

Impact of Indian renaissance on Women Upliftment



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Abstract

Indian tradition always glorified the role of women as wives and mothers but it hardly recognized the individual dignity of her. It is indeed a paradox that Indian woman had been conferred with the status of goddess but in reality she was oppressed and subordinated to man. Afflicted womankind got a sigh of relief with a welcome shower of social reforms in nineteenth century. The medieval psyche of Indian Society that kept women in shackles for centuries was now experiencing a new light. Countless girls were killed at the time of their birth only, if they somehow survived the onslaught of infanticide the fear psychosis of cursed widowhood and self immolation with husband's pyre constantly haunted them..

Introduction:

Except in early period of vedic times, woman was never assigned a position of equality with man. Law and religion did not recognize the equality and equal rights of man and woman¹. Society permitted man to have rights and freedoms from which woman was excluded. Different standards were adopted to judge the individual and social conduct of man and woman². Women of upper classes were left to rot in generally inferior status, their enforced seclusion, their early marriage and lack of education increased their miseries³. So far as the labouring classes were concerned. their was not much difference in the status and privileges of men and women⁴. The system of child marriage was prevalent with its adverse effects. Young boys and girls. even children of one year were married, which resulted in the procreation of feeble progenies⁵.

The greatest evil arising of child marriages was the growing number of child-widows. Without the economic means by which to sustain themselves, without benevolent treatment from their immediate relations, and being subjected to suspicion, social stigma and superstition, the girl widows lingered through their unfortunate existences⁶.

Hari Keshawaji, the earliest champion of widow remarriage in Bombay gave a moving description of the miseries of the Hindu widows, He wrote in 1839: 'She who was originally intended to be the inseparable companion of the man and to render him her assistance according to the divine laws, is doomed to spend her days unprofitably in the state of widowhood; disgusted with her gloomy life, with here shaved head, and the continual mournful dress and her exclusion from the company of married females on the occasion of marriage and such other rejoicings⁷.

The degraded deprived social state of Hindu widows gave a stirring jolt to the sensitive perception of enlightened social reformers. For rebuilding Hindu society and creating social renaissance, they contemplated reform movements aiming at the liberation and education of Indian Women. The crusade for emancipation of Indian Women became the first tenet of the social reform every where in India⁸. Nineteenth century witnessed the dawn of Modern Indian Renaissance. It left an indelible mark in the history of Indian social reforms and initiated the process of salvation for down trodden Indian women. The Human content and the rationalism of some broad minded Indians and stringent administrative measures of some kind hearted British officials made the task easier.

The first notable social measure was effected at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lord Wellesley was the Governor General and Carey, the notable missionary of Serampore, drew the