

Status of Women in India (1947-1985)

Abstract

It's undeniable that a Woman is the pillar of each family, a special component of each society, and many more. In respect of all this, the status of women in Indian society is asymmetric and unequal. A number of social reformers, politicians fight to uplift the state of women after Independence of India. This paper is a small view to express the status of women after Independence of India.

Keywords: Women, India, Status, Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Introduction

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

— **Swami Vivekananda**

In the long history of humanity and its development in the propagation of the human race and in the social economy of the world; the woman has been an important factor as a man. She has all the potentialities for work, action, and achievement.¹

However, in a complex society like India, the status of women is asymmetrical when it comes to equality in terms of gender, social, economy, religion, culture and various other areas. Britain came into India bringing with it western thoughts and ideas. Western contact began to influence Indian thought. Men like Raja Rammohan Roy arose who took up the cause of women's reforms and liberation. He fought for the abolition of Sati in 1829, and the Brahma Samaj, which he established taught absolute equality of men and women.²

Revolutionary changes have taken place in the position of women in India after independence. The Constitution of India provided for special steps to be taken by the government to improve the condition of women by separate institutions. Women's history is developing into a new era of research at a particularly existing time it has been stimulated by two related but essentially independent development the maturation of social history and the growth of an active women's movement. In India, a significant landmark in the field of women's studies was the publication in 1974 of *towards equality*; the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI).³

Nehru & Womens' Status

Dawn of Independence marked the beginning of the new era, Jawaharlal Nehru as the first Prime Minister of emergent India to bring about the more fundamental transformation in the structure of Indian society. So women like Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Renuka Roy and Durgabai Deshmukh were involved by Nehru in the important task of constitution making.⁴

India was a free nation now, but in reality, it was still a slave to a lot of narrow mentalities of the society. Where a man was allowed for polygamy, but a widow was not allowed even think of a remarriage. Women were also separated from the right in the property. To break this social jinx from women's life Nehru came up with Hindu code bill which was supported by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar but it was strongly opposed in the parliament and this led to the failure of independent India's first Hindu code bill. Later in 1952 after the first general elections, the bill was again reconstructed and the bill was broken into different parts. The Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the special Marriage Act 1954, the Hindu Succession Act 1956, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act 1956, Hindu adoption and maintenance Act 1956 and the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and section 125 of The Criminal Procedure Code for the social measure enacted during the premiership of Jawaharlal Nehru. These Laws aim at emancipating Hindu women from oppression and affording them an equal status with a man.⁵



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Women after Independence

In Independent India, women have taken important political and administrative positions. For instance, Indira Gandhi guided the destiny of country as prime minister of India for more than 15 years. Women have also served as a presiding officer, chief ministers, ministers in the union and the state government, the presiding officer of legislative bodies and secretary to the Government of India. Vijayalakshmi Pandit was India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union and the first woman president of United Nations General Assembly. Najma Heptulla was the president of Council of the Inter-parliamentary Union.⁶

Women in India participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sector, science, and technology & etc. The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality no discrimination by the state (Article 15(1)); equality of opportunity (Article 16) and equality pay for equal work (Article 39 (D)).

A very few were allowed into the public space which she was expected to manage on her own while maintaining her domestic role as homemaker. In spite of the Sharda Act which was passed in the 1950's to raise the marital age to 18 years for girls.

For viable economic and social development to take place in any country, it is necessary that people participate in the political process. The percentage of women members of the Lok Sabha, the elected house of the Indian Parliament has ranged from a low of 2.8% in the first 1952 election, to a high of 8.5% in the 1984 election the average percentage of women number has been 5.6%.

Women's participation in politics has not only emerged in national politics but there were special amendments for them to be an active part of the administration right from the root levels in rural areas with Gram Panchayat. The 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, mandating reservation in at least 1/3rd of the seats of all Panchayat Councils and 1/3rd of the Pradhan (head of the Panchayat) positions for women, was a landmark for women's political empowerment. This was followed by the 74th Amendment Act, 1992, which established similar reservations in Nagar Palikas & Municipalities.

Women and Education

In Independent India, education is seen as an agent of social change. The development strategy in independent India in 1950 heavily on planning. The first five-year plan (1951-1956) held women have the same opportunity as men for taking all kind of work and this presupposes that they get the equal facility. The second five-year plan (1956-1961) laid greater emphasis on women. The third five-year plan (1961-1966) considered the need of increasing the proportion of women student in colleges, universities to take up different occupation. The fourth five-year plan (1969-1974) continued to give priority to education for the girl child, fifth five-year plan (1974-1979) higher priority was given to free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. The sixth five-year plans (1980-1985) emphasized the need of universalisation of elementary education

and promote balwadis to enable girls to attend school.⁷

Women, who now represent 48.2% of the population, are getting access to education, and then employment. From 5.4 million girls enrolled at the primary level in 1950-51 to 61.1 million girls in 2004-05. At the upper primary level, the enrollment increased from 0.5 million girls to 22.7 million girls. Dropout rates for girls have fallen by 16.5% between the year 2000 and 2005. Programs like 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' and 'Saakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy' has helped increase the literacy rates from less than 10 percent to more than 50% today.⁸ The enrollment figure under the program of adult literacy for women has given by the Ministry of Education is 2 million in 1950-51; 3 million in 1960-1961; 6 million in 1965-66 and 3.2 million in 1968-69.

The ministers of agriculture, rural development, industries, labor, science and technology and the department of women and child development have taken significant initiatives by making specific women's employment. Government biggest effort to employment for women has been in the rural development sector. The most important programme in this connection was integrated rural development program which was started by way back in 1975. The target under the program however provided coverage and fisheries out of the total beneficiaries.

Women and Society

After the attainment of independence, it was felt that social and economic uplift of the masses required government assistance to strengthen the service rendered by voluntary agencies. The central government, therefore, creates a new agency the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953 to promote welfare and development services for women and children.

Both the Central Social Welfare Board and the department of community development concluded that the proper agency for the success of this program would be a committee of local women. The organization of Mahila Mandal thus becomes one of the objectives of these rural development programs. Mahila Mandal was organized in the villages and blocks for promoting women's program nutrition, education, health and mother and child care, home improvement, literacy, recreation and cultural activities.⁹

According to the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), the number of female employees in the categories of professional, technical and related workers, primary and middle school teachers has been continuously rising since 1960. The Director General of Employment and Training data for selected professions in public and private sectors identify teaching, medical and health, clerical and related workers and telephone operators as the four occupations.

Conclusion

As the time changes women's right also have undergone wide changes. Indian women have mastered anything which a woman can dream of but still has to go a long way to achieve equal status in

the minds of the Indian men. With the changes in policies, women have become more powerful in various fields.

Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. It is not only demand for simple justice or democracy but also can be seen as a necessary condition for women is interest to be taken into account. The term status includes not only personal and proprietary right but also include duties liabilities and disabilities.¹⁰

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