has been changed from ancient time to modern age. But still 'female foeticide' and infanticide are committed frequently in India and other countries. Therefore, researcher in this research has discussed the position of woman from primitive society to modern society which will help to find out reasons of 'female foeticide'. It has been discussed as follows.

Position of women in ancient period

a. Women in Pre-Vedic Period

Historical studies and the scriptures indicates that Indian women enjoyed a comparatively high status during the early vedic period (2000 B.C. to 1000B.C.) surpassing contemporary civilization in ancient Greece and Rome. The Aryans, Who were mostly busy fighting wars, regarded women as useful and productive members of society. The condition of vedic women was good women also enjoyed religious status like that of men.

Especially in vedic initiation and studies. The Rigveda provides ample evidence to prove the concept of equality women with men as regards access and capacity to acquire the highest knowledge, even the absolute knowledge.

The Rigveda had rendered the highest social status to qualified women of those days. But status of women fell in the later vedic and Epic period. They were not at all treated equally with men or we can say that they were not enjoying equal rights and privileges as compared to men.

Though the women participated in each family ceremony with men but they only played a role as a silent observer not an active participant as per manu, men always enjoy unchallenged authority over their wives. Child marriages, polygamy and sati were prevalent at that time still out of all these things women at that time were respected by the society. However, changes into the status of women introduced in 15th century. Saints and supporters of bhakti movement were expounded and spoken about equality of woman with men ^[9].

During these period men were polygamous and widow burning was an accepted norm. Arthashastra imposed more stigmas on women as kautily dismissed women's liberation. They were not free even to go elsewhere without husband's permission. They become worse off in the Gupta period. But in vedic period position of women was not worse as that of today. Our history shows that woman in vedic period was also on strong footage as compare to men and therefore they were not subjected to 'female foeticide' and Infanticide of people never think about that.

Though the Overall position of women was lower than men, yet on the whole the position of women was good. In the post vedic period, women started being discriminated on the ground of education and other rights. The 'Child Marriage', emphasis on physical chastity of women and their unquestioned obedience to husband lead's to progressive deterioration of their position. In the smriti sastras as well as in manu, it has been mentioned in strongest terms that women should be honored. But then again Manu has given absolute rights to men to inflict corporeal punishment on her and discard her if she said anything disgraceful to him. Thus, a contradiction in the rules of treatment to women was there. Manu's system continued for long after the Mauryan period in the Indian society. However, the upper class women enjoyed freedom and were respected in society. Besides these women, a vast majority worked in the fields and homes. Their condition worsened in the 20th century ^[10]

b. Position of woman in Vedic age

As we have studied position of woman in pre rig vedic period was very high. In later vedic period, the position enjoyed by woman in the early vedic society, was not retained. In vedic society participation of wives was required in many rituals, woman could select their husband in an assembly called Lo;aoj ^[11]. But in most cases the women had to lead on unhappy married life. This was simply because their husbands were allowed to have more than one wives and this was especially quite common among the upper classes of the ancient Indian society. A widow was expected burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. This would make her 'sati' ^[12]. Manu assigns to the woman of vedic age, a position of dependence, not of surordination. In the work called Amarkosh written in the Gupta era names of the teachers and Professors are there and they belonged to female sex. They were the authors of vedic scripts and 'mantras' ^[13].

C. Position of Woman in Hindu Dharma

The roots of hindu religion are in aryan society of patriarchal system. The family unit was large one, generally extending over three generations and with the male off springs living together. Hindus considered that the man and woman represent the two aspects of one 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 ^v/kZukjs'oj*. Woman was considered more powerful than man and treated as goddess of ^kDrh*. The society was governed by certain established norms approved by ^/keZ'kkL=*. The highest social ends in ancient Indian society were four, Arth, Kaam and Moksha.

D. Womans Education in Ancient India

In the golden age of aryan where in the men were free, Brave, Vigorous, fearless themselves civilized and civilizing others, Nobel and deeply spiritual and the woman were learned. Additionally, woman represented the best example of conjugal love, offering the supreme sacrifice of their lives as a demonstration of their feeling for their partners in the brief journey of life. Woman did write sanskrit plays and verses, excelled in music, painting and other fine arts. It clearly shows that our kings were aware of woman education their children without the discrimination of male or female.

E. Position of Women in Mughal Period

Unlike in the ancient Indian period, the position and status of woman in the mughal period was not quite high. Purdah and child marriage had become common. Except those of the lower classes, Women in mughal period did not move out of their houses. The Muslims woman observed purdah much more strictly than the Hindus. Through, the overall position of woman in mughal period was low, there were many Hindu and Muslim woman of outstanding ability, whose fame is still relevent today like, not ably Rani Durgabati of gondawana, Rani Karmawati, Mira Bai, Tara Bai etc.

Status of Woman in Medieval Period

The position of woman become worse in mediaval period, rather to develop some good changes in their status. During the mediecal period only, system of purdah and jauhar were being introduced by muslin and Rajput community against woman. Firstly 'Purdah' means, women in muslim community is fully covered with clothes, so as to cover their body from male. Secondly 'jauhar' means woman with their own consent immolate themselves so as to save their body and property from detention of energy. If there are from defeated warriors family in both the system, liberty of woman was curtailed by the community that they were not giving right to moment. Bhakti movement had played a very important role for improvement and impoverishment for status of woman.

Starus of Woman in Modern Period

As India moved into path of independence, woman blamed in India. It was era of 1860's 70's when woman were confined to their household work. They were deviled from equal dignity education and accommodation. But as the time

passes, India blessed with urbanization and Industrialization, It also got status of women enriched in Meany fields. Woman today are equally occupying the equal dignity in every sector. There are enomorous examples which reflects that women's are potencialized enough to serve society.

There are few examples

- Meera Chadha Borwankar
- Ritu Karidhal
- Sumitra Mahajan
- Arundhati Bhattacharya
- Hima Das
- Anu Kumari etc.

Are examples of women empowerment that are boosing our proud to ward Country. Woman today occupy high ranking posts like I.A.S., I.P.S. also in our defense services. The modern Indian woman participate in various sports and games like football, hockey, cricket, table tennis, lawn tennis and also in athletics namely Saniya Mirza, Sayana Nehawal etc.

Status of Woman in Contempory Time

The contempory Indian woman serve as M.P., M.L.A., Governors and Ministers. Woman of recent time like mother Teresa, Soniya Gandhi, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, M.S. Subhalakshmi, Lata Mangeskar and our expresident of India Pratibha Tai Patil have achieved international fame. Women have also achieved high fame in the areas of literature, Music and acting's. Moreover woman are joining the field of Science and technology also. In Fact, there is no sphere of activity in which women are unsuitable or incompetent.

Following are the some legislative enactment implemented by legislator for promotion and protection of women Empowerment in India as follows:-

Act Implemented By Govt

- National commission for women Act 1990
- Indian Penal code 1860
- Indian Evidence Act 1872
- Prohibition of Dowry
- Medical termination of Preganan

References

1. The Prevention of sati Act, 1829.
2. The Child marriage restraint Act, 1929.
3. The dowry prohibition Act, 1961.
4. The woman property right Act, 1955.
5. The Hindu widow remarriage Act, 1836.
6. Equality before Law, Equal protection of Law.
7. Government shall not discriminate any citizen on the basis of caste, race, sex and religion
8. Make special provisions so as to do affirmative discrimination in favour of woman.
9. <http://www.importantindia.com/29545/status-of-woman-in-vedic-age/> posted in Essay, patagraphs and articles by vipash mehra on february 17, 2014, last visited 15.06, 2014.
10. Posted in Essays, Pargraphs and articles by karan malhotra on August 21, 2014. cited at, <http://www.importantindia.com/2654/status-of-woman-in-vedic-age/> last visited 15.06, 2014.

11. Sayambhar means it is a form of marriage which had been followed in vedic period. Bride select one of the bridegroom amongst all the eligible bachelors for examples drapadis marriage in Mahabharata which is well known to everyone.
12. The term is derived from the name of the goddess sati, who self-immolated because she was unable to bear her father Daksha's humaliation to her husband shiva.
13. The Indian commission of sati (prevention) Act, 1987. Part I, and section 2(c) define sati as the act or rite itself.