



Research Paper

The Role of Women in Today's Society: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Women are the epitome of strength, love, sacrifice and courage. The role of women in today's world has changed significantly and for better. Women are now self-sufficient, well aware and financially independent. They have attained immense success in every field, whether it is sports, politics or academics. With the encouragement of co-education, women are now marching side by side with men, in every walk of life. The twenty first century has brought a new hope and has empowered women in a positive manner. Earlier they were under the shadow of a husband or a father, but now they have established their own identity and are independent. Education is an important key to success. Empowering women would become more pertinent if women were well informed and educated. A woman needs to understand her rights so that she can walk at par with men. Mother Teresa, Indra Nooyi, Pratibha Patil, Kalpana Chawla and a lot more have been very significant in their own sphere and are an idol for every woman in India and across the globe. The role of women has changed tremendously and they have been able to create a positive impression in the society. From housewives to CEOs, the transition can be seen at an accelerating rate. Modernization and the advent of the latest technology have widened hope and opportunities for them. They have established themselves socially, politically and economically in almost every field. Women are no longer considered unfit or weak for military or for other defence forces. Recently, Avani Chaturvedi has set a perfect example and has created a milestone by becoming India's first female fighter pilot.

KEYWORDS: Woman, Education, Society, Strength, sports, Politics, Academics.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In earlier times, women were exploited through every possible means by the society. They suffered a lot of criticism, lacked freedom and stood nowhere next to men. They were even deprived of the basic birthrights of a human being. It took a lot of effort and courage for them to mark an impression of "women power" and make a significant place in society. Poetesses such as Charlotte Bronte inspired women by quoting, "I am no bird and no net ensnares me, I am a free human being with an independent will." Through this she tried to convey that women are no longer to be treated as birds in the cage, instead they should be given equal liberty and opportunities as men. Such supportive sections of society led to the developments that are responsible for the improved status of women in today's society. Women's full and equal participation in all facets of society is a fundamental human right. Yet, around the world, from politics to entertainment to the workplace, women and girls are largely underrepresented. The visualizations below take a closer look at this gender-imbalanced picture over time, revealing just how slow progress is. Rooted in patriarchal norms and traditions, the consequences are far-reaching with detrimental, negative consequences on the personal, economic and future well-being of women and girls, their families and the community at large [1,2].

From their presumed strictly household activities at the premises of civilization to being today able to figure among the most powerful and influential personalities on the planet, the status of women has greatly

evolved through the ages. The world we are experiencing today is dramatically different from the world our parents experienced, let alone the world that our grandparents experienced. I am talking about our parents' and our grandparents' generations just to point out the fact that the time when they were younger was actually not a lot of time ago, yet society, everywhere in the world has experienced major changes. In ancient times, the main social groups of early mankind and early civilizations used to favour a matriarchal setting of their society. This means that women were literally on the forefront; they were at the center of society and made up a dominant role from different perspectives and points of view [3, 4].

In the ancient world, women were politicians, spiritual and religious leaders, warriors, and respectable icons, symbols of fertility and prosperity. Somewhere along the line, the female dominated culture of early social groups switched from a matriarchal setting to a patriarchal setting, meaning that men "took the front row seat" and became leaders, kings. For thousands of years, our society has been dominated by males; culturally and historically speaking. Most anthropologists hold that there are no known societies that are unambiguously matriarchal. It is a very well-known fact that women have not been placed on the same standing since then, never being on the same pedestal as man throughout the centuries, but always covering "minor" roles characterized by submission. Many people can communicate easily, breaking through language and cultural barriers, like never before in history. The internet is opening more doors than any other means of communication before it; It is not only a way for people to communicate between each other, but also to spread ideas, to spread culture, to discuss, and yes even to work and to be entertained. This has open up new doors, window through which more proactive social interaction can be stimulate, and help in breaking the age-old social barriers not easily visible like the *parda* (veil) system, domestic violence etc. First of all, if a global equality between the two genders is to be discussed, it has to be done with a lot of care. The degree of this equality undergoes great variations depending on the region of the world considered as well as the society, religion, and many other societal factors that influence the unequal gender roles of modern society [5, 6].

In the wake of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's movement against women's subjugation to men and British influence on Indian culture and civilization the position of women had once again undergone a change. However, it was only under the enlightened leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that they re-asserted their equality with men. In response to the call of Gandhi they discarded their veil and came out of the four walls of their houses to fight the battle of freedom shoulder to shoulder with their brothers. The result is that the Indian Constitution today has given to women the equal status with men. There is no discrimination between men and women. All professions are open to both of them with merit as the only criterion of selection [7, 8].

As a result of their newly gained freedom Indian woman have distinguished themselves in various spheres of life as politicians, orators, lawyers, doctors, administrators and diplomats. They are not only entrusted with work of responsibility but also they perform their duties very honestly and sincerely. There is hardly any sphere of life in which Indian women have not taken part and shown their worth. Women exercise their right to vote, contest for Parliament and Assembly, seek appointment in public office and compete in other spheres of life with men. This shows that women in India enjoy today more liberty and equality than before. They have acquired more liberty to participate in the affairs of the country. They have been given equality with men in shaping their future and sharing responsibilities for themselves, their family and their country [9, 10].

It is a fact that women are intelligent, hard-working and efficient in work. They put heart and soul together in whatever they undertake. As typists and clerks they are now competing successfully with men. There are many women working in the Central Secretariat. They are striving very hard to reach highest efficiency and perfection in the administrative work. Their integrity of character is probably better than men. Generally it was found that women are less susceptible to corruption in form of bribery and favouritism. They are not only sweet tongued but also honest, efficient and punctual in their jobs as receptionists, air-hostesses and booking clerks at railway reservation counters. As a matter of fact they are gradually monopolising the jobs of receptionists and air-hostesses [11, 12].

Women have been serving India admirably as doctors and nurses. Lady Doctors have been found to perform efficient surgery by virtue of their soft and accurate fingers. They have monopolised as nurses in the hospitals and nursing homes. Very few men have been able to compete with them in this sphere because the women have natural tendency to serve and clean. It is thus natural tendency found in women, who motivated Florence Nightingale to make nursing popular among the women of the upper classes in England and in Europe. She showed the way to women kind how nobly they can serve humanity in the hours of sufferings and agonies [13, 14].

Women's contributions in politics and social services have also been quite significant. We cannot fail to mention the name of Indira Gandhi who shone so brilliantly and radiantly in the firmament of India's politics. She ruled this country for more than a decade and took India victorious out of Pakistan-war which resulted in the historic creation of a new country, Bangladesh. In the field of social service Indian women have also done some excellent jobs. They have not only served the cause of the suffering humanity but have also brought highest laurels for the country. The name of Mother Teresa cannot but be mentioned. She brought the Nobel

Prize for India by her selfless services to the poor, destitute and suffering people of our country in particular and the needy and handicapped people of the world in general. Today, we need the services of the educated women who can tour throughout the country and help in removing human sufferings. The Government is alarmed at the rapid growth of population in the rural areas in particular. Women volunteers can more easily take up the task of canvassing the advantages of family planning among the rural womenfolk. They can, more easily than men, carry on propaganda against hazards of unhygienic conditions under which the villagers live. In urban areas they can efficiently take up the task of visiting and teaching the orphans and the helpless widows in the orphanages and the widow welfare centres. They can train them in sewing, knitting, embroidery and nursing in which women by nature excel. They can also train them in the art of music and dancing [15, 16].

There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in the last fifty years but yet they have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male dominated society. The Hindu Code Bill has given the daughter and the son equal share of the property. The Marriage Act no longer regards woman as the property of man. Marriage is now considered to be a personal affair and if a partner feels dissatisfied she or he has the right of divorce. But passing of law is one thing and its absorption in the collective thinking of society is quite a different matter. In order to prove themselves equal to the dignity and status given to them in the Indian Constitution they have to shake off the shackles of slavery and superstitions. They should help the government and the society in eradicating the evils of dowry, illiteracy and ignorance among the eves. The dowry problem has assumed a dangerous form in this country. The parents of the girls have to pay thousands and lacks to the bridegrooms and their greedy fathers and mothers. If promised articles are not given by the parents of brides, the cruel and greedy members of the bridegrooms' family take recourse to afflicting tortures on the married women. Some women are murdered in such cases. The dowry deaths are really heinous and barbarous crimes committed by the cruel and inhumane persons. The young girls should be bold enough in not marrying the boys who demand dowry through their parents. The boys should also refuse to marry if their parents demand dowry. But unfortunately the number of such bold and conscientious boys is very few. Even the doctors, engineers, teachers and the administrative officers do not hesitate in allowing themselves to be sold to the wealthy fathers of shy and timid girls. Such persons have really brought disgrace to their cadres in particular and society in general. The government should enact stringent laws to afflict rigorous punishment on dowry seekers, women's murderers and rapers [17, 18].

II. FACTORS LED TO THE ENHANCEMENT OF STATUS OF WOMEN IN MODERN SOCIETY

The improvement in the status of women in the society can be analyzed in the light of the major changes that have taken place in areas such as legislations, education, economic and employment sector, political participation and awareness of their rights on the part of women.

Women in the Field of Education

The effects of women's education on development constitute a significant area of research within international development. An increase in the amount of women's education in regions tends to correlate with high levels of development. Some of the effects are related to economic development. Women's education increases the income of women and leads to growth in GDP. Other effects are related to social development. Educating girls leads to a number of social benefits, including many related to women's empowerment. Recent research in human development has established a strong link between women's education and international development. In particular; researchers seek to determine what factors explain differences in rates of development. Women's education is one of the major explanatory variables behind the rates of social and economic development. According to notable economist Lawrence Summers was reported that "investment in the education of girls may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world" [19].

Women in Economic and Employment Fields

In both villages and cities, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of women going out of the four walls of the household and becoming workers. In the "employment market", they are giving tough competition to men folk. In some fields the number of women employs is steadily increasing. For example, women working as teachers, doctors, nurses, advocates, bank employees, clerks, typists, telephone operators, receptionist, personal assistants and so on. Since 1991, though in a smaller number, women are getting recruited into armed force, air force and naval force also. In order to give protection to the economic interests and rights of the womenfolk the government has undertaken various socio-economic legislations, which cover areas such as right to property or inheritance, equal wages, working conditions, maternity benefits and job security [20].

Women in Political Field

Every country deserves to have the best possible leader and that means that women have to be given a chance to compete. If they're never allowed to compete in the electoral process then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent" says Madeleine K. Albright, Chairman of NDI. It's believed that equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to build and sustain democracy. Comprising over 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to be under-represented as voters, political leaders and elected officials. Democracy cannot truly deliver for all of its citizens if half of the population remains underrepresented in the political arena. Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Governance relates to a set of rules, institutions, and values that are involved in the management of state and society. Governance institutions and processes include political parties, parliaments, government and their interactions with society. Although governance is a generic term which could mean good government or management, the governance values, types of government, the nature of political processes, the political parties and organizations, which/whose interests are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses have to challenge the state or in suggesting alternatives in methods of governance etc [16].

Women given Equal Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, enshrines "the equal rights of men and women", and addressed both the equality and equity issues. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for legal implementation of the Declaration of elimination of discrimination against sex. Described as an international bill of rights for women, it came into force on 3 September 1981. The Convention defines discrimination against women in the following terms, "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." It also establishes an agenda of action for putting an end to sex-based discrimination for which states ratifying the Convention are required to enshrine gender equality into their domestic legislation, repeal all discriminatory provisions in their laws, and enact new provisions to guard against discrimination against women. They must also establish tribunals and public institutions to guarantee women effective protection against discrimination, and take steps to eliminate all forms of discrimination practiced against women by individuals, organizations, and enterprises [12].

Women in the field of Culture and sciences

Bestowed annually to recognize intellectual achievement and academic, cultural and scientific advances, the Nobel Prize have been awarded to more than 900 individuals in the course of its history from 1901 to 2019. Only 53 of the winners have been women, 19 in the categories of physics, chemistry, and physiology or medicine. Marie Curie became the first female laureate in 1903, when she and her husband won a joint Prize for physics. Eight years later she was solely awarded the Chemistry Prize, making her the only woman in history to win the Nobel Prize twice. Although women have been behind a number of scientific discoveries throughout history, just 30 per cent of researchers worldwide and 35 per cent of all students enrolled in STEM-related fields of study are women [10].

Women in the Field of Sports

Female participation in sports rose dramatically in the twentieth century, especially in the last quarter, reflecting changes in modern societies that emphasized gender parity. Although the level of participation and performance still varies greatly by country and by sport, women's sports have broad acceptance throughout the world, and in a few instances, such as figure skating, rival or exceed their male counterparts in popularity. The main purpose of participation of women was to bring equality between the sexes in educational institutions. Today there are more females participating in athletics than ever before. As of the 2007-2008 school years, females made up 41% of the participants in college athletics. In 1971-1972 there were 294,015 females participating in high school athletics and in 2007-2008 there were over three million females participating, meaning there has been a 940% increase in female participation in high school athletics. In 1971-1972 there were 29,972 females participating in college athletics and in 2007-2008 there were 166,728 females participating, that is a 456% increase in female participation in college athletics. Increased participation in sports has had direct effects on other areas of women's lives. These effects can be seen in women's education and employment later on in life; a recent study found that the changes set in motion by participation of women explained about 20 percent of the increase in women's education and about 40 percent of the rise in employment for 25-to-34-year-old women. This is not to say that all women who are successful later on in life played sports,

but it is saying that women who did participate in athletics received benefits in their education and employment later on in life [6].

Women in the Field of Journalism

When it comes to equality of men and women in news media, progress has virtually ground to a halt. According to the largest study on the portrayal, participation and representation of women in the news media spanning 20 years and 114 countries, only 24 per cent of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news are women. A glass ceiling also exists for women news reporters in newspaper by-lines and newscast reports, with 37 per cent of stories reported by women as of 2015, showing no change over the course of a decade. Despite the democratizing promise of digital media, women's poor representation in traditional news media is also reflected in digital news, with women making up only 26 per cent of the people in Internet news stories and media news tweets. Only 4 per cent of traditional news and digital news stories clearly challenge gender stereotypes. Among other factors, stereotypes and the significant underrepresentation of women in the media play a significant role in shaping harmful attitudes of disrespect and violence towards women [19].

Women in the Field of Entertainment

Like other forms of media, film and television have a powerful influence in shaping cultural perceptions and attitudes towards gender and are key to shifting the narrative for the gender equality agenda. Yet, an analysis of popular films across 11 countries found, for example, that 31 per cent of all speaking characters were women and that only 23 per cent featured a female protagonist a number that closely mirrored the percentage of women filmmakers (21 per cent) [19].

The gross underrepresentation of women in the film industry is also glaringly evident in critically acclaimed film awards: In the 92-year history of the Oscars, only five women have ever been nominated for the Best Director Award category; and one woman Kathryn Bigelow has ever won. And, Jane Campion remains the only woman director to have won the Cannes Film Festival's top, most prestigious prize, the Palme d'Or, in its 72-year history. The only other women to have received the prize but jointly were actresses Adele Exarchopoulos and Lea Seydoux with the movie's male director Abdellatif Kechiche. If a picture is worth a thousand words, the message is worth a million: If we are to shift stereotypical notions of gender and reflect women's realities, we need more women in film, on-screen and off-screen [18].

Women in the Field of Culinary Arts

Despite women being prescribed stereotypical roles in the kitchen at home, the upper echelons of the restaurant industry have remained relatively closed to female chefs. As detailed in the documentary *A Fine Line*, women must often overcome active discrimination and navigate a culture that both glorifies masculinity and tacitly condones harassment. Paired with long, unpredictable and inflexible working hours, unfriendly family and childcare policies and lower salaries, women face enormous challenges when entering the restaurant business. The numbers match the story: Today, just under 4 per cent of chefs with three Michelin stars (the highest rating you can get) from the prominent restaurant guide are women [17].

III. CONCLUSION

It is largely held that women all over the world have been made to suffer discrimination and deprivation of various kinds since the beginning of time that they have all along been denied even such basic rights as access to literacy and property. This global concern has steadily grown through the past few decades and has resulted in efforts to bring women into the mainstream of life, mainly through socio-economic activities aimed at empowering them and thus restoring equality between the sexes. The journey of liberation of women has crossed many milestones and the society has indeed come a long way. They have struggled hard over the last few decades but still been able to successfully establish their own identity. Today's women are adorned with patience and perseverance, which has helped them to attain the pinnacle of success. Earlier, women were seen only as housewives who were projected to cook, clean and take care of their family. Today- along with handling tough clients at office, they successfully multitask at home too. Women are more focused and have a unique decision making power even at senior leadership level, in the most optimal manner, and at times are in a better position than men. Empowering women can help the society to grow and develop at a faster pace. We are definitely redesigning the world.

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