

A STUDY ON CHANGING ROLE AND POSITION OF INDIAN WOMEN THROUGH REFORM MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Without a study of women's roles and positions, any study of civilization is lacking. Everyone in Indian society is now interested in the status of women as a subject. The status of Indian women in historical context enables us to more clearly demonstrate the phenomena of women having inferior roles, responsibilities, and tasks to men. Indian women's roles are frequently contested, and attitudes range from equality with men to restrictiveness. Numerous manuscripts, some of which date back to 2000 BCE or older, serve as the foundation for Hinduism. The context and particular text have a big impact on how Indian women are positioned. While some books, like Manu Smriti, call for the restriction of women's rights, others, like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, make positive references to the ideal woman. Indian social reformers of the 19th century took up the issue of addressing the appalling status of women. Many upper caste, English-educated individuals in Bengal and Maharashtra were involved at the beginning thanks to Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Regarding Raja Ram Mohan Roy Historiographers have referred to him as the "father of modern India," a "champion of women's rights," and a "feminist," according to Geraldine Forbes.

KEY WORDS: *The Movement, Indian Women, Indian Society, Hinduism.*

INTRODUCTION

The movement for socio-religious reform in India has a long history. The current work, however, is concentrated on the "evolving role and position of Indian women during the reform period." Etymologically, the word "reform" only refers to the formation after a system has been completely destroyed; nonetheless, social reform includes "amendment," "improvement," etc. Thus, it implies nonviolent resistance, gradual reform, and gentle crusading.

Europe saw political, social, and scientific upheaval during the nineteenth century. At the time, British people believed that their dominance of the continent of Africa demonstrated their moral superiority. James Mill suggested that the status of women should be regarded as a gauge of social progress. "Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women. They are held, according, in extreme degradation," wrote Mill in his conclusion.

Indian society was in upheaval during the nineteenth century. Old traditions and customs were deteriorated, and many social ills such as female infanticide, Sati, child marriage, the caste system, purdah, the prohibition on female education, widow remarriage, etc. took their place. Conditions for the advancement of Indian women were quite poor.

India was at that time less revolutionary than nations in the Middle East or Western Europe. If India had any chance, it would result from the adoption of western institutions and ideas. However, very few Western critics of Indian society actually held this view. Therefore, a few changes in gender ideology and how women are really treated must come before any positive change can take place.

In all regions of British India by the second half of the nineteenth century, reform organizations existed. They emphasized topics like Sati, female infanticide, polygamy, child marriage, purdah, restrictions on women's education, and devadasis (temple dancers wed to the Gods), among others. It is a shift from the Medieval Age to the Modern Age because blind faith in present customs, beliefs, and practices was replaced by a spirit of rationalism. Raja Rammohan Roy (1774–1833) is credited for practically starting the social reform movement.

Raja Rammohan Roy's arrival marks the transition from the gloomy medieval ages to the current era of "enlightenment." Raja Rammohan Roy works for the rights of women, particularly against the depraved Sati tradition. He is referred to as the "father of modern India" and a "champion of women's rights" by historians. Ram Mohan Roy was a renowned academic. He was fluent in many languages, including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Universe of the Study Area is roughly created by the Districts under the Colonial British Rule of the former Madras Presidency or the present Tamil Nadu. Madras, Chengalpattu, South Arcot, North Arcot, Tanjore, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Salem, Dharmapuri, Tiruchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Coimbatore and the Nilgiris as Revenue Districts were the Tamil-Speaking portions of the Madras Presidency. This jurisdictional restriction

allowed the scholar, for the purpose of a crisp and thorough analysis, to cut the size of the vast material available for the entire Madras Presidency into a manageable proportion. Within the chronologically scripted related events, this study aims to explore the above theme.

In the Tamil Speaking Districts of the former Madras Presidency during the Colonial British Rule, the scope of the study includes all progressive educational activities under the Administration of Missionaries, the Madras Government and the Imperial Government. It also includes all kinds of education provided with the aid of Missionaries, Private Organizations and Philanthropists by the Colonial Administrators.

The research was carried out on the consultation of primary sources such as records, administrative papers, and statistical abstracts of different Commissions such as the Indian Education Commission, Commission Indian Universities, Census Reports, and District Gazetteers at different offices, manuals, Native News Paper Reports such as Zarnin Ryot, Zanana Patrika, Andhra Patrika, Krishna Patrika and Krishna Patrika.

Materials such as the Administration of the District Boards in the Madras Presidency 1884-1945 have been studied along with many writings by individual authors. Numerous libraries and state archives have been visited for the compilation of knowledge listed above.

PERIOD OF THE STUDY

The focus of the study is the growth of education in Colonial Tamil Nadu from 1854 to 1937. A total of eighty-three years is covered. The research starts its investigation with the 1854 Wood's Despatch, which is called the 'English Education Magna Carta in India'. It also marked the beginning of the Western way of educating people. The study ends in 1937, when in 1937 the Congress Party established the ministry in Madras's presidency. Occasional references to the former presidency of Madras and other parts of India have been made, as the issue under discussion spills over to the presidency of Madras and the rest of India.

SOURCES

The primary sources are Government Orders, Education Census Reports, Public Instruction Reports, Administration Reports, Recommendations of the Reports of the Educational Commissions, Trials, Dispatches, Excerpts of Letters of the Court of Directors, Governor-General and Governor, etc., and Publications of the Governments of the Imperial and Madras. Annual reports from educational departments and universities provide a great deal of information on the growth of education in Tamil Nadu, as well as a great deal of information on progress in various fields. Good information about the different phases of growth is given in government

proceedings. For specific observations on education in general and in particular, the studies of the Educational Commissions are noted.

The secondary sources, along with the skeleton content, are helpful in constructing this dissertation.

METHODS

Both historical and empirical approaches are adopted in writing this thesis and chronology is observed to the highest degree. This study analyses the different steps taken between 1854 and 1937 by the Colonial Government of the Presidency of Madras and the Imperial Government of India to advance education and its growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ROLE OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Gandhi Ji struggled very hard to Understand women's physical and mental pain. When Gandhiji assumed India's leadership the average life span of an Indian woman was only twenty seven years. Babies and the pregnant women ran a high risk of dying young. Child marriage was very common and widows were in very large numbers. Only 2% of the women had any kind of education. In north India, they practiced the Purdah (veil) system.

Child Marriage was considered to be social evil by Gandhi ji, so he propagated against this evil and he wrote, "child marriage is morally and physically a crime, a sin, a social evil. There is need to bring an Act to ban these child marriages. But only Acts cannot bring about the change. A Girl below 18, should not be married."

MAHATMA GANDHI'S EFFORTS FOR THE UPLIFTMENT OF WOMEN

India have produced several notable individuals. Gandhi was a charismatic figure in India. Gandhi was lacking in sincerity, integrity, seriousness, and vigor. His Ahimsa concept allowed him to usher in the Gandhian era. Because they were elitist in nature, the effects of the reform movements mostly affected the upper and middle classes in urban regions. It was up to Mahatma Gandhi's nationalist freedom movement to win over the populace and bring about societal change. The use of non-violence, self-sacrifice, and the metaphor of Mother India, which was applied to all women, were the two main aspects that made it easier for women to participate in the independence struggle on a mass scale. It evoked the common perception among women of a mother giving everything up for her enormous family, in this case, India. All reservations from their immediate relatives were put to rest by the women's presented attributes of kindness and selflessness. Women took part in all aspects of the movement, whether they did it at home or on the streets. The National Congress had equality and respect for women on its

agenda. The importance of women's responsibilities and contributions, as well as the different forms of exploitation and discrimination they had to endure, were brought to light by the Nationalist Movement. This made it much easier for women's issues and concerns to be brought to light and reflected in our Constitution once we gained our independence. Regarding Mahatma Gandhi Future generations could not think that someone like Gandhiji ever existed as a human being in the flesh, according to Albert Einstein. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda, two early reformers who worked toward the emancipation of women, left unfinished business that Gandhi ji picked up. "Women, the destiny of India is far safer in your hands than those of a Government, which has exploited India's resources to the point that she has lost faith in herself," remarked Gandhi ji.

The participation of women in politics is where Gandhiji made his greatest contribution to the fight for the emancipation of women. As a result, Indian women came to understand the importance of living as aware beings and made an effort to break free from the constraints placed on her by society. Women in public affairs and men have created a society in which science is overdeveloped in comparison to human interactions, according to Mrs. Pearl Brick, the wise authoress of "Good Earth." It is time for women to have an impact on society's ideals since they are the only ones who understand the price of creating life and caring for it.

WOMEN AND CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Although India gained its independence on August 15, 1947, its constitution didn't go into effect until January 26, 1950. It clarified India's governmental structure and citizens' rights. It eliminated prejudice against women in the legal and public spheres. Women were protected from sex-based discrimination thanks to fundamental rights. From Article 12 to Article 35 of the Indian Constitution, which applies to all people regardless of sex, are the fundamental rights. The Directive Principle of State Policy embodies the main welfare state objectives, some of which are specifically geared at women.

THE LEGISLATION CONCERNING WOMEN

The Indian government has passed numerous special laws that pertain to women in order to safeguard constitutional rights. The labor laws of our nation and the labor department safeguard the men and women who belong to the working class. The major goals of passing laws are to give women the opportunity to live wealthier lives that are comparable to those of males, to boost their productivity, and to promote their involvement in beneficial services. The following are significant labor laws that affect women:

- **The 1948 Factories Act:**

The Factory Act is a piece of labor welfare legislation that lays forth policies to be taken for young people's and women's employment, working hours, leave, and health and safety welfare. In factories, mines, and plantations, this act restricts women to working until 6 p.m., unless the state and federal governments approve an extension. Facilities for working women are included in the Factories Act, and there are provisions to provide lavatory and urinal facilities for women at the workplace.

- **Act of 1948 establishing Employees State Insurance:**

This Act, which was passed to provide for numerous benefits under various scenarios, is one of the most significant pieces of social legislation in India. women workers who are covered by this Act. Additionally to these advantages, however, in the event of certain unforeseen circumstances like as confinement, miscarriage, illness resulting from pregnancy, confinement, early birth of a child or miscarriage, and death. In the event of confinement, insured women are eligible for maternity benefits for a total of 12 weeks, not to exceed six weeks prior to the anticipated date of confinement. The covered woman must agree to refrain from working for pay on the days the maternity benefit is paid in order for the payment to be paid. The maternity benefit is paid to the insured woman's nominee or legal representative in the event of her death for the entire term if the child survives and for the entire period if the child also dies until the child's death.¹⁰⁶ Despite the existence of laws covering employment, pay, working conditions, social security, welfare, and other facets of labor, not all of them are specifically geared toward women.

INSTITUTIONS THAT WANTED REFORMS:

BRAHMO SAMAJ:-

Raja Rammohan Roy establishes the "Atmiya Sabha" (Association of Friends) in 1815. He founds the "Brahmo Sabha" in 1828, subsequently known as the "Brahmo Samaj." He was the first to take action to oppose Sati practice, and it quickly turned into his lifelong cause. He stoked public outrage and referenced the scriptures to demonstrate that this behaviour was against Hindu doctrine. Sir William Bentinck, the Governor General of India, then stood by him. By enacting the 17th Regulation Act in December 1829, Lord Bentinck was able to successfully eradicate "Sati" in Bengal.

YOUNG BENGAL MOVEMENT

This movement is started by young Anglo-Indian instructor Henry Vivian Derozio (1809–1831) at a Hindu institution. Derozians were the name given to his adherents. The Derozians were adamantly opposed to the

prevalent caste system, Pardah pratha, polygamy, child marriage, idolatry, and other traditional Hindu practices of the time. They advocated for the abolition of Sati, widow remarriage, and female education.

PRARTHANA SAMAJ

In Maharashtra, it was founded in 1867 by Dr. Atmaram Pandurang (1823–1898). It's a branch of the Brahmo Samaj. The primary Samaj pillars were R.G. Bhandarkar and Mahadev Govinda Ranade. Under Ranade's (1842–1901) direction, the prarthana samaj actively participates in social reform. They supported women's education, widow remarriages, caste equality, opposed child marriage, and elevated the status of women from marginalized castes.

ARYA SAMAJ

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883) established the Arya Samaj in 1875. In particular, the Brahmin priesthood, rituals, pilgrimages, and restrictions on widow remarriage and female education were vigorously contested. Reformers established separate Arya samajes in Delhi, Lahore, and other North Indian cities within a short period of time. Dayananda Saraswati promoted female education and denounced practices he believed to be disrespectful to women.

PANDIT ISHWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR & OTHER REFORMERS:

Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891) was raised in a traditional Hindu Brahmin family, although his viewpoint was fairly liberal. He is referred to as Daya-sagar, or "Ocean of Kindness," for his acts of generosity and philanthropy. He devoted his entire life to improving the situation of Hindu society's child widows. He works hard to improve the lot of Indian women in particular. Ishwar Chandra launched a ferocious campaign in support of widow remarriage in 1855. The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, which made it legal for Hindu widows to remarry, was passed by Governor-General of India Lord Dalhousie in the face of fierce resistance. In the environment Vidyasagar lived in, male members of the kulin Brahmin caste—an aristocratic group with strict marriage laws—were in high demand as bridegrooms and permitted to wed as many women as they liked.

JYOTIBA PHULE, 1827–1890

Jyotiba Phule was a key figure in Maharashtra's reform movement. He campaigned for the welfare of untouchables, the underprivileged, and women. He raised Savitribai Phule, his wife, to become his closest ally. Phule creates schools specifically for women since he supports their education. To rescue the scheduled caste from upper caste

persecution, he established the Satyashodhak samaj (Truth Seeker's association). Additionally, he is remembered for his work to encourage widow remarriage. He is thought to have been the first Hindu to build an orphanage for needy kids.

RESOLUTIONS AMONG PARSIS:

Religious reforms among Parsis were started in the middle of the 19th century by Narouji Furdonji, Dadabai Naoroji, S.S. Bengalee, and others. In 1851, they established the Rehnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha, often known as the Religious Reform Association. They were crucial in the growth of education, particularly among girls. This Association spearheaded the modernization of Parsi social conventions relating to women's education, marriage, and general social passion on the part of women. It also waged a fight against the entrenched orthodoxy in the religious sphere. Over time, the Parsis emerged as one of Indian society's most forward-thinking communities. India was then included in the British empire's "Civilizing Mission," which gave women a major role. Scholars have referred to this as the "women question," or "how can they be modernized?"

REFORM MOVEMENT AMONG SIKHS

THE NIRANKARIS

A movement for cleansing and restoration called the Nirankaris was started by Baba Dayal Das (1783–1855). Dayal Das was nurtured as a devout, religiously focused youngster and was born into the Malhotra Khatri family in Peshawar. Sikhism, according to Dayal Das, is a degenerate religion rife with myth, superstition, and mistake. He emphasized the worship of God as Nirankar (formless) and urged for the restoration of Sikhism to its founding principles in the 1840s. Therefore, this method condemned idols, idolatry-related rites, and Brahman priests who performed these ceremonies.

DEV SAMAJ

An offshoot of Brahma Samaj, Dev Atma created it in 1887. Dev Atma was a Brahma who had left the Samaj in 1878 under the name Shiv Narayan Agnihotri. The Dev Samaj anticipated engaging in intercaste unions. He established the marriage age at 20 for boys and 16 for girls in an effort to end child marriage. Agnihotri forbade extravagant dowries, women's isolation, and their customary funeral ceremonies. After his husband passed away, he preached that widow marriage was permissible and later wed a widow himself. On October 29, 1899, the Dev Samaj built a coeducational school in Moga to promote the education of women. Dev Samaj provided education

to a significant number of women. In this way, the Dev Samaj brought about a synthesis of religious heritage with radical social transformation, particularly in the position of women.

SINGH SABHA

An American Presbyterian Mission was founded in Ludhiana in 1838. It had expanded its operations from Malwa to the Majha region of Punjab as soon as Punjab was annexed. In 1873, four Sikh pupils at the Amritsar Mission School offered to become Christians. The Singh Sabha of Amritsar was established as a result of this, with its first meeting occurring in October 1873. An active struggle for women's freedom was launched by this sabha. Among the behaviors that impeded women's liberation and advancement were female infanticide, child marriage, the purdah system, polygamy, and widowhood. The Singh Sabha reformers went to considerable lengths to portray Sikh women as being in a clearly superior position to their Muslim and Hindu counterparts. The Singh Sabha started a campaign against the purdah practice, which denied women the opportunity to take part in community sociocultural activities. The orthodox segment of the Sikh community first opposed the Singh Sabha leaders vehemently. Giani Ditt Singh began ferocious oppositional propaganda to the purdah.

SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT IN TAMILNADU

This was started by E.V. Ramasamy "Periyar" in 1925 as a campaign to increase awareness among Tamil Nadu's downtrodden castes. Periyar Self-Respect Conference for Women was launched by E.V. Ramasamy, who also approved a resolution urging the government to end the societal injustices against women. To aid in achieving economic freedom, he founded a technical training facility. Ramamirthammal, one of his followers, began the anti-nautch movement to free the oppressed women under the Devadasi regime. She built them a rehabilitation facility so they could resume their normal lives.

PANDITA RAMA BAI (1858-1922)

She was raised by her parents, who were both excellent teachers, in a Brahmin family that was highly progressive. She knew Sanskrit well and could memorize 10,000 verses before turning ten. She was a scholar in Sanskrit at the age of sixteen. She picked up Bengali and Hindustani as well as Marathi and Kannada. She traveled around India with her brother, speaking to sizable crowds about women's education. Her knowledge and research were highly valued by conservative men who had previously resisted women's higher education. For the purpose of promoting women's education, she traveled to Bombay Presidency. She spoke in 1881 before the Sir William Hunter-led

Education Commission, highlighting the urgency of reforms like the outlawing of child marriage and the promotion of women's education.

WORKS OF MISSIONARIES

Christian missionaries highlighted social ills and practices that have been shown to be detrimental to the advancement of Indian women. Missionaries educated British officials to end these societal ills in India and England. The public's support for the elimination of evils and social traditions was also aroused by missionaries. When Reverend E. Starrow visited India in 1848, he said that the discord in that country was due to women's subordinate status. According to Starrow, the boldness and virtue of strong nations like Israel, Rome, and Western Europe came from the elevated status given to women.⁸⁵ Missionaries pushed the government to raise the legal age of marriage. As a result, the 1872 Indian Christian Marriage Act was enacted. According to this Act, no marriage should be legalized if any of the intended spouses is under the age of 18. Both parties' consent for a Christian marriage was made absolutely necessary. Because of this, Christians were unable to engage in early marriage.

CONCLUSION

The constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, sets forth rules for hiring practices and employment conditions for those working for the union and state governments, regardless of gender considerations. In terms of the fair options guaranteed to employees to defend themselves in the event of a dismissal, removal, rank reduction, etc. during the course of their employment, it is very obvious.⁹⁵ By giving men and women the same rights and opportunities in the political, economic, and social realms, our constitution promotes gender equality. Additionally, discrimination against any person on the basis of sex, religion, ethnicity, caste, etc. is prohibited by Article 96 of the Indian Constitution. It gives the state the authority to discriminate positively against women. In terms of public appointments, the Indian Constitution guarantees equality of opportunity. It requires the state to provide equal remuneration for equal effort as well as a means of subsistence to men and women. The Indian Constitution requires the state to establish policies that guarantee fair and compassionate working conditions and maternity leave. Every citizen is likewise required by Article 101 of the Constitution to abandon behaviors that are offensive to women's dignity. Thus, the Indian Constitution has done a wonderful job of protecting women.

There are numerous reforms that were implemented throughout India in significant efforts on behalf of women. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar promoted female education in Bengal and spearheaded the movement to legalize widow remarriage. Keshub Chandra Sen, a Brahma Samaj leader, worked to redefine women's roles through schools,

prayer gatherings, and living experiments. Swami Vivekananda, the founder of an aggressive order of Hindu monasticism, claimed that women could exert a potent regenerative force around the turn of the century.

At that time, a movement was established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, and several other social workers for the education of women, the abolition of the sati system, the restriction of polygamous unions, etc. Parliament passed laws to combat sati, allow widows to remarry, and prevent child marriage as a result of this. The improvements in women's lives are the result of numerous reasons, including women's education, the reform movement, women's engagement in politics, and numerous social laws.

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