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Position of women in Kashmir then and now

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Abstract:

The position of women in different periods of Indian history has remained very miserable. From time to time they became victims. They always remained at receiving end. Every time their position has opened new chapters of research. All inhuman atrocities were imposed upon them be it, dowry, infanticide, sati etc. Different acts were passed with the positive support of socio-religious reformers with an aim to liberate the women from the screws of onslaughts. At present they are demanding equality with men folk. If they have contributed a lot to society in every field then why they have to fight for their rights. But in Kashmir their position is entirely different. Position of women in Kashmir has to some extent remained appreciable. In spite of having the patriarchal nature of society still they enjoyed a respectable position. They are allowed to move freely, even can acquire the knowledge. The work of women in the open fields seems to be immoral. The development of nation can be seen through the development of women.

Keywords: Women, Orthodoxy, Illiteracy, Equality, Organizations.

Introduction:

From the very beginning women has remained the subject of oppression. They have been treated as objects in the society dominated by males. The disuniformity in social, cultural and economic conditions has further

deteriorated their position. Women were treated as inferior in their own families by parents and after marriage by in laws .Everywhere they have to face the problem be it social, cultural or others. Caste system has created havoc in their status and it is more rigidly seen among the low and middle classes. The number of restrictions was put on their movement, so that they will remain dependent upon men. Several socio-religious movements have raised their voice against the atrocities faced by the women. To some extent the position of women has remained satisfactory during the early vedic phase, 1500-1000.B.C.

For the first time women were allowed to receive the education and almost equal status with men was provided during the rigvedic days. They were allowed to study vedas and observed Brahmacharya and upanayana. Women like, Ghosa, Vishvara and Apala have composed the number of hymns related with vedas. They were allowed to have their own property. The man made evil customs were not followed by the people. Their participation in social gatherings was ensured at all levels. But within a calculated period of time there occurred drastic change in her position during the later vedic phase, 1000-600.B.C.They were now denied the right of inheritance and ownership of property. Patriarchal nature of society got further strengthened. With the passage of time caste system became rigid that further worsened her position in the society. During the Buddhist age women were allowed to acquire the right

knowledge, but besides this they cannot study the vedas. On one side they were allowed to gain knowledge, but on other side number of restrictions was enforced upon them. However during the age of imperial Guptas the dowry system was followed by the people very rigidly. Now widow was not allowed to remarry, thus the life of females became too miserable and tough. Above all a new evil of Sati came into being. Really the practice has changed the overall position of women. After a brief interval of time, 1206-1761.A.D, their position witnessed further deterioration. In the period female infanticide, child marriage, sati, jauhar, slavery and purdah were among the social evils that affected her position and status. Conservatism, illiteracy, sati and superstition became part of their life. Her devotion to home, children and in-laws was universally accepted as a positive value.

Efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar brought some changes in their position and succeeded in getting the widow remarriage act passed in, 1856.A.D. Later on it was actually Raja Ram Mohan Roy who really created awareness among the orthodox people, that sati is not a part of religion. The crusade of Roy succeeded and its level got minimized firstly adopted by princely States. Still the same has not got stopped at gross root level, but to some extent a relief was provided that stopped further oppressions on females.

The problems of sati, infanticide, child marriage, prohibition on widow

remarriage, women's right to property, slavery etc attracted the attention of British people. In the beginning of nineteenth century the inhumane practice of sati remained confined to some areas of Bengal and Bihar, but with the passage of time it engulfed the whole of nation. It occurred among all castes. For upper strata it was sense of pride, but among others it was sometimes a force. But on the whole it was practiced everywhere especially by those females whose husbands belonged to middle and lower middle classes. The important factors that worsened the position of women in societies were institution of polygamy, forced widowhood, austerity, sense of salvation, social convention and adoration of different practices and rites. The most dangerous evil of time was the custom of infanticide prevalent in various parts of nation. Benaras, Gujrat, Rajasthan, Punjab and Sindh were the leading centers of crime. Number of reasons were responsible for the emergence of infanticide institution as narrated by K. L. Sharma "sense of honor and pride, ultimately in, 1779.A.D,infanticide was finally declared equivalent to murder by Bengal Regulation Act, XXI, and from, 1804.A.D, extended to other parts of country automatically.

Early marriage also increased the hardships among females. It was mostly followed by rural and orthodox people. Child marriage is the outcome of notion of virginity, chastity, hyper gamy and dowry. In the preceding years it has resulted in over population, ill health, poverty and complete

dependence on parents. With regard to this particular problem the first legislation was passed in, 1860.A.D, under which the prescribed age of girls would remain ten years and in another legislation of, 1891.A D, the age of consent was raised to twelve and in another legislation of, 1925.A.D, raised to thirteen years for married girls and fourteen for unmarried ones. Some other acts and legislations were also passed related to marriageable age of male and female. In, 1929.A.D, child marriage restraint act (shadra bill) and Hindu marriage act of, 1955, A.D, the age was raised to fourteen and eighteen and for later it was fifteen and eighteen respectively. Now during the present era it is eighteen and twenty one years of age. But there seems to be no visible changes in her status, because there is no uniform social code of law in country. It differs from community to community, even from caste to caste and from family to family. Slavery system was also responsible for further degradation. Domestic and predial (agricultural) was very common in society. Domestic slavery remained confined mainly with the females only and later on mainly practiced in princely states during British rule. The slaves of this category were insolvent debtors or they were sold and resold by their masters. In the modern age slavery can be identified with bonded labour.

The period between,1927-1940.A.D,witnessed remarkable changes in the position of women. Number of reformative movements was launched,

that resulted in the immediate existence of women's conference in, and 1972.A.D. Some women belonged to middle class struggled for jobs. Ultimately number of acts passed with an aim to provide relief to women folk. The acts were, hindu widow remarriage act of, 1856.A.D, hindu law of inheritance act of , 1929.A.D, child marriage restraint act of, 1929 and, 1930.A.D, hindu women's right to property act, 1937.A.D, hindu special marriage disability act, 1946.A.D, special marriage act of, 1954.A.D, hindu marriage act of, 1955.A.D, hindu succession act of, 1956.A.D, dowry prohibition act of, 1961.A.D, maternity benefits act, 1961.A D, equal remuneration act of, 1976.A.D, civil and criminal amendment act of, 1983.A.D. The different acts were passed from time to time only with an aim to secure the position of women. But in most of the areas there seems to no visible change. As per the reports of National Crime Research Bureau, there was increase in the incidents related with women be it dowry or others. In 2005, the number of crimes dealing with women were, 1,55,553. Among the targeted areas where from the crimes were detected are Andhra pradesh, Uttar pradesh, Madhya pradesh, Delhi, Bihar, Bengal, Vijayawada etc. Such happenings have really changed their position from bad to worse. The incidents differ in nature, may it deal with dowry, rape, infanticide etc. They are being exploited and teased despite their immense contribution in every field. Nowadays they are in no way inferior to men; fields of change are open where they can

think in terms of betterment. The status of women in Kashmir is totally different as compared as other parts of country.

The position of women in all periods of Kashmir history was very high, besides being patriarchal in nature. There were no restrictions on the movement of women, they can move freely or even can acquire the knowledge. Seclusion of females was unknown for a long period of time till the emergence of Muslims in society from, 1339.A.D, onwards. They enjoyed a respectable identity in society, as one can realize this very fact that number of them acted as rulers like, Yashovati (wife of King Damodar), Sungdha (904-906.A D), Suryamati (1063.A.D), Didda (980-1003.A.D), and Kota Rani (1338-1339.A.D) etc. Evil customs were not common with the traditional culture of valley. Kalhana has mentioned about the custom of Sati and Prostitution that the inhumane customs were known in some areas of the valley. But the practice was mainly common among the lower strata of society and was disliked by the enlightened souls. Such was the impact of socially sensitive souls that sati got banned, widows were allowed to remarry and from all corners people raised their voice against the prostitute centers. Importantly said system too got eradicated for all the times to come.

The engagements of women clearly presents positive picture of their status. Besides having the better position, they voluntarily used to help their husbands in various economic activities of life, so to have healthy

social structure. Among them the popular activities were grinding of grain, manufacturing of pottery items, shawl work, zardoozi, sozni work etc. They also used to work in fields with males, but the participation of females in agricultural sector was not liked by the educated section of society. The reformers were always in a constant try to educate the women. As regards the education it was open to all irrespective of age, caste and religion. For the purpose Patshalas, Maktabas and later on schools were opened to educate the women. Such was the impact of new tool that almost all the social evils were completely eradicated from Kashmiri society. The period between, 1920-31.A.D, acted as the phase of transition in her status. Mass schooling of young girls and other innovations of earning were introduced in order to make them socially and economically independent and raise them to the position of equality. Through different activities of emancipation the quality of family life got considerably improved. To a greater extent visible changes occurred in the society that ultimately boosted the good image of females among others. With the result overall development engulfed the whole valley. In valley of Kashmir the women possess very very high reputation as compared to others parts of country. Nowadays in each and every sector of life they are ahead of menfolk be it education, technology or other fields. During the medieval period the court of rulers has remained free from the sexual perversities and orgies of debauchery which had been the

prominent feature of Kashmir history. Kashmiri women as such are not struggling for equality with men, as they occupy the same long before. For a number of reservations they are fighting and the same should given to them.

The desire for equality has given birth to number of institutions and organizations from time to time. Discrimination constraints are age old issues faced by females. But the women have hardly any alternative to opt for an independent path for upliftment. Now the question arises what type of equality they are demanding, so to compete with men. In most of the fields they are treated at par with men or they can go ahead. In the fields like, education, technology, employment, administration they can go ahead. If they have to act and react then what for they are struggling. It seems they are having some inner and own problems. The present position of women has rather increased problems in their domestic life like suitable match for marriage, having equal economic status and caste equation. While looking for these qualities a number among them remained unmarried. Every one is aware about the problems faced by those who by chance remained out of marriage system. Without the sacred relation both are incomplete, but a female is having the more religious and social obligations as compared to male.

Employment of women can not solve the age old problems. Women from lower strata are actively involved in several economic activities and

yet they are dependent on menfolk. From my point of view today's society is henpecked. They have already dominated the society at all levels. The need of the hour is to revolutionize the society through different innovations with equal participation of both sexes. That can be achieved only by providing the skilled education in schools at primary and middle level. If they are demanding for identity as a person the social structure of whole country may collapse. Then all religious and social laws need to be amended. Amendment in religious laws is impossible that will definitely create havoc not only in Kashmir but also in the whole of world. The demand of the time is to change the social structure of society not the sacred laws. Only balanced life can provide the same. Actually all people including both male and female have got deviated from religious education. They have ignored the same and are after the modern one only. Better status can be given to women through different steps beginning with welfare, access to resources, awareness and their participation in different social activities. As lord Budha has said that "middle path is the path of success", so we have to maintain the balance between the two. On the whole all people will accept the new social structure with their inner recesses of their hearts. As quoted by Chinese writer Mao, "The day all women in China will stand on their feet is the time for victory of Chinese revolution. Time has changed and today men and women are equal". The same formula can be applied on Kashmir society to have a change in the

position of women. Some of the more advises how to have a healthy, dignified and successful life without the discrimination of gender were provided by the famous Kashmiri poet Pandit Nand Ram or Parmanand (d.1879)quoted by, G.M.D.Sofi in" Kashir being a history of Kashmir,vol.ii " are as,

"Strengthen the field of action
With the loom of righteousness
Then sow the seed of contentment
Which will yield the harvest of bliss"

Conclusion :

The healthy social structure of Kashmir society has provided respectable position to women .Their mass involvement in all the fields ultimately reformed the social set up to a greater extent. With the result development, peace and progress engulfed the whole of Kashmir . Their sincerity has really forced all to adopt changes for all round development irrespective of gender and faith.

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