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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Title	Page No.
1	Backward and Forward Marketing Patterns, Hurdles and Resultant Net Negative Returns for Agricultural Produce by the Farmers' Suicides Affected Victim's Households from Maharashtra Dr. Dnyandev C. Talule	1-23
2	Agricultural Sustainability and Livelihood Security of Sangli District: An Empirical Illustration Using SLSI Approach Dr. M. S. Deshmukh, Digvijay Patil, Ajay Kumbhar	24-54
3	Impact of Covid-19 on Indian Print Media Dr. Shivaji Jadhav	55-65
4	Understanding Indian Feminism Through Historical Perspective Dr. S. R. Kattimani	66-73
5	The Role of social Media in disaster management: A study of social Media Page 'Kolhapur Flood Victims' Dr. Sumedha S. Salunkhe	74-81
6	स्वच्छ भारत अभियान के प्रति विभिन्न वर्गों के विद्यार्थियों की शारीरिक एवं पर्यावरणीय जागरूकता का अध्ययन (इंदौर जिले के परिप्रेक्ष्य में) डॉ. वीरेन्द्र जैन	82-91
7	Central State Fiscal Transfers: A Case Study of General Category States across Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Finance Commissions Shrivardhini D. Talule	92-124

4

Understanding Indian Feminism Through Historical Perspective

Dr. S. R. Kattimani

Abstract:-

Women have had a special place in society since the beginning of human civilization. The role of women in the society is symbolic of teachers, pastoralists, assistant artisans, maids, etc. This paper intends to illustrate the changing role of women in different eras in India. Assessing the status of Indian women from a historical perspective is a need of the time. Because the history of the contribution of women from all arenas of life is neglected and incomplete. The truth is that they struggled with constant adversity and restored themselves. It is well said that, one is not born as a woman but rather becomes a woman. Although women's empowerment is a key issue in a modern country like India, it is often ridiculed. People with chauvinist tendencies make a lot of fun of feminist topics. The secondary importance of women is often highlighted in the media and advertisements. This paper throws light on Understanding Indian Feminism through Historical Perspective.

Keywords:- Symbolic, Maids, Adversity, Empowerment, Feminism...

I. Introduction:-

In the history of ancient India, the status of women and their socio-familial contributions were considered important even in prehistoric times. Although, nature has gifted women with the power of creativity i.e. the power to give birth to offspring, it has made some distinctions between man and woman. Still, women have proved their worth over time. In invention of agricultural activity, the role of women was important, just as in the process of village formation and human socialization in the Neolithic Age. Historical evidences show that there was a matriarchal family system in India during the Indus

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II. Result and Discussion :-

Valley Civilization:

In the case of the position of woman in ancient India and in the context of women, we see that in Smriti Grantha, a woman is referred as a womb. And by glorifying her motherhood she was later worshiped. When we look at the nature of male-centric psychological expression, we see that culturalization and socialization have a significant effect on the expression of individuals. No expression can be socially neutral when this culture is absolute. Individuals express their feelings according to their temperament as well as their gender within the socio-cultural framework. Therefore, in understanding feminism from an Indian perspective, we have to consider the following.

Vedic Woman:-

Vedic literature shows that in the Vedic period, women had an important place in society, in families and in politics and had the right to education. We understand from the historical literature that there were Vidushi women like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra in the society. In ancient literature we find the concept of Swayamvar i.e. marry a woman with groom of her choice out of the set of suitable candidates; Which shows women had freedom of marriage. Women also play an important role in the Vedic political organization 'Sabha and Samiti'. Overall, in the Vedic period, women had social, political, family and educational rights and freedom.

Contributions of Jainism and Buddhism to Women's Development:

Due to the social and religious rigidity, complexity and rituals of women's liberation in the post-Vedic Period B.C. In the early sixth century, new religions, Jainism and Buddhism emerged in India. Historical evidence shows that Jainism and Buddhism adopted a liberal approach to women. For women these two religions made available an access to the disciplined spiritual practices which means the salvation through sadhana. Like male monks, female monks (Nuns) were made independent by removing obstacles in the way of living in monasteries, meditating and attaining salvation. The Therigatha in Buddhism is the best evidence of this.

Buddhist Sangha's:-

While interpreting Buddhism and philosophy in the context of Indian feminism from a feminist point of view, one has to use Pali texts like Therigatha Paramthadipani as well as Sanskrit texts written by Buddhist scholars like Nagarjuna and Subandhu, Dignag and Dharmakirti. Gautama Buddha admitted women to the Sangha. The women like Khema, Uppalvanna, Dhammadinna etc. who joined the Sangha proved Buddha's faith. The women of the Buddhist community were not only qualified to attain Nirvana, but were also very intelligent and communicative. In Buddhism, women were never underestimated because they were women, whereas in the Buddhist community, women lived very safe lives.

On the one hand, the Buddhist Sangha was a guide for those who wanted to attain Nirvana, and on the other hand, it was the one who established ethics in the society through Buddhism. Buddhism was a role model for the society by his own conduct. There has never been any discrimination in the Buddhist community regarding caste or gender. In short, in Indian culture, it can be said that Gautama Buddha and Buddhism were the first to open the door of salvation for women by treating them with respect.

Maurya & Gupta Period:-

The Maurya and Gupta periods are considered important in the formation of Indian women and in their social, political and economic developments. It is during this period that the restrictions on women created during the post-Vedic period became more oppressive. In the course of time, women's right to education was taken away from them. Many social, political, and religious restrictions were imposed on her. During this period, the political importance and participation of women remained nominal. A Woman was considered a consumable item. Her personal freedom was taken away and she was paralyzed.

Post Gupta Period:-

The post-Gupta period saw political chaos in India. Taking advantage of this, many foreign rulers and invaders invaded India. At the time of this foreign invasion, social restrictions on Indian women became even stronger. From the inscriptions of Iran, we

find the first written evidence of Sati, the wife of Bhanu Gupta, the Gupta king's general, was killed. Earlier in the Mahabharata, Madri, the princess of the Madra Kingdom and the wife of the Pandu king, is an example of sati.

Due to foreign invasions, the female yoke was created by many social constraints such as pardha practice, child marriage. Looking at the historical pages from post-Vedic times, it can be seen that women's economic dependence has brought a hammer on her social and political freedom. Financially, women were deprived of independence as they were dependent on their father, husband in their youth and on son in her old age. These restrictions appear to be exacerbated by the small contribution of women in trade, commerce and industry.

Sultanate Period:-

In the early days of the Sultanate, India was ruled by female politicians like Razia Sultana. But this proportion is very small. Razia Sultana was assassinated because male-dominating chiefs did not like it. Due to the political instability created during the Sultanate period, many oppressive restrictions were imposed on women in India during this period. Archaeological and literary evidence shows that women played an important role in the contemporary Vijayanagara Empire and in the Rajput kingdoms.

Mughal Period:-

In the Mughal period, some women like Nurjaha and Mumtaz seem to have made their mark in politics. But the proportion is also very small. Even during the Mughal period, Indian women remained socially, politically, economically, religiously and culturally neglected & deprived. During the Peshwa period, more restrictions were imposed on women. Texts like Manusmriti were strictly followed. Her life was marred by restrictions such as child marriage, sati, hairdressing, veil, polygamy and she was bound by many social chains.

Women's Life during British Era:-

In the modern world, many revolutions have taken place in Europe since the Industrial

Revolution. Religious and social revival movements in Europe took place in modern times. Modern methods of education, new discoveries show that modernity has been adopted by Europeans. Therefore, women in Europe and Britain appear to have more privileges than Indian women.

In European countries, these restrictions were imposed on women at that time, and in order to overcome these restrictions, women's liberation movements appear to have taken place in European countries. After the arrival of the British in India, modern education was developed and spread. By adopting this teaching of the British, the Indian middle class became rationalists. This led to social and religious reform movements as well as gave birth to women reformers in India.

British liberalism gave impetus to women's movements. In the nineteenth century, women like Savitribai Phule, Tarabai Shinde, Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade, Laxmibai Tilak, Dr. Anandibai Joshi contributed to the social development of women in India. In the uprising of 1857, women like Rani Lakshmibai, Begum Jhalkaribai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Maina Peshwa, dancer Aziz Begum and Zeenat Mahal proved the courage of an Indian woman.

Involvement of women in Indian freedom struggle:-

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation of India, seems to have done a lot of thinking and writing on women's issues during the Indian War of Independence. Therefore, it is seen that women have played a significant role in the non-cooperation movement, civil disobedience and Quit India movement called by Gandhiji against the British. During this period, women freedom fighters took part in anti-British movements. In which Pandit Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Dr. Sushila Nair, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Hansaben Mehta, Rajkumari Kaur, Urmila Devi, Pandita Sumati Shah, Anusaya Kale, Mridula Sarabhai, Avantika Gokhale, Sarladevi Chaudhary, Smt. Kamalaben Patel contributed to the freedom struggle.

The contribution of foreign women in the Indian freedom struggle is also significant.

Leading the way are women like Anne Besant, Madame Cama, Sister Nivedita, Neil Sen Gupta, Miraben. Indian and foreign women who participated in India's freedom struggle had to suffer a lot. On some occasions women had to stay in jail but they proved their contribution. So, women's contribution to Indian independence is significant.

Women's Participation in the Revolutionary Movement:

The contribution of revolutionary men in the Indian freedom struggle is very important and so is that of women revolutionaries. The Indian revolutionaries, in their style of terrorizing the Indians, contributed to the freedom struggle by adopting the repressive tactics adopted by the British. Which appears to include a large number of women revolutionaries.

Indian women participated in national programs such as Swarajya, Swadeshi, Bahishkar, Rashtriya Shikshan. At the same time, Indian revolutionary women took part in terrorist activities such as setting up secret organizations, wielding weapons, training them, looting government treasury offices, and marking tyrannical officials. Among them are Veena Das, Suhasini Ganguly, Shanti Ghosh, Suniti Chaudhary, Ujwala Mujumdar, Sushiladidi Ghosh, Parul Mukherjee, Preetilata Vaddedar, Yamunabai Savarkar, Yesubai Savarkar, Rajmati Patil, Lilatai Patil, Kalpana Dutt, Durgadevi Bahra, Yamuna Dasyakarya .

The Azad Hind Sena, formed by Subhash Chandra Bose, is an important contributor to India's independence. The Azad Hind Fauj consisted of brave women like Capt. Lakshmi Sehgal, Smt. M.A Chidambaram, Pratima Sen, Shakuntala Gandhi, Smt. Gurudayal Kaur and Jyotirmoyee Gangoli. These women set an example to the world of women's militancy through the Azad Hind Fauj against the British. Indian women seem to have made significant contributions on the occasion of the merger of the Sansthan through the Stree Praja Parishad movement during the Partition of India.

In post-independence India, women in the Satyashodhak Samaj, women in the Swabhimani movement, women in the Dalit movement, women in the farmers, tribal and labor movements, women in the anti-inflation, anti-emergency movement, women in the Chipko movement, Narmada Bachao movement and environmental activists, Muslim

Satyashodhak Samaj, Women in the feticide and daughter rescue movement, women on the path to empowerment in politics have proved their capability and importance to the society .

Even so, women have been neglected by Indian society. The woman's place in the family is limited to the Chul and the Mul. Influenced by the idea of an agrarian personality, the society imposed many restrictions on women which are still an obstacle in the way of her liberation.

III. Concluding Remarks:

The Government of India has supported women through a number of laws in the post-independence period. The Government of India has sought to empower women through legislation to protect their social, political, economic, religious and cultural rights. Even so, women continue to face problems such as dowry, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. When we look at the root of all this, it is the patriarchal attitude of the society that is the main reason why we see obstacles in the development of women. The patriarchal attitude cannot be eradicated by law, but the society needs to be socialized. For this, men need to understand the importance of women.

Therefore, it has become necessary to study how the social, political, economic, religious and cultural position of women has changed and how they have been bound by the historical test. Some selfish and hypocritical people in the society-imposed restrictions on women from time to time on their dignity.

The rationalist reformers have proved that women are just as efficient and capable as men. Although feminism is a concept in the West, it is a fact that women in India are still living under the shadow of economic, social, psychological and cultural oppression. Therefore, this fact cannot be ignored. The problems of Indian woman cannot be assessed on the basis of Western concepts, her social, political, economic, religious, cultural status, her constitution, her personality and mental state need to be focused in Indian context.

In conclusion we could say that from her childhood, the patriarchal society has inculcated on woman's mind that her field of work is cooking and nourishment of child. What

society needs is to change its attitude, not to make laws; because just making laws will not empower women, there is a need to change the mindset of the society for the proper implementation of these laws. In order to give economic and social independence to women, it is necessary to increase the social and political will of patriarchal tendencies so that women can be truly empowered.

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