A Review: On Women Empowerment in Indian History

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Abstract: *Empowerment refers to increasing the economic, political, social, educational, gender, or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. The term covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and disciplines ranging from psychology and philosophy to the highly commercialized self-help industry and motivational sciences. Sociological empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through for example discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Empowerment as a methodology is often associated with feminism. Sometimes groups are marginalized by society at large, but governments are often unwitting or enthusiastic participants. This Act made it illegal to restrict access to schools and public places based on race. Equal opportunity laws actively oppose such marginalized. Equal opportunity laws which actively oppose such marginalization, allow increased empowerment to occur. They are also a symptom of minorities and women's empowerment through lobbying.*

Key Words: *Empowerment, Feminism, Gender, Sociological, commercialized*

I. Introduction:

Marginalized people who lack self-sufficiency become, at a minimum, dependent on charity, or welfare. They lose their self-confidence because they cannot be fully self-supporting. The opportunities denied to them also deprive them of the pride of accomplishment that others, who have those opportunities, can develop for themselves. This in turn can lead to psychological, socialaccomplishment which others, who have those opportunities, can develop for themselves. This in turn can lead to psychological, social and even mental health problems. Empowerment is then the process of obtaining these basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by those people or through the help of non-marginalized others who share their access to these opportunities. It also includes actively thwarting attempts to deny those opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively.

History of Women Empowerment in India: Most women across the globe rely on the informal work sector for an income. If women were empowered to do more and be more, the possibility of economic growth becomes apparent. Empowering women in developing countries is essential to reduce global poverty as women represent most of the world's poor population. Eliminating a significant part of a nation's workforce on the sole basis of gender can have detrimental effects on the economy of that nation. In addition, female participation in counsels, groups, and businesses will increase efficiency. For a general idea on how empowered women can impact a situation monetarily, a study found that of Fortune 500 companies, "those with more women board directors had significantly higher financial returns, including 53 per cent higher returns on equity, 24 per cent higher returns on sales and 67 per cent higher returns on invested capital (OECD, 2008). This study showed the impact women can have on the overall economic benefits of a company. If implemented on a global scale, the inclusion of women in the formal workforce (like a Fortune 500 company) can increase the economic output of a nation. Therefore, women can also help businesses grow and economies prosper if they have, and if they can use, the right knowledge and skills in their employment.

Barriers to the empowerment of women Many of the barriers to women's empowerment and equity lie ingrained in cultural norms. Many women feel these pressures, while others have become accustomed to being treated as inferior to men. Even if men, legislators, NGOs, etc. are aware of the benefits women's empowerment and participation can have, many are scared of disrupting the status quo and continue to let societal norms get in the way of development.

Research shows that increasing access to the internet can also result in an increased exploitation of women. Releasing personal information on websites has put some women's safety at risk. In 2010, Working to Halt Online Abuse stated that 73% of women were victimized through such sites. Types of victimization include cyber stalking, harassment, online pornography, and flaming. Recent studies also show that women face more barriers in the workplace than do men. Gender-related barriers involve sexual harassment, unfair hiring practices, career

progression, and unequal pay where women are paid less than men are for performing the same job." Such barriers make it difficult for women to advance in their workplace or receive fair compensation for the work they provide.

Studies on the emancipation of women and their empowerment are the need of the hour to bring meaningful socioeconomic change and achieve a healthy society as well as sustainable development. "Women can do anything and everything these days". Today's woman is proving herself worthy of this statement and is doing everything humanly possible both at the workplace as well as at the home She is taking various incompatible tasks efficiently. Women are known for multitasking skills and abilities. There were great many leaders in the world that upheld in those values. There have been men with such values in the history of India. Among them a special mention must be made of Basaveshwara and Dr. Ambedkar.

The early Vedic period gives somewhat a bright picture regarding women, they enjoyed equal rights with men, participating in different spheres. Both husband and wife enjoyed the property rights. Re-marriage of widows was allowed. Women enjoyed a high status before 300 BCE but after 300 BCE there was a sudden shift in their status. In Manu's code, a woman ceased to be a man's equal in her own right. The woman was a morally low creature. She was not fit for independence. She was not entitled to offer prayers, to practice penances, to undertake pilgrimages to recite Vedic mantras to worship gods. There was no approval of widow remarriage inter-caste marriage upanayana for a girl, and the right to secure education. She was also denied the right to study the scriptures child marriage, widowhood and sati systems were in vogue, she was protected by her father in childhood by her husband in youth and by her sons in old age. The woman was to worship her husband altogether, her position was one of subordination and equivalent to the Sudra. "Women came to be categorized as a weaker sex, inferior in intellect and domestic chattel and property of the master". Gradually women were relegated to the four walls of the kitchen, and they were debarred from spiritual and religious quests. They were subjected to many social evils and were forced to become devadasis - and prostitutes and Sati, Johar etc., without giving any scope for them to contribute to the collective wisdom of the society on par with men. In the 18th century, which was aptly known as the age of reason or enlightenment, there arose what we call liberal feminism during which, the first serious and systematic work in the cause of women was done. ry Wollstonecraft, in her work "A Vindication the Rights of Women" published in 1792 declared that "Women are first and foremost human beings and not sexual, women are rational creatures. They are capable of governing themselves by reason.

The status of women was not similar throughout Indian history. It went on changing positively due to the efforts of reformist movements launched by Bhakti saints like Meera bai, Kabir and others, the Sharana movement headed by Basaveshwara, social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr B. R. Ambedkar and host of others. The existing relations between the sexes the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement that it ought to be replaced by the perfect equality admitting no power or privilege on one side nor The human society is everywhere composed of males and females and the society is stratified based on sex. Women constitute half of the population and thus, a significant segment of every society. Hence, their status, role and position determine the progress and development of the society as well as identify the culture and values on which the society is based.

This article explains how women excelled in social spheres along with men and how changes occurred in her position since Manu and further deteriorated and subjected to suppression throughout Indian History. At the same time, it attempts to picturise the status of women in pre and post-independent India and the changes in their status. India has a long past civilization and in every stage of its history, women constitute half of its population, but their position in society is not the same in all the ages of history. Their position has been variously expressed regarding their place in different stages of Indian civilization. Several factors including foreign invasions for centuries together, social movements, various geographic regions, different economic occupations, political stability and instability and religious affinity of the family to which women belong have greatly influenced her status in the family as well as in the community.

However, for the sake of analysis, the position of women in India can be studied in different phases of history, namely, Ancient India, Medieval India, British India, and post-independent India. The present Women in Ancient and Medieval India More than two thousand years ago, the Rigveda, the Upanishad, Kautilya's Arthasastra and many other writings reveal that women in India enjoyed a fair measure of equality with men in all spheres of human activity and religious, teaching and learning, even war and statecraft. The Rig Veda propagated that reality consists of two aspects, that is, male and female. Except in Hindu religious scriptures, no where it is written that males and females are counterparts of each other, both are complimentary to each other and both in the form of Shiva and Sakti constitute Nature. Hindu religion provides the concept of unity of male and female, which equally contributes for sustaining Reality. Further, the woman in traditional religious belief has been regarded as the Universal Mother. The common metaphor used to describe her is Prithivi (Mother Earth), who upholds all living and non-living beings. Finally, she is portrayed as Prakriti, while the male is described as

Purusa. Hence, Prakriti and Purusa, female and male together constitute the Reality or Nature. This religious dictate determined the equal virtue of women in the family and society. During the Vedic period, education was imparted to both male and female children. The education of women was looked upon as so important that the Atharva Veda asserts that "the success of woman in her married life depends upon her proper training during the Brahmacharya." Hence, the girls like the boys had to undergo the initiation, the Samskar, Upanayan and Brahmacharya. They were also allowed to perform Sandhya rites like the male persons. Women thus, learnt and recited Vedas and took part in conferences and deliberations and in this context, the names of Even when, Buddhism and Jainism were spread in ancient India, both these religions did not make any gender discrimination, so far as education and religious preaching were concerned.

II.   Conclusion:

The women during- this period undertook equal pain as male missionaries by travelling far and wide to preach the messages of Lord Buddha. They led a life of celibacy and became prophets of the Holy Scriptures. The Buddhist history still carries the messages of the famous nun Amrapalli and the missionary Sanghamitra, daughter of King Ashok who even reached Ceylon to spread Buddhist teachings. Similar was the case of Jainism, missionary Sanghamitra, daughter of King Ashok who even reached Ceylon to spread Buddhist teachings. Similar was the case of Jainism, as one of the Great 24 Tirthankars of Jainism was Mali, daughter of King Videha. Not only were the women of ancient India imparted with religious education, but they were also well equipped with military and administrative training. Of course, the women of ruling elite-class families were given this type of training. To give an illustration, we may cite from history Dowager Queens, Nayanika of Satavahana dynasty (2nd century BCE), Prabhavati Gupta of Vakataka family (4th-century CE.), Vijayabhattarika of Chalukya House (7th-century CE.), and Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir (10th-century CE.), who successfully administered extensive kingdoms. The social status of women during this period was also very

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