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Status of Women Through Ages in India

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ABSTRACT

Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man. She has the right of freedom and liberty as he. By sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying superiority over women, which they do not deserve and ought not to have.

The growth of socio-political consciousness among Indian women got further impetus when Gandhi organized the mass struggle for freedom. He wanted men and women to co – operate for the welfare of India. His struggle was not confined to any particular group or class but to Indian women as whole. Women’s status in India society had a checkered history, from pardah slavery, sati, deva das I system, it has achieved equal status with men. Thus India has gone a long way in pioneering efforts for improving the status of women and bringing them into the mainstream of development. Women came out of their homes to join the freedom struggle. Women thus came out of their seclusion. There were distinct ages of rise and fall in the status of women in Indian context. The present study mainly aimed to trace the changing status of women over a period of time.

KEY WORDS – Growth, Status, Customs, Seclusion

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INTRODUCTION

Women in the Vedic period :-

The position of women in ancient India can be found from the Vedas the bedrock of Indo Aryan civilization (2500-1500 B.C), the age of Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads, epics and smritis (500 B.C – 500 A.N) and the later commentators and digest writers (500 A.D – 1800 A.D). The position of women was fairly satisfactory at the dawn of civilization during the Vedic age. A woman was man's friend, his co-worker and never his inferior. She had enjoyed property rights, and she also struggled against the political as well as social problems freely with man women went to gurukula to receive education and married only after getting education. During Vedic period age women occupied a high position in society. Women had equal rights with men and in matter of selecting the life partner. The marriage of girls used to take place at the age of 16 or 17. Pre-puberty marriage were uncommon in this period. In Vedic age marriage was considered as a social and religious institution women had an absolute equality with men in the eyes of religion. In social and religious functions women occupied a prominent position. In the Vedic age widow remarriage was practiced and women had the privilege of adopting a child.

During the post Vedic period:

In the post Vedic period the status of women deteriorated considerably. During this period women completely dependent on man and subjected her to the authority of a father, wife and mother. The outstanding change has been the change from freedom to bandage and from honour to disgrace. A women was neither entitled for divorce nor for adoption. Child marriage became prominent during this period. The revival of sati, early child marriage and great prevalence of polygamy made her position very bad.

Ideologically women considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no significance, no personality, socially, she was kept in a state of oppressed and suppressed women were economically, socially, educationally and politically dependent on men.

Medieval Period:

During this period Muslims ruled the country. Thus Muslim culture, customs are very much influence on the social life of an individuals. They brought with them the purdah system, polygamy, child marriage, lack of girls education and women's property rights. They also allowed women to watch functions like mushaira(poetic symposia) through pigeon holes of partition walls in the durbar halls so that they could see the men in action but could not be seen by them. During this period one also hears about the part played by women, in politics and administration despite the prevalence of the purdah system. Indian social life was influence by Islam culture.

British period :

The Britishers first adopted a policy of non-interference in the social and religious life of the people. So that they can win their co-operation in the administration of the country. This led the women to go down imperceptibly in social status. Cooking, child bearing and rearing and catering to the relatives, in-laws and husband, comprised their work and life. They had practically no idea of the ever changing world outside, except what they learned from their men folk.

During this period the woman was treated as an appendage of man with a distinct and meekly accepted conception of her family duties and obligation. She did not have even the haziest awareness of her rights in the early years of British rule in India. The decline in the Indian women's status clearly evident in the customs relating to marriage religion, and property, widow hood, dowry, role in the family, basic attitude, with respect to the social image of woman etc. The spread of education was an essential characteristic of British rule.

Status of women after Independence:

The status of women in Independent India occupies an important role and all efforts are being made to establish the significant place that she can play in the upliftment of her own self and the society at large. The preamble to the constitution of India resolved to secure all of its citizens. "Social, economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunities, dignity of the individual and the unity of nation." Indian women are entitled to these rights just as men are.

Many social legislation such as the Hindu marriage Act, 1955, the Hindu succession Act, 1956, Dowry prohibition act, 1961, the family court Act, 1984, the equal remuneration Act, 1976 etc have brought on the statute books for removing various constraints, which hinder women's progress, special provisions under the different plans have been made to uplift the position of women many socio-economic programmes were also started under the plans. These programmes aim at providing special facilities to women for education, health, training and opportunities of gainful employment.

CONCLUSION :-

Women's status, development and their participation equally on par with men will provide a holistic perspective not only to the development of women but to society as a whole, of which women constitute around half the population. The reason for women's subordinate status is the fact that they are not only economically exploited but also socio-culturally oppressed. Subordination of women in all walks of life manifests itself the marginalization of women in the economy on the other hand, What we need today is socio-economic development of the country with women. For this the potentialities and capabilities of women have to be fully tapped. The need of the hour is, thus, to create conditions for women to be self-reliant

and self-confident. The equality and dignity of women shall have to be maintained at any cost to seek their full cooperation in the process of nation —building. This requires proper education to women about their rights and duties. One of the biggest problems, facing women in India is a sense of insecurity. As long as women feels insecure, she cannot come up in life. The economic independence creates confidence and provides social security. The voluntary organizations, should take up concrete steps, if necessary collaboration with the governmental agencies to provide more and more employment opportunities to women.

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