
AMBIGUOUS PERSPECTIVES REGARDING REAL WOMAN

DEVIKA JAYSSELL

Abstract: India is the land of diversities. It presents endless varieties of physical features and cultural patterns. In short, it becomes an epitome of the world. But in this same society women have been treated as 'objects' by the male domination. The lower status of women in India is the result of the Patriarchal form of family. The woman has always occupied higher status in the scriptures of all religions, but in reality she has not attained it in any of the phases of history. The Hindu religious scriptures have placed women in the rank of Goddesses. But reality shows a contrast between the religious beliefs and the actual treatment of women in the day to day life. When the British came to India, women had no individuality of their own and were clearly discriminated as the weaker section of society. During the British rule in India, economic, social and educational changes with respect to women were slowly but surely initiated which led ultimately to the abolition of certain anti-woman cultural practices like sati, child marriage, polyandry, devadasi system etc. We expect men and women to have different personalities and skills and to perform different tasks. In understanding the social roles of men and women, it is helpful to make a distinction between gender and sex. Sex refers to the two biologically different categories, the male and the female and the gender refers to the expected dispositions and behaviors that cultures assign to each sex. The government aims at developing specially identified sections of society, including the women. Right from the 19th century, legislations have been passed to emancipate women from oppression which confined their roles and lowered their status. With Independence and the launching of the five year plans, there has been a constitutional and administrative commitment to promote woman liberty and equality. But have these transitions make any change in the status of women? Now this transition has reached a stage from the code of man, "Woman deserves no freedom", to the neo-liberalist perspective. Women have patience, humbleness and loyalty but at the same time they are bold enough to fight for justice, power and their rights. Therefore, a question ensues, who is the real woman?

Introduction: History of women dates back to the history of human beings in the world. Ample example can be cited with regard to the roles played by women in the history of mankind, heroines, rulers, goddesses, etc. Women were not only considered as a link in the life cycle of human beings by giving birth to offspring for retaining human life on earth for centuries together but also played active roles as catalysts in the declaration of wars, annihilation of civilizations, evolution of communities, etc. Women have played roles as a gender for the suppression of emotional feelings of their opposite sex, as warriors, political leaders, administrators, goddesses, philanthropists, persons renowned or chastity and also as slaves, a product of commercial importance, etc. Women as a gender have played equally important roles in the history of prosperity and catastrophes to the mankind.

Socio-cultural Status of Women in India: Historical Perspective: History of Indian civilization (2750 BC - 3200 BC) gives several instances as to the roles and status of women in India. Indus Valley Civilization indicates that women folk got high respect in the society during the period. Women were worshipped in the society in the form of mother goddess. Agriculture was the main occupation and domestication of animals, spinning, weaving of cotton and woolen clothes were other occupations in Indus Valley Civilization.

The Ancient Period: (Early Vedic period, Later Vedic period, Buddhist period)The ancient period, especially the early Vedic period, is one of the glorious chapters in Indian history. The women entered fields of teaching, medicine, business and administration. From about 1500B.C, known as later Vedic period started the change in woman's status due to various reasons. The most important among them was the denial of education. The origin of Buddhism tried to retrieve and restore the positions of women in society.

The Medieval period: By the advent of Islam and Mughal rule in India, marriage became essential for girls. Widow Remarriage was favored. Early marriage, dowry system, sati and purdah were the main institutions prevailing among both the Hindus and Muslims during this period. Later with Bhakti movement they secured certain social and religious freedom.

The British period: When the British came to India, the conditions of Indian women were deplorable. During the British rule, many educational, social and economic changes took place which ultimately led to the abolition of certain anti-woman cultural practices like sati, child marriage, polyandry, devadasi system etc.

The Contemporary period: The low status of women in India upto late 1940s had mainly stemmed from illiteracy, economic dependency, religious prohibitions, caste restrictions, lack of female

leadership etc. Education, economy, family, political participation and legal provisions are the indicators of change in the status of Indian women.

The Gender Issues in India: To understand the social roles of men and women, it is necessary to understand the difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to the two biologically differentiated categories, male and female. Gender refers to the expected dispositions and behaviors that culture assign to each sex. We expect men and women to have different personalities and skills and to perform different tasks.

The Gender and Society: Social attitudes, beliefs and norms reflect the woman's poor access to education. The need for education of males and females is perceived in the context of the roles they are expected to play. Gender violence is specific category of violence because it is usually directed against the women. The norms and values of Patriarchy are the factors that determine gender violence. Family, religion, caste system and Mass media are the important institutions that are playing vital role in the perpetuation of gender discrimination.

Problems of Women in India: Child marriage (a practice in which a boy and a girl are married prematurely), Sati (a social practice in which a widow commits suicide by burning herself in funeral pyre of her husband), Female infanticide, Dowry system, Female foeticide, Acid throwing, Abortion, Incest and Domestic violence are the major problems that are still taking place in Indian society along with the advancement in technologies and social structures.

Reforms for Indian Women: First, there were modifications in the appropriate activities for a female at different stages of her life. Second, the accepted area for female action was expanded. And third, individualism was now fast gaining currency among the people. There was seen establishment of new educational, religious and social institutions. As families moved from their village homes to the cities, they increased their contact with the foreigners and they were gradually influenced to change their views regarding traditional household activity. The National Plan for Action for the girl child and the Platform for action is a positive step in protecting the rights of girls.

Social Legislations Relating to Women

- The Special Marriage : : 1954
- The Maternity Benefits Act: : 1961
- The Dowry Prohibition Act: : 1961
- The Equal Remuneration Act: : 1976
- The Immoral Traffic(Prevention) Act : 1986

- Indecent Representation of Women(Prohibition) Act : 1986
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act etc

Women According to Gandhiji: Woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and to take bolder actions in nonviolence. Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realize what tremendous advantage she has over man.

Ambiguous Perspectives Regarding Real Woman: Tracing from the past evidences, it is evident that women enjoyed equal status as that of men. But gradually this situation changed a lot. With the technological advancement, the external structures of our society are developing but the perspectives of people are getting narrow. Though there is much legislation for the protection of women, they all failed to satisfy the needs and interests of woman. Patience, humility, tolerance etc are the qualities assumed to a woman. But Indian history and World history have experienced women who were bold and powerful, who were warriors and great leaders of dynasties, who were patriotic and freedom fighters. Therefore, she not only represents a dove but at the same time a lion.

Conclusion: The educated, socially active "new women," as they were called, were part of a modernizing movement which sought to modify gender relations in the direction of greater equality between men and women. the position of women in modern India was one of great social upliftment. There was a major change seen not merely in the lives of the women themselves but also in the perception of their roles and functions by society. It paved the way for the greater independence and expression of individuality of Indian women. Holistic manifestation of womanhood and the womanly goal with an aim to bring perfect balance between the masculine and feminine forces of accepted history irrespective of gender is what seems to be the need of the hour.

It's Hard to Be a Woman!

You must think like a man,

Act like a lady,

Look like a young girl,

And work like a Horse.

" Someone said: women are the cause of problems in the world...Yes. I agree because she suffered nine months to bring a fool like you in life to say that women are the reason for problems..."

Be Proud To Be A Woman!

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Devika Jayssell/ 2nd Year Integrated B.A,M.A, International Relations/ Central Univ. Of Kerala/