Research Paper Political Science

Women's Rights : A Historical Perspective

Dr. K. PRASSANNA KUMAR | Assistant Professor , Department of political Science Shyadri Arts and Commerce college Shivmoga , Karnataka India.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, it is tried to trace the history of women rights and the status of women in the Indian society. Women constitute the majority of the world's population, but there is still no society in which women enjoy full equality with men . they often face specific discrimination , even in countries which grant legal equality to both sexes; women are often economically disadvantaged and suffer discrimination. National and local governments should give particular attention to this matter, because the rights of women , to own land , property and housing , often determines their quality of life and the prospects of their children. The extension of the rights of human being to include women came about by a gradual process of change in societies, as the part which women played in society changed and they increasingly entered into public life.

KEYWORDS

In a civilized society, respect for human rights is a basic condition for the survival of human beings. The UN center for human rights defines human rights as"those rights that are inherent in our nature and without nature and without which we cannot live as human beings"these rights relate to life, equality, liberty and security of person, equal protection under law, free from all forms of discrimination etc Human rights , which were embedded formally at the united nations as a grater international priority sixty two years through the December 1948 universal declaration of human rights have gained prominence as a universally recognized set of norms and standards that increasingly inform all aspects of our relations as individuals and as collective members of groups , within communities and among nations Although women constitute the majority of the world's population, their is still no society in which women enjoy full equality with men . they often face specific discrimination, even in countries which grant legal equality to both sexes, women are often face economically disadvantaged and suffer discrimination. National and local governments should give particular attention to this matter, because the rights of women , to own land , property and housing, often determines their quality of life and the prospects of their children. The extension of rights of human being to include women came about by a gradual process of change in societies, as the part which women played in society changed and they increasingly entered into public life . in September 1995, the Beijing declaration and platform for action , adopted at the united nations fourth world conference on women and the girl-child as an inalienable , integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Women as a class, suffer acute deprivation in all respects of their lives . so , women needs more consideration. Protection of their rights is prerequisite of their development. Women's rights are human rights , which need to be protected particularly in relation to violence, sexuality and reproduce healthy women should have equal rights in inherent land and property. The preamble of the united nations charter (1945) beings by referring a 'faith in fundamental; human rights , in the dignity and worth of the human persons, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small'. the full an d equal participation of women in political ,civil, economic , social and cultural life, at the national , regional and international levels and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community (The Vienna Declaration and the programme of action).

Origin and Development of Women Rights

Human rights discourse had traditionally been male dominated in the sense that, in what is essentially a man's world, men have struggled to assert their dignity and common humanity against an overbearing state apparatus. Attempts to define a body of civil and political rights were made from the eighteenth century onwards in societies that were organized by men and , predominantly for men . Plato was the first Greek political philosopher who tried to emancipate women from their house hold duties of child bearing and rearing , so that they can contribute equal in the state affairs. Therefore, he gave the their of communism of wives for the guardian class, since from ancient times, so many philosophers have been talked about the rights of women and natural rights worldwide. The original contributor to women 's human rights were those who first taught women to read and thus to explore the world out side the home and vindicate the right of women and a certain philosophical; tradition did develop in which pleas were made for the emancipation of women to allow them to escape their traditional domestic role and to enter more fully in into society.

Historical research , however has revealed a much longer gestation period, beginning at least in the early 15th century with the 1405 publication of Le livre de la cite des dames (the book of the city of Ladies) by Christine de Pizan . this work stimulated what French feminists call the Querelle des Femmes (debate about women), which continues to the present .

Jean Jacqus Rousseau (1712-1778) promoted political freedoms and rights, though he belittled the advocacy of women's rights by hiscontemporaries. Nevertheless, Oiympe de Gouges (1748-1773) issued the declaration of the Rights of Women (1790) to the idea of women's human rights is often cited as beginning in 1792 with Mary Wollstone Craft's book Vindication of the rights of women, published in response to the promulgation of the natural rights of man theory.

Jhon Stuart Mill (1806-1873) Introduced the question of women's sufferage to the House of Commons in 1867, and his The subjection of women first published in 1869, provided a full scale analysis of women's situation and the advantages to society of giving them full legal and political equality with men. He definrd the essential components of liberty as the freedom , expression , association , and living according to one's taste. He advocate women's rights and political equality.

In Indian context , there is a wide spread misconception regarding the true status of women in ancient Indian society. It is mainly due to deplorable b ignorance of the original Sanskrit texts, both Sruti and Smriti, in which there are to be found the laws , customs and tradition which define the true status of women in early times.

The neglect of education and the lowering of the marriage age, produced disastorous consiquences upon the position and status of women . their position in society further deteriorated with the prohibition of widow remarriage, the spread of sati custom, the practice of purdah , increasing demand for dowry and the greater prevalence of polygamous marriages.

In Sikhism , women have equal status with men. At the times of guru Nanak's birth, the condition of women were undoubtedly depressed . the birth of a female child was regarded a bad omen and was looked upon with disfavor . Among Rajputs, female infanticide was freely practiced. The women did not equal status with men.

Across India , there is also a long list of reformers who undertook major efforts on women's belief. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's (1772-1832) name is usually listed first among those of nineteenth century reformers concerned with improving women's status. Historians have called him 'Father of Modern India', a ' champion of Women's Rights'. And 'a feminist' . in Bengal , Iswar chandra vidyasagar champion female education and led the campaign to legalise widow remarriage , and Keshub Chandra Sen, A leader of the Brahmo Samaj, sought to bring women into new roles through schools, prayer meetings, and experiments in living. Swami Vivekananda had also supported the cause of women right and said that women could become a powerful and condemned customs . He regarded marriage between partners of unequal ages , dowry , and polygyny against the betterment of women.

Mahatma Gandhi advise women to liberal women to liberate themselves and their menfolks" from the death grip of the existing government which is the greatest of all social evils with which society is cursed.

As Former Security General of UN, Kofi Annan has stated, " Women's rights are the responsibility of all human kind; combating all forms of violence against women is duty of all human kind and achieving the empowerment of women is the advancement of all human kind".

Some major conventions and conferences have been held at the international and national levels . Many acts and Laws are being made by government to make women legally strong and give them protection against any type of discrimination . Some major conventions, days and institutes are.

- International Women's Day, 1908
- Commission on the status of women (1946)
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951
- The United Nations convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 1967
- The International Year of Women, 1975
- First women Conference of Women , 1975
- Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Discrimination against Women, 1979
- UN Development Fund for Women(UNIFEM). 1996
- UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)

There are many constitutional and legislative provisions for women in india:

- The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality before law- Article 14.
- No discrimination by the state on ground of only religion , race , caste , sex, place of birth or any of these- Article 15(1).
- Equal opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment of appointment to any office under the state – Article 16;
- State policy to be divested to securing for men and women equally , right to an equate means of livelihood- Article 39(a);
- Equal pay for equal work for both men and women – Article 39(d);
- Provision to be made by the state for securing just and conditions of work and For maternity relief-Article 42;
- To promote harmony and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51(A) (e).

In addition , Article243D(3), 243D(4), 243T(3), 243T(4) of the Constitution makes provisions for reversing not less than one third of the total seats for women in the direct elections of local bodies, viz. Panchayats and Muncipalities. Some legislations, laws and acts have been formulated to protect the rights of women like wise : Provisions in Indian Penal Code, in Indian Evidence Act, Code of Criminal Procedure etc. Some laws and acts are:

- Dowry Prohibition Act , 1961
- Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- The National Commission for Women Act, 1990
- A National Plan of Action for the Girl Child
- The Protection of Women from Violence Act, 2005

Besides, these acts many other acts and laws are exits that are Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, Immoral Trafic (Prevention) Act 1956, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1971 and many more.

Conclusion:

Despite the great progress made in the arena of women's rights in theory in theory and policy formation. Women are still facing violation of their social, political and economic rights in the family and Community. Women's Rights and equality must be looked with renewed vigour and vision. An integral part of the development and welfare policies of states and international organizations. Awareness campaigns should be organized on women's rights by civil society and freedoms and disseminate knowledge of the various welfare measures implemented by the state and international organization. The active involvement and association of the civil society in women's issues can accelerate the whole process as it works at the grass-root level and, understands the ground reality of the situation. The most important thing for the upliftment of women is to change the mind set of men folk as well as women folk.

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