

Patriarchal Complex Society: as a Path to Secondary Social Status and Plight of Women in Nepal

Paper Submission: 05/06/2021, Date of Acceptance: 13/06/2021, Date of Publication: 23/06/2021

Abstract

In the present article, an attempt has been made to analyze the status and social identity of Nepali women under the complexities of patriarchal society. The condition and well being of Nepali women have been affected by the traditional values and customs that prevailed in society. The reasons responsible for their exploitation in the monarchical form of governance are the traditional beliefs and various forms of patriarchal thinking and the second class place in society have been discussed in detail further.



Mamta Goutam

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of Political Science,
Government P.G. College,
Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

Seema Devi

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of Political Science,
KMGGPGC, Badalpur,
G.B Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, India

Keywords: Nepali Women, Patriarchy, Social Status, Custom, Complex Society, Monarchy.

Introduction

With the general survey it is clarified that the status of women seems not to be better in any part or any patriarchal society of the world. Their position is not equal as to that of man. Now let's make general survey on the position and status of women in modern Nepal. There were many factors which had been affected the position of Nepali women in the past. The factors ranged from social, economic, religious condition, to political and legal element. Each category is important but here we discuss social condition in detail

The status and well being of Nepali women in general, have been affected by the traditional values and customs that prevailed in society. Most of the traditional values of past were not favorable to the free access of women. There were many evil customs, practices and social norms which neglected women's individuality. Some of them were stopped by the effort of government and social organization. Since, even evil customs are rooted in tradition, they are often continuing long after legislation and social sanctions against them. How those social factors had affected the freedom of Nepali women will be clear in the following discussion.

Agnate System

The Nepali society is patriarchal and plural. The society appreciates the birth of the son than the birth of a daughter. The successor of the deceased person is male kingship and the property of the deceased is inherited the sons, grandsons, brothers etc.

Sati System

The Sati system evolved at the early post-Vedic period. Two of the Hindu lawgivers Angiras and Harita emphasized Sati system and propagated it as a ideal for widows. By this she not only "Elevated herself but also her husband's; to heavenly bliss even if he were in hell".

The justification behind the derivation of Sati system was that after the death of a member of the upper strata of society desired almost every worldly Bana had opposed the Sati system. The criticism of poet Bana is of great interest.

To die after one's beloved is most fruitless, It is mistake committed by Infatuation. It is reckless course followed on account of hot haste. It is a mistake of stupendous magnitude. It does no good whatsoever to the dead person...By dying with him one can do good to nighters. (Poet Bana; Quoted in Thapa, K.B, 1995, p.11)

In addition, the adherents of the Tantric cult were against the Sati system of Hindus. Mahanirvana Tantra had pinioned that the immolation of wife would rather lead the husband to hell. Sati system had been in practice in Nepal since ancient time, the actual time of its commencement is not defined. At that time it was not compulsory. Similarly, many other women of that period abstained from becoming Sati rather maintained Satiprabha (passing the widowhood according to the prescribed ritual which was full of intricate rules) Sati system reached its zenith during medieval Nepal.

With the advent of Shah Period in Nepal the Sati system was on its decline but not stopped. Seven or nine women become Sati on the funeral pyre of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Soon after the emergence of the Rana period in Nepal some legal steps were taken against the Sati system.

However, the fact was that Jung bahadur against the Sati system and he for the first time in the history of Nepal, had taken significant steps towards checking it. He puts many legal checks on the way of becoming Sati. He made the Patiya (purification) very easy for those women who could not be immolated themselves even after ascending the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands. Accordingly, the revised provisions in the legal code were made the case of committing Sati a murder case, thus banned the Sati legally.

Child and Unequal Marriages

The child marriage among both the sexes was a common feature in Nepal. It was very common in Nepal especially, before 1951. But this social practice was more harmful for women. Customarily a child bride would be married with an aged man, at times with one having grandchildren. This was given

belonging like wives and slaves. It is in this belief the Sati system had its origin. According to another belief, in ancient times some warring tribes who considered their women the subject of their pride, hence they preferred to kill their women after the death of their husbands rather than giving them a wandering life. That's why they started the practice of Sati system. That system was beneficial for all husbands to be secured from the conspiracy of the wives because the husband's death would cause their own extinction by immolation. So, those sanctions were imposed by the men to serve their interest.

However, the Veda, the most authentic Hindu text had taken sati as suicide and on that basis many men like Medhanithi, Virata and poet

rise to a Nepali saying which runs: "A seven year old girl would marry with seventy years old man". It seems that there were no legal provisions on the marital age of the girl before the time of Jang Bahadur in his law put some provisions which fixed the marriageable age(not before five years) of the bride.

Thus, the marriageable age fixed by this legal code was itself very low. Legally, the marriage of a girl of reaching five years could be done when such child brides would not be able to understand the sense of marriage.

Chandra Shansher codified laws with many amendments twice during his Prime-minister ship but he made no amendment on the law governing the marital age of the girls. It was the only time of Judda Shansher some significant change was brought about the marriageable age for girls by fixing 11 and 14 years or above for Brahmans and other Janai wearing castes respectively.

During Rana regime the child marriage was not abolished because the traditional Nepali society was in favour of it. Only few elite groups were against it but their opinion did not prevail in the society. Thus the child marriage continued in Nepal throughout Rana period and remained a hurdle on the way of women's freedom. That tradition was handed down as a legacy for the period even after 1951.

One of the causes of women suffering in Nepali society was the unequal marriage. The unequal marriage generally occurred in the Brahman communities of Nepal. The other communities in which the unequal marriage used to take place were the landlords and wealthy communities. A wealthy man, whatsoever his caste might be, generally would keep many wives. Therefore, wealthy polygamist, with his advances in age would collect younger and younger wives.

Before the time of Juddha Shansher, no Rana rulers paid attention towards checking unequal marriage. Jaddha Shansher for the first time in Nepali history had taken steps to tackle the problem of unequal marriage and tried to check the unrestricted age differences between the bride and groom by codifying laws in 1992 B.S. (1935).

Juddha Shamsher was the first Rana ruler to initiate this step, credit goes to him. According to his biographer, Iswari Prasad, Juddah's step aimed at checking the increasing numbers of widows and solving the health problem. So far the problem of unequal marriage was concerned Juddah's legal provisions theoretically as well as practically, did not solve it.

Practically, Juddha's legal provisions regarding narrowing down the age difference between the bride and groom and thus, avoiding child widowhood, had no effect on social practice.

Thus the practice of unequal marriage had been prevailing in the society and that practice had retrogressive effects on Nepali womankind.

The Proclaimed Custom of Polygamy

It was an old practice in Nepal and it had been in vogue in the Nepali society since ancient to contemporary times. The polygamy in Nepal had more impact upon upper class of Nepali society. The women of this class were suffered from that evil practice. In lower class of society, though a man could bring many wives but the women too had the freedom to divorce and taking some another husband. So far as the upper stratum of the society was concerned, women did not enjoy that sort of freedom.

The man of upper strata used to keep many wives at a time but all the wives would not be of same categories. There were two categories of wives namely Byaite (married) wives and Lyaite (illegitimate) wives. Byaite category also consisted of mainly two types namely: married in similar caste and married in dissimilar caste. Lyaite wives too would be of many categories such as Jari Lyaite, Bidhuwa Lyaite from dissimilar and lower caste. Although, both types of marriages were in trend in Nepali society, generally in all casts from earlier time. This social custom has been coined into a Nepali proverb, which runs, *Mardako Saya Woti Swasni Hunchhan* (A man would have hundreds wives) (Thapa, K.B, 1995, p.42)

Some scholars have tried to prove that the polygamy which was practiced in Nepal had not only religious and economic reasons but also a social necessary for absorbing the most women population of the period. But the real reason which contributed to development of polygamy in Nepal was the traditional attitude which had been governed by the religious, social and economic reasons. The evil practice of polygamy also had worse effect on the women of those two classes. Among the working class, though the women were not affected so much by the evil practice of polygamy.

The Evil Practice of Witchcraft

Nepali society more or less still retains the superstitious belief on the existence of witchcraft. Most of Nepali, of all social strata in earlier days believed that the witchcraft could be meditated and mastered by the female members. On the other hand the Nepali society took witchcraft as an undesirable and harmful phenomenon for the society. So that

everyone would hate the witchcraft. Thus, the "witch" had become one of the most pinching courses for women in Nepali society. That sort of old notion has been dying out at present. In spite of this every old woman in many less developed or remote areas of Nepal, even the condition is such at present.

Before and even during the beginning of Rana period there was a strong belief on the existence of witchcraft and no one had thought about the non-existence of witchcraft rather people usually blamed women in the absence of proof, for being witches. It was due to this anarchic condition. Thus, the then Nepali society and even ruling elites believed on the existence of witchcraft. Only the government of Jung Bahadur wanted to check the unrestricted and proof less blame which had been falling against innocent women. Beside this, no effort were made through-out Rana period from governmental or social sectors to root out the superstitious belief in witchcraft.

The Ranas at that time were influenced by the humanitarian ideas of Britishers regarding such unscientific belief. They also used to imitate the Britishers. Despite that, Ranas were not influenced by the Britishers regarding witchcraft. Their palaces were not free from such belief.

Thus, it can be deduced that, the Nepali society during Rana period had a deep belief of the existence of witchcraft and that the notion had prevailed from the palace to hut. The impact was so great that the consciousness that had appeared during the last phase of Rana period could do nothing to annihilate such a belief. Women were continuously portrayed as an element that could cause harm to the people with the help of evil spirit of witchcraft. That sort of social belief was great hurdle on the way modernizing women kind in Nepal.

Practices of Selling Women to Foreigners

Nepali people who belong to the castes other than slave category could not sell their women from earlier times. But some Magars had the custom of selling their daughters and that was stopped by Bhimsen Thapa. That practice was abolished even in the slave class after the abolition of slavery in Nepal.

There was neither social customs nor legal provision during Rana period regarding the selling of Nepali women to foreigners. Socially, it was hateful business and legally there was a great restriction even on the visit of Nepali women to foreign land. Women of Nepal had no chance of visiting other foreign countries except India and the visit to India also was restricted for all other reasons except for pilgrimage.

Thought there was so hard legal provision, Nepali girls (sometimes women too) usually would be taken away to India and would be sold in the hands of Indians. Contemporary newspaper had given news about the abduction of Nepali girls by Nepali themselves. Not only girls were sold by the agents, sometimes even a husband would sell his own wife

mentioning that she was unmarried girl. Sometimes, even the Rana Prime Minister would send his Harem girls to sell them to the foreign land.

As a matter of fact, the Nepali women of lower classes though they would be more free in other social bond than the women of upper class and middle classes would be the victim of such illegal women selling to the foreigners.

Thus, the Nepali women during Rana regime had no social freedom. They would be sold like a commodity, through illegally in the hand of foreigners. Their freedom would be taken away by their own Nepali brothers. Sometimes their own husbands would be the cause to the loss of their freedom. Their chastity would be placed on the foreigners hands mostly by their near relatives. That was most insulting and heinous crime against women of Nepal. This would be the single most important example showing how women in those days, would be locked down as an animal. This was the result of the social insecurity towards women kind.

From the study of the above discussed implications regarding women's social status and economic rights, it becomes apparent that those social provisions were not in favor of providing social and economic freedom to women.

The social evils were the main hurdles to the freedom and progress of Nepali women like sati system, witchcraft, polygamy, unequal marriages and child marriage were in vogue. All those social evils except the sati system (which was abolished by Chandra Shamsher) were continuing throughout Rana period. Some of them like polygamy and unequal marriages rather gained momentum during that time. Ranas, themselves used to kept hundreds of women in their palaces. They also gave momentum to the unequal marriage. Most of the Rana rulers married with tender-age girls. (When Bhim Shamsher was 66 years old, his junior wife was 24 years old) The ruling and upper class of the Nepali society always considered their wives as;

"...Nothing but a child bearing machine" and suppressed them so much that they were "just like dummies" and they had no right even in their domestic affairs. They had to become "a silent spectator" even if their husbands "committed the most horrible sex crime, in the presence of them". They looked upon women as sex object. They (Ranas) used to marry by bringing "Thakuri" girls generally from west Nepal and such girls were judged mainly on the basis of their external beauty and unless they were satisfied with them they would be send back. (Thapa, K.B, 1985, p.69)

In the lower strata of Nepali society all agricultural works except, "ploughing" and all economic activities except taking up services in the governmental and non-governmental sectors were done by women equally to that of men. However they had no substantial economic right. They were not co-partners. They had accession to the inheritance of parental property very rarely. They could get their

shares in specific conditions but there were many restrictions on disposing such a share even in time of their necessity. Women had absolute right, only over specific items of Daijo-pewa. Among women, only the widow mothers having sons had better economic right for she could even hold on the due share of the sons in their father's property. Many jobs had been divided between men's and women's sectors on the basis of sex.

However, Nepal is a country of diverse ethnic and religious groups. Women of Mongoloid-Buddhist communities and women belonging to lower strata of society had greater freedom while women of Aryan-communities and upper class community were deprived of the freedom. Thus, there were so many factors which had affected the freedom of Nepali women and the consequence of this the position of women in society was very low and this lower status have the effect on present Nepali society too.

Therefore: the invitation of "All Pakistan Women's Conference", earlier to that in 1953 the above organization has send its members as representatives to "The Conference of Asian Women" held in Colombo". Thus, from 1951 onwards Nepali women had attended many international conferences and had got opportunities of paying visits to many countries. Most of those countries visited by Nepali women during this period were very more advanced than Nepal in the field of women consciousness and women's participation in all fields of national activities. So that Nepali women had been inspired and impressed with the advancement of women's status of those countries visited by them.

Today, although transformations may have come about in our manners, speech and dress, as we have seen many points presented above. We are not very far away from the situation which prevailed in ancient times. The main obstinately held narrow concept regarding women. In the patriarchal society the status of women is of second class citizen. This does not mean that we now advocate the necessity of matriarchal society. Rather we envision a human society of men and women where the personality of one sex is not dominated by the other. Harmonious coexistence should be the guided principle in the relationship between men and women. Therefore, it is essential that every woman and every man each in her/his own sphere contribute to removing the discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women on the basis of sex. Everyone's effort is necessary to make people in our society realize the importance of mutual partnership and harmonious coexistence and the mutual benefits which will come from such a partnership.

True gender equality can be established only by bringing by complete change in the attitude of the family and society towards women. This is possible only when women themselves recognize their value, express their feelings and ideas, their contribution, fight for self interest and develop

self-confidence. Such sharing of real feelings among women (whether from the village or the cities) will bring them into the process of empowerment.

The feminist believe that relationships should base on mutual respect, justice and equality and are concerned with bringing our lopsided relationships into balance.

Through it is true, a change is gradually occurring in the terms of empowerment of women but unless further changes takes place in the countries an attitudinal change regarding social norms and behavior occurs, effective adequate protective measures are undertaken. Nepali women will continue to face problems and challenges of disparity and discrimination.

Aim of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to analyze patriarchy and women's subordinate social position. The paper aims to highlight the customary reasons and potential causes in the traditional patriarchal system which undermines women's position and contribution.

Conclusion

As conclusion I must say that changes are gradually occurring in society in the terms of empowerment of women but unless further changes takes place in the countries an attitudinal change regarding social norms and behavior occurs, effective adequate protective measures are not undertaken. Nepali women will continue to face problems and challenges of disparity and discrimination.

References

1. Acharya, Madhu Raman (2002) "Nepal culture shift", Adroit publications, New Delhi.
2. Acharya, Meena (1994) "the statistical profile Nepalese women", An update in the policy Integrated development studies..
3. Adhikari, Milan (1995) "Women, Development, Democracy-A status of women in Nepal (1983-1993)". Kathmandu Shtri Shakti.
4. Altekar, A.S. (1991, reprint) "The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization", M.B. publishers
5. Bacchetta, Paola (2004) "Gender in Hindu Nation" published by Women Unlimited an Association of Kali for Women.
6. Bista, Dor Bhandar (2000) "People of Nepal" Ratna pustk Bhandar. Kathmandu.
7. Chena, Mary Des (1997) "The simplicity and complexity of women movements" in *Studies of Nepal History and Society*, Volume -2 No.-2 (December.)
8. Chhetri, Gyanu (Jan-2001) 'A Social and Cultural Perspective of Women and Community Forestry in Nepal in *Journal of Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies*; Vol-8, No.-1.
9. Gurung, Jeannettc D. (1999) (ed.) "Searching for women's Voices-in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas", Published by International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Kathmandu.
10. SAARC, *Regional Poverty Profile (2005-06)*, Nepal Country Report, January 2006.
11. Saltzman, Janet (1990), "Gender Equality: An Integrated Theory of Stability and Change" Sage, Beverly Hills.
12. Shaha, Rishikesh (2001) "An Introduction to Nepal", Ratna pustak bhandar Khathmandu
13. Thapa Krishna B. (1995) "Main Aspect of Social-Economic and Administrative History of Modern Nepal" Winner printing press, Kathamandu.
14. Thapa Netra B (2001) "A Short History of Nepal", Ratna pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu.
15. Upadhay, Shigu (1996) "Studies in Nepali History and Society Vol-1, No-2", Mandala Book point
16. Watkins, Joanne (1996) "Spinted Women: Gender, Religion and Cultural Identity in the Himalayas" New York, Colombia University.