

Role of Women and Women's Organization in the Prohibition Movement

¹Mary Elizabeth Shyamala
²Dr. Viji. M

¹Assistant Professor

Department of Commerce

²Associate Professor

Department of History

Holy Cross College(Autonomous)

Tiruchrappalli -2

Abstract

There are many Historical data signified that women have many role in civilisation since ancient time and these roles are changing over the period. In a society, status of people can be assessed by importance of women in that culture. Many factors that rationalise the magnitude of India's ancient culture is the respectable place granted to women. Several research studies have demonstrated that women have raised their position and made a place in different sectors which has led to liberation and to live better life. In ancient culture, women had to suffer from unequal condition, and but as the time passed, females had enhanced their status to get equality to the men (Christina S. Handayani, Ardhan Novianto, 2004).

Keyword

Women, prohibition movement

Earlier, women were only allowed for doing domestic activity and their contribution in public was very restricted. It entails that the political sector was only for male communities and the women were concern to the private sector. It is established in studies that Women are important in our society. Every woman has her own job or duty in this modern society in which men are still dominant.

Women in India

The status of women in India has undergone drastic changes over a Past few millennia. In ancient time, the Indian women were completely devoted to

their families. In the Medieval period, known as 'Dark Age', the status of women was declined considerably. They were not allowed to go out, and move with others. They were asked to stay at home and take care of their children. In India, early marriage of a girl.

Medieval Indian history continued for 500 years. It is principally dominated by Muslim rulers. Muslim appeared in India as a warrior class. Their rule in India is divided into two Eras; The Era of Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Era. The only women who has power and gained the thrown of Delhi was Razia Sultan. She was not only a wise monarch but also a women of determined courage. She proved herself as the role of model for politically empowered women in India. In Mughal Period, India saw the rise of some renowned Muslim women.

Modern India denotes to the era form 1700 A.D. to 1947 A.D. In the back ground of the intellectual disturbance of the 18th and 19th century, there observed a worldwide demand for establishing of independent and democratic nationalist societies which consistently emphasized the fairness of women with men. Women in modern India have been influenced by the programs of modification and upliftment which brought about a fundamental change in their status. With the numerous reform movements and a steady change in the opinion of women in society, there, a radical change in the position of women in modern India was seen. Before the British rule in India, the life of women was rather domineering, and they were subject to a continual process of subjugation and social domination. The steady change in the position of women can be highlighted by looking at what has been achieved by women in the country:

Women's organization in India

Women's Organisations emerged in India as a result of the spread of education and the establishment of the notion of the new woman. There was an improved level of communication among women which made them aware of the different problems that they faced and their rights and accountabilities in society. This awareness led to the upsurge of women's organisations that fought for and signified women's causes.

Pre-Independence

An exclusive feature of the Indian women's crusade is the fact that early efforts at women's liberation were set in motion by men. Social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharishi Karve and Swami Dayanand Saraswati challenged the conventional subservience of women, stimulated widow remarriage and supported female education and impartiality in matters of religion, among other issues. Mahila mandals organised by Hindu reformist organisations such as the Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj encouraged women to go out of the boundaries of their homes and interact with other members of society. Pandita Ramabai, who was considered as one of the innovators of the feminist movement, with the help of Justice Ranade established the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882. She envisioned creating a support network for newly educated women through weekly lectures and lessons at homes, where women could learn and gain confidence through interactions.

Women's auxiliaries of general reform associations also served as a ground for women to deliberate social issues, express opinions and share experiences. The Bharata Mahila Parishad of the National Social Conference was the most protruding among such opportunities. Though the National Social Conference was formed at the third meeting of the Indian National Congress in 1887, the Mahila Parishad was launched only in 1905. These initiatives greatly influenced the social status of women. Early attempts at encouraging women to converse outside their families and local committees thus, stemmed from the broader social reform movement and efforts to upgrade the conditions of women. But a major inadequacy of the movement at this juncture was that it was essentially exclusive in character. The reforms were planned for restricted upper caste women and did not take up the cause of the huge masses of poor and working class women. Also, male-guided organisations still perceived the household as the woman's first priority and did not make efforts to employ education as an instrument to improve their contribution in society. In the beginning of nineteenth century, there was concerted efforts towards education of women. Schools and educational institutions promoting female public education mushroomed across the country.

The pre-Independence period saw women's issues related to the nationalist agenda at various junctures. In this period, major enhancement of women was in terms of political participation of women, calling for a redefinition of conventional gender roles. Women began openly demonstrating their opposition to foreign control by supporting civil disobedience actions and other forms of protest against the British. Opportunities to organise and participate in agitations gave women the much-needed confidence and a chance to develop their leadership skills. Cutting across communal and religious barriers, women associated themselves with larger problems of society and opposed sectarian issues such as communal electorates. Political awareness among women grew, owing to a general understanding that women's issues could not be separated from the political environment of the country. During this period, the initial women's organisations formed within the historical background of the social reform movement and the nationalist movement were as follows.

Each of these organisations emphasised the importance of education in women's progress. The WIA, created by Margaret Cousins in Madras, worked widely for the social and educational emancipation of women. Associated with the Theosophical Society, it encouraged non-sectarian religious activity and did creditable work in promoting literacy, setting up shelters for widows and providing relief for disaster victims. Women in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata through networks developed during World War I work, allied their associations together and created the NCWI in 1925. A national branch of the International Council of Women, its most prominent member was Mehrbai Tata, who aggressively campaigned against inert charity and advised men to support female education. The most important of the women's organisations of the time was the All India Women's Conference. Though its initial efforts were directed towards improving female education, its scope later extended to include a host of women's issues such as women's franchise, inheritance rights.

Period of Post-Independence

The Constitution of India enlisted in 1950 which permitted equal rights to men and women. Rights such as the right to vote, right to education, right to entry into public service and political offices brought in satisfaction among women's groups. In this period, there was limited activity in the area of women's rights. Many women's organizations such as National Federation of Indian Women (1954) the Samajwadi Mahila Sabha (1959) were formed to work for supporting the cause of Indian women. Since the country was facing a social, political crisis after the British rule, many demands of the women activists were not supported by the Government. But during this period from 1945, the Indian women got an opportunity to participate in confrontational politics. In post-independent India, the women's crusade was divided, as the common opponent, foreign rule, was no longer there. Some of the women leaders formally joined the Indian National Congress and took powerful position as Ministers, Governors and Ambassadors. Free India's Constitution gave universal adult franchise and by the mid-fifties India had fairly liberal laws concerning women. Most of the demands of the women's movement had been met and there seemed few issues left to organize around. Women's organizations now observed that there was an issue of implementation and consequently there was a pause in the women's movement.

Women displeased with the status quo joined struggles for the rural poor and industrial working class such as the Tebhaga movement in Bengal, the Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh or the Naxalite movement. Shahada, which acquired its name from the area in which it occurred, in Dhulia district in Maharashtra, was a tribal landless labourers' movement against landlords. Women actively participated and led demonstrations, developed and yelled militant slogans and mobilized the masses. As women's belligerency developed, gender based issues were raised. For the meantime in Ahmadabad the first attempt at a women's trade union was made with the establishment of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) at the initiative of Ela Bhat in 1972. Major objective was to improve the condition of poor women who worked in the unorganized sector by providing training, technical

aids and collective bargaining. Based on Gandhian ideals, SEWA has been a remarkable success.

The Nav Nirman movement, initially a student's movement in Gujarat against rising prices, black marketing and dishonesty launched in 1974 was soon joined by huge number of middle class women. Their method of protest reached from mass hunger strike, mock funerals and Prabhat Pheris. The 1970s and 1980s observed the development of numerous women's groups that took up issues such as dowry deaths, bride burning, rape, and sati and focused on violence against women. They stressed the sexual coercion of women in a way previous reform or feminist groups had never done. They questioned the patriarchal assumptions underlying women's role in the family and society based on the biological sex differences implying a "natural" separation of human activities by gender differentials, the public political sphere being the male domain and the private familial sphere as that of the female which eventually translates into a supremacy of male over female. Some of the earliest self-governing women's groups were the Progressive Organization of Women (POW, Hyderabad), the Forum Against Rape (now redefined as Forum Against Oppression of Women), Street Sangharsh and Samata (Delhi).

Among the first campaigns that women's groups took up was the struggle against rape in 1980. The modified law was passed in 1983 after heated debate with women's groups. Since then, women's groups have lobbied again to have the law further changed to make it more severe and have also fought for an implementation machinery to be set up without which the law is less effective than it was intended to be. The POW in Hyderabad planned new and fresh remonstrations against dowry. In the late 1970s, Delhi became the focus of the movement against dowry and the violence imposed on women in the marital home. Groups which took up the campaign included 'Street Sangharsh' and 'Mahila Dakshita Samiti'. Later, a joint front called the 'Dahej Virodhi Chetna Mandal' (organization for creating consciousness against dowry) was made under which a large number of organizations worked. In 1975, the Lal Nishar Party structured a joint women's conference which was well attended by women in Pune in

Maharashtra. Similarly the communist party in India in 1975 organized a National Seminar which was attended by women in Maharashtra. The famous women's organisations which were established during this time are the Shree Mukhti Sangkatana, the Shree Sangharsh and Mahila Dakshata in Delhi. Vimochana in Chennai, Baijja in Maharashtra, Pennurumai in Chennai. The Feminist Network in English and Manushi in Hindi were some of the first women's newsletters and magazines to appear. The issues that they raise are rape, wife-battering, divorce, maintenance and child custody along with legislative reforms. This progressive outlook is indeed a by-product of the changing economic, social and political climate in the country. Therefore, the women's movement in India after Independence struggle not only struggled for liberation but also averred the need for creating a non-class socialist society where women can be completely free from apprehension and violence. The reverberations of changes, recurrent and sporadic at the beginning, began to be heard rather loudly from the middle of the 20th century. Some women organizations such as the Banga Mahila Samaj, and the Ladies Theosophical Society functioned at local levels to promote contemporary ideas for women. These organizations deal with issues like women's education, abolition of social evils like purdah and Child marriage, Hindu law reform, moral and material progress of women, equality of rights and opportunities. It can be believed that, the Indian women's movement worked for two goals.

All the major political parties, the Congress, BJP, CPI, CPI (M) have their women's wings. The new women's groups declare themselves to be feminist. They are dispersed with no central organization but they have built informal networks among themselves. Their political commitment is more leftist than liberal. Currently there are many women organizations of India: National alliance of women: The National Alliance of Women (NAWO) is a national web of women. It is affiliation or membership is open to all liberal minded women's groups and institutions, non-governmental organizations, women workers, women's unions, individuals and others who share the principles, objectives and values of NAWO, as defined in the NAWO vision.

Another women organization in India is Swadhina (Self-esteemed Women) which was formed in 1986. It is principally a civil society organization focused on Empowerment of women and Child Development based on Sustainable Development and Right Lively hood. At Swadhina, it is believed that positive social change has a direct effect on the lives of women and that change is possible only through an equal and spontaneous participation of Women. Organization members are active in five states across the country in remote tribal districts of Singbhum in Jharkhand, Purulia and West Midnapur in West Bengal, KanyaKumari in Tamil Nadu, Mayurbhanj in Orissa and East Champaran in Bihar.

Major projects of this organization are as follows

All India Democratic Women's Association is also dominant woman organization which is an independent left oriented women's organisation committed to achieving democracy, equality and women's emancipation. AIDWA members are from all strata in society, regardless of class, caste and community. It has an organizational presence in 22 states in India. AIDWA was created in 1981 as a national level mass organisation of women. AIDWA believes the liberation of women in India requires fundamental systemic change. It upholds secular values and challenges and resists cultural practices demeaning to women. To summarize, women from earlier time has significant role in shaping of civilization. Historical data indicated that though the struggle for women's rights is long and hard, but currently, status of women is enhanced and society recognized their importance. It was observed that after Independence, the Indian women gained considerable importance within their country in social and political spheres. The women's movement has a long way to go in its struggle for bringing about new values, a new ethics and a new democratic affiliation. The objectives were to get equality based on gender, job opportunities, improving the existing laws which gave women only partial justice, and creating a society which did not dominate women intellectually, physically and emotionally. Even though the efforts made by women activists and concerned organization were slow in getting a real break-through, despite the conservative outlook of their counterparts, they thrived in creating a focused

awareness among middle-class and upper middle-class women at large.

Currently, Indian woman is working throughout the country at high post and virtually in all professions at different positions. She is not only visible as the top politician as seen above in politics. Even as managers in industrial firms, director of nationwide operating banks, top bureaucrats, active members of micro-credit groups or as independent fashion designers. Government is going to help women in every sphere of life in society. Numerous programs are implement to empower women in India (Tripathi, 1999). Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), and equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

Feminist activism in India gained momentum in the late 1970s. One of the first national-level issues that brought women's groups together was the Mathura rape case. The acquittal of policemen accused of raping a young girl Mathura in a police station led to country-wide protests in 1979-1980. The protests, widely covered by the national media, forced the Government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Indian Penal Code; and created a new offence, custodial rape. Female activists also united over issues such as female infanticide, gender bias, women's health, women's safety, and women's literacy.

Since alcoholism is often associated with violence against women in India, many women groups launched anti-liquor campaigns in Andhra

Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and other states. Many Indian Muslim women have questioned the fundamental leaders' interpretation of women's rights under the Shariat law and have criticised the triple talaq system. In the 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs. Self-help groups and NGOs such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in the advancement of women's rights in India. Many women have emerged as leaders of local movements; for example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (*Swashakti*). The National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women came was passed in 2001. In 2006, the case of Imrana, a Muslim rape victim, was highlighted by the media. Imrana was raped by her father-in-law. The pronouncement of some Muslim clerics that Imrana should marry her father-in-law led to widespread protests, and finally Imrana's father-in-law was sentenced to 10 years in prison. The verdict was welcomed by many women's groups and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. According to a report by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women, India was also noted as the worst country for women among the G20 countries, and however, this report has faced criticism for its inaccuracy. On 9 March 2010, one day after International Women's day, Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill requiring that 33% of seats in India's Parliament and state legislative bodies be reserved for women. In this regard the position of women is in Question till date.

Reference

1. Tyrrell, Ian (1991). *Woman's World/Woman's Christian Temperance union: the Women's Christian Salvador Temperance Union in international perspective, 1800-1930*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press. p. 2. ISBN 0-8078-1950-6

2. "Double-Do for WCTU". Time magazine. 1961-08-18. Retrieved 2009-04-09.
3. Johnson, Dirk (1989-09-14). "Temperance Union Still Going Strong". New York Times.
4. Joseph R. Gusfield, "Social Structure and Moral Reform: A Study of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union", The American Journal of Sociology 61, No.3 (1955):226
5. Gokilvani. S., Women's Studies Principles, & Theories & Methodologies, Alagappa University, Karaikudi. 1999.
6. Kenneth D. Rose, American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition (NYU Press, 1997), 36.
7. Scherer, Anton. "Our Town." Indianapolis Times. 18 April 1939.
8. Vijaykaushik & Belarani, Indian Women through the Ages, Sharma Sarup & sons, New Delhi, 1998.