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3. Changing Role of Women

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Abstract

There is the major role of women in India. She is playing a role of four-fold status-role sequences. These were her role is daughter, wife, housewife (homemaker), and mother. The woman, whose status and role traditionally was well defined and almost fixed in the society, is now experiencing far-reaching changes. The woman in modern times is entering into certain new fields that were unknown to the woman's sphere of role-sets. They are activating participating in social, economic, and political activities.

The women of the present generation have received higher education than the women of their preceding generation. There have been far-reaching consequences in the economic status of their families.

Introduction

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." — Swami Vivekananda

Women are not born, but made. With the whole world celebrating International Women's Day with great pomp and show, it would be only apt to analyse the position and space Indian women occupy today, and comparing it to the time 60 years ago when the country had just gained independence. With women participating in nationalist movements, to being pushed into the domestic household space, to their resurgence as super-women today, women in our country have seen it all.

While on one hand, India has seen an increased percentage of literacy among women, and women are now entering professional fields, the practices of female infanticide, poor health conditions and lack of education still persisting still continue. Even the patriarchal ideology of the home being a woman's 'real domain' and marriage being her ultimate destiny hasn't changed much. The matrimonial advertisements, demanding girls of the same caste, with fair skin and slim figure, or the much criticised fair and lovely ads, are indicators of the slow changing social



mores. If one looks at the status of women then and now, one has to look at two sides of the coin; one side which is promising, and one side which is bleak.

Women in India slowly started recognising her true potential. She has started questioning the rules laid down for her by the society. As a result, she has started breaking barriers and earned a respectable position in the world. Today Indian women have excelled in each and every field from social work to visiting space station. There is no arena, which remains unconquered by Indian women. Whether it is politics, sports, entertainment, literature, technology everywhere, its women power all along.

Today names like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shobhaa De, Jhumpa Lahiri can put any other writer to shame. In the field of cinema, women like Rekha, Smita Patil, Shabana Aazmi and Vidya Balan and Konkona Sen are such names who don't play feminised roles, but have asserted themselves over this male-dominated realm. In the field of Politics, from Indira Gandhi to Shiela Dixit, Uma Bharti, Jayalalithaa, Vasundhara Raje and Mamata Banerjee today, women are making their presence felt.

Here we discuss changing role of women in some aspect.

Women's Role in Society: The modern women are inclined towards the social issues, and trying hard to improve the social status of women at large. Increased awareness and education has inspired women to come out of the four walls of the home. Many woman actively supported and participated in the nationalist movement and secured eminent positions and offices in administration and public life in free India. Traditionally Indian women exist because of the family and for the family.

Just like their man counterpart, women are also fond of attending social functions and value her social life quite a lot. Previously, men-folk used to discourage women from leaving their households for attending social functions. Now the spread of education, especially that of women, and with that the changing social attitudes of educated women have changed the order.

Woman as a wife: Woman as a wife enjoyed ideally a status almost equally to that of her husband and performed both social as well as biological functions. Even today, the Indian girls are still brought up on models portraying selflessness, self-denial, and sacrifice. The desire for mutual affection and love is beginning to appear in their conception of their relationship with their husbands. The husband-wife relationship has become more equalitarian in character and



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much more companionable. More freedom of choice in marriage is thus an accompaniment to the change in form of the family.

Women's role in politics: Education of women has not only helped them to become aware of the political problems, but they are gradually becoming active participants in the political life. Some are enrolling themselves as members of political parties, attending party meetings, conventions, and carrying out political programs. Some women are attaining influential political stature of their own and have become instrumental in shaping the public opinion for the betterment of women's conditions in society.

Participation of Women in Socio-economic activities: The woman in modern times is entering into certain new fields that were unknown to the woman's sphere of role-sets. These are the woman's participation in economic, political, and social life. The modern woman keenly desires to enter into a work career because of the pressing economic needs of the family. In middle class families, much emphasis is given to the maintenance of high standard of living. To fulfil the economic needs of the family and to achieve higher standard of living the woman participates in economic activities.

Marriage: Most women, even the educated, regard marriage as a matter of parental choice. Many young girls of the middle and upper classes are educated with a view to marriage rather than to careers. Again, many girls enter into careers apparently not because they want them, but because there is nothing else to be done until their parents find them husbands.

Women equality is not universal: Women's equality in terms of education, employment, and power is still an individual rather than a universal achievement. The majority of our women are still content to accept an inferior status. This is by and large due to the fact that, although legally women have equal rights with men, there are not enough jobs for women and working women are not adequately protected from exploitation.

Unaware of their legal status: Women are generally not aware of the provisions related to the improvement of their own position. Even if they know about some of the provisions related to their rights of succession, marriage, or family, they do not desire to invoke them. Traditional dominance of the authority of the male parents, husband, and other elder members of the family often restricts the enjoyment of their legal rights by the women. The materialization of these problems still depends largely upon the attitudinal changes in society.



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Rural women: Gandhi's vision that women must play an equal and important role in national development. However, the movement for raising the socio-economic status of women had involved generally the middle-class educated women in major urban centres while the great mass of rural women are yet to enjoy the rights and privileges as enshrined in the Constitution.

Role of Women Welfare Organizations: Among the national level, the important organizations are Young Women Christian Association, All India Women's Conference, National Council of Women, Inner Wheel (Women's section of the Rotary International). In many cities, local organizations exist such as Mahila Mandal, Mahila Samiti, and Recreation Clubs, etc.

Conclusion

Educated women are just on the threshold of transition from tradition to modernity. The women themselves desire that their status and position in society should rise higher. Though a proper climate for such a change is still wanting, yet there have been many structural and statutory innovations for the improvement of their position. The traditional status and role sets of women are breaking up and new role-sets based on achievement, independence and equality are gradually coming up.

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