



## Social Change and Women

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### Abstract

*Everyday in our life start with the word change, from beginning of the day we start with the discussion of what was the situation in past one year, one decade, or in past twenty five years. How things have changed whether values, customs, mores, norms, religion, culture, tradition, believes so on and so forth. Without doubt change has left no corner of society and human life. Women are no exception to change. We find that if we start to write about the life of women there will be shortage of ink and paper. One interesting thing is that in each corner of globe where we find human habitation there women status is next to men, in almost all culture and community. This fact itself has become law of nature.*

**Keywords:** Social change, status of women, education, empowerment, employment, women in politics.

### Introduction

“Change” refers to any deviation from accepted way of life or established lives. Social change is the change in society at large. Society has been defined by MacIver as “web of social relationships”. Change which has occurred in these social relationships is social change. Thus whatever perceptible alterations or modifications taking place in the mutual behavior between individuals is the sign of social change. Since society is a process not product. If it had been product then there would not have been changes. Processes are ongoing change therefore they bound to change. Society is changeful and dynamic, it can never remain static. We can say that change is a law of society unchanging society is a myth<sup>1</sup>.

Women have been key agents of social change as well, and because of social change there is tremendous change in the lives of women. These women are not only the beneficiaries of change they are the key agents for change. Throughout India's long struggle for independence, women stood shoulder to shoulder with men. The Freedom Movement was their (women) movement, and the battles were their(women) battles. In fact, it was a woman- Rani of Jhansi who fired the first shot that began the freedom struggle in 1857.

While the women of India worked, fought and died for freedom, few have been able to share the fruits of that freedom. They remain subjugated, marginalized and disenfranchised, as they have been throughout history. Today, their struggle for bringing change is again the nation's struggle. Freedom for India's women means freedom for India to create a new future.

### Review of Literature

Different Sociologist has different opinion about social change. The major approaches for studying social change in India are: Evolutionary, Culture and Structural.

Sharma K.L (2008) in his book “Indian Social structure and change”, has explained that the concept of social change is a very broad one. It consists of constellation of process of change in human society in terms of place, time and context. Besides the concepts of social change, the concepts of evolution, revolution, progress, development, social movements and process have also been discussed in his book<sup>2</sup>.

Percy Cohen (1979) has said that one might also distinguish between minor changes and major or fundamental changes in a society<sup>3</sup>.

Davis defined this process as “an alteration in and contentment of a society.”

Jones said that “social change is nothing but variations in, modification of, any aspect of social process, social patterns, social interaction, or social organization”.

Koenig S is of the opinion that “social change is modifications which occur in the life patterns of a people”.

Above mentioned are the simplest definitions regarding social change

### History of Women Status in India

Change in the attitude of women is not from recent time but, change has taken place many years ago. Chitkara (2001) in her book “women and social transformation” mentions that, the major impetus in recent years, in bringing about a change in the attitude of women has come from the national movement for independence. The appeal to women ‘per se’ was a major plank in Gandhi's policy. Participation of women in the politics of the national movement was an act of patriotism and political life became a respectable vocation for a woman.

The reason of requirement of change among women is the history of status of women itself. For example Manu the Hindu law giver has given both positive and negative statement about the status of women in particular family and in society as a whole. He considered woman to be submissive to man in her entire life<sup>4</sup>.

During Vedic period, women enjoyed good status by having access to education. Later in Puranic period the status of women got lowered. And in Buddhist period new discourses prepuberty marriages, participation in religious ceremonies etc. were imposed. In Medieval Period women were secluded and educational opportunities were vanished. With efforts of many saints education was again introduced to women.

Under British rule social problems such as sati, infanticide, slavery, child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, and lack of women's rights were paid attention by Indian social reformers and British.

Gradually women started to take part in social movements and freedom movements. Women's quest for equality with men has become universal. The history of women's status has been of ups and downs. Their status was influenced by social, economic, and political conditions at different times.

In Indian constitution the concept of equality have been introduced through various provisions such as laws concerning marriage, divorce, widow remarriage, prohibition of sati, dowry, child marriage, etc., has helped in the foundation of present status of women. It has also improved higher education, economic status, empowerment and employment of women. In this paper different dimensions or aspects have been used to analyze the social change amongst women<sup>5</sup>. They are education, empowerment, employment, politics have been discussed below:

### **Social Change through Education**

Education is a powerful aspect in modernization of Indian society. Education is the only institution which gives women equal status, equal rights and equal opportunities etc. In pre-independent India education was restricted to males of upper strata, in the sense, male members of the Brahmin community. Even the Brahmin females were deprived of the opportunity of education. At present the change of scenario can be seen. When girl child take birth the members of the society suggest the parent to provide her with, level best education. That is why even the government facilitating the parents of girl child with bhagya laxmi scheme, mid day meals provision of free books and uniform etc, now people are more interested to give education to their female children also<sup>6</sup>.

Because of various governmental initiatives female literacy rate is increasing decade by decade but still it is less than male literacy rate. Kerala and Mizoram are first and second states to

have highest female literacy rate. We find improvement in social and economical status of women in these two states because of education<sup>6</sup>.

Education in India has achieved amazing success during the last fifty- five years. Its achievements, both in absolute and relative terms, have been remarkable. The fact becomes more visible when we compare the present situation with the one existing at the time of independence. After independence, it was recognized that education formed a vital aspect of the modernization processes<sup>7</sup>.

### **Social Change through Empowerment**

The word 'empowerment' itself signifies the presence of 'power'. Women empowerment is nothing but enhancement of their position in power structure of the society<sup>8</sup>. This is the most important concept which brings about change in the womenfolk. Women as an individual is said to be empowered when she has the right and ability to make and influence decisions. She may be economically, socially, or politically empowered. It is necessary that women be politically empowered for the holistic development of nation. Political empowerment of women has been defined by Datta as the "acquisition of the capacity as well as the adoption of needed strategy by women in order to exercise their powers more effectively and professionally, for their own development in particular and of the society in general"<sup>9</sup>.

### **Social Change through Employment**

When it comes to the matter of employment of women, most of them get employment in the unorganized/informal sector. The reasons behind this, is that their work is invisible and unpaid in household. When women do house hold work it is considered that she is not doing any extraordinary work but her duty for which she is the most suitable one. Contrary to this men work is considered as hard work which is dedicated for the family. Because of patriarchal followings women suffer from inequality which is reflected in tasks assigned to them and lower wages paid to them. Addition to this there is a lack of support in services such as hostels, crèches, maternity services etc. Illiteracy and close pregnancies further aggravate their position as employees along with this the several exploitation and vulnerability from which they suffer which made them unequal partners in the employment market and accordingly in economic development<sup>10</sup>.

This also because of absence of awareness about social legislation, Low economic status, lacuna and disparities in the personal laws governing marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance etc., have contributed to the lower status of women in Indian society. Coupled with this is the gender bias arising out of the patriarchal system which makes their position still worse, girls are discriminated against in terms of health, malnutrition, secretion and education inputs. This has resulted in

lower education, health and nutritional standards among girls, with the result that women are not only deprived of development inputs but this also, retards their active participation in development<sup>10</sup>.

### **Social Change through Politics**

Modern Indian women can be seen enjoying the high offices such as President, Prime Minister, speaker in loksabha and leader of the opposition. But in Indian history we do not find that women have been given a respectable administrative or political position. Even today when we look into the women's participation in politics, the number of women politician is much more less than compared to the number of men politician. This is because of lower percentage of participation in voting, in public administration and in public debate and lack of supporting atmosphere in political sphere. Significant changes occurred in the social, economic and political status of women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in India<sup>11</sup>.

The women who are in politics they belong to the urban elite group. The poorer women are restricted to domestic life. There is also an irony that higher percentage voting women belong to the rural and poor background, when compared to the percentage urban and educated background women are less<sup>12</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Women are making a difference against all odds; women are there in panchayati raj. There is change in the outlook of women in contemporary Indian society. Variety of factors such as modern education, high geographical and occupational mobility and most importantly emergence in the new economic patterns are responsible for making women acquire a new status and a new social stature. Thus, the social change for women in a positive manner is the need of the hour.

Thus aspects such as education, empowerment, employment, and politics, economy, legislation, religion, etc play an important role in bringing about social change in women.

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