WOMEN'S IN INDIA: GENDER ROLES AND GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS IN CHANGING SOCIETY

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Abstract:

Introduction: The women's movement has a long history in India. There exists an active women's movement in India today. Furthermore, there also exists a strong legal environment to protect women's rights. However, the social status of the majority of Indian women remains unchanged.

Purpose of study: Purpose of this article is gender roles and gender consciousness in Indian society

Research methodology: This article study on based a qualitative historical analysis method for two reasons is the lives of Indian women's is intertwined with the religious and cultural history of India and to understand and analyze the Indian women's movement.

Paper Discusses: This article discus on two topic one role of Indian women has and second is gender consciousness.

Conclusion: Women's organizations have succeeded in improving the legal and economic status of Indian women but have failed to success in social status of women because of their lack of emphasis on questioning the tenants of patriarchy.

Key word: Women's, Gender Roles, Gender Consciousness, India, Society

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INTRODUCTION

In India, there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to cultural norms, family structure, class and caste. As mentioned in the previous section, religion served as the primary paradigm for social values and norms for women in this period. Further, it is important to note that these paradigms provided the definition of female and the consequent roles for women in Indian society for generations to come. The women's question in the 19th and 20th centuries mainly revolved around issues such as child and widow marriage, sati, purdah and divorce.

According to **Khanna & Varghese (1978),** marriage as an institution has existed in every form of society since time immemorial. It is said to cater to the very basic needs of men and women by providing security, companionship and stability, thus forming the nucleus of family life. It is no wonder then that marriage is given such an important place in Indian society. In short, marriage is a must for most Indian women. The traditional, religious, and sociological aspects of marriage have contributed largely to the definition and role of the Indian woman. Although the Indian concept of marriage gives ample scope to the husband and wife to fulfill their duties to the home, family and community, it is argued that the patriarchal traditions of Hindu culture naturally gave the husband greater authority and power as the bread earner, with the wife becoming the nucleus of the home.

According to **Dhruvarajan (1989),** the ideology of "pativrata", which literally means the "virtuous wife", has dominated the lives of women in Indian society throughout history. It has also sustained the patriarchal structure which gave rise to this ideology in the first place. This ideology provides all the rules and references regarding gender roles in Indian society. It is based on certain assumptions and beliefs regarding the nature of men and women and their interactions. Most central to these beliefs is the assumption that men are ritually pure, physically strong and emotionally mature; women, on the other hand, are ritually impure, physically and emotionally weak and lack strong will power.

In Indian society although the wife wielded less economic and material power, she was the major force behind the domestic security of the home. Furthermore, because India was an agricultural society, women had less access to the economic community outside the home. This particular aspect of marriage can be argued to be the most influential in the construction of gender roles in Indian society, in which the women were confined to the domestic or private world while the men took care of the outside or public world. This confinement of women to a private or domestic sphere is generally seen as controlling and further channeling power towards men.

According to **Harlan & Courtwright (1995),** the practice of sari also originated from the ideologies of Hinduism regarding the role of women as only wives and mothers. The image of a woman willingly throwing herself on her husband's funeral pyre goes against the universal right of self-preservation. Paul Courtwright suggests two conclusions which might be drawn from the act of sati. Either the woman is not human or she is not acting on her own will.

According to **Asthana (1974)**, the powerful ideology behind the practice of sati of the woman being completely dependent on the man and thus having no use for her life after his death, is one which has attracted more attention and cause for analysis than the actual physical act of it. Its various interpretations stress the issues of gender and power and connect it to religion and violence in compelling ways. Further, the issue of sati has emerged as an important part of the discourse of feminist criticism of Hindu culture's patriarchal structure. Hindu priests glorified sati to such an extent that it became prevalent not only among the Rajputs but also

among the Jats and Sikhs as well as among the Brahmins in Bengal .However, not all widows burnt themselves during this time. Those who chose to remain alive were destined to face society's anger.

According to **Robinson cited in Haddad & Findly (1983),** the practice of female infanticide seems to have arisen during the middle period of Indian history. It took a variety of forms ranging from killing newborn infants by methods such as strangling with the umbilical cord to drowning the baby in a river. Although this was not common to every region, it is important to mention its existence because of the re- occurrence of this practice in the modern day period. These mothers preferred to kill their baby girls rather than subject them to a harsh life. However, in most cases in the modern period as well, the societal pressures of bearing a son were so intense that women were often left with no choice but to kill female babies. The principles behind practices again, find their roots in the value or in this case, the devaluation of women in Indian society.

Thus, in the early 19th and 20th centuries women's lives were governed mainly by blind faith, ritualism and traditionalism. The status of Indian women was determined by the verdicts of law givers and jurists. The ideologies of pativrata and the laws of Manu were particularly influential in shaping the roles and positions of women for years to come.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:

Purpose of this article is based on:

- ➢ Women's roles in Indian society, and
- ➢ Women's consciousness in Indian society

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the current role and position of Indian women and the women's movement, it is necessary to provide a historical background of both. This article study on based a qualitative historical analysis method for two reasons.

First, since the lives of Indian women are intertwined with the religious and cultural history of India, it is necessary to provide the reader with the context of Indian women's lives. This is important because the religious and cultural history of India has had a tremendous impact on Indian women. Thus, in order to analyze the causes of women's subordination, it is important to describe how this ideology evolved historically.

Second, in order to understand and analyze the Indian women's movement, it is also necessary to provide a historical overview of how it evolved within the greater context of Indian history. The women's movement in India has always had strong links with all the major phases and events in Indian history.

PAPER DISCUSSES

This article discus on two contents one is roles of Indian women's and second is gender consciousness.

Roles of Indian Women's:

There is a considerable amount of literature regarding the role of women in Indian society. The question of women's subordination has prompted extensive research. Some scholars argue that the role of Indian women stems from their socio-economic positions within the family and society. In other words, this body of literature suggests that women's position is intricately tied up with the development of the class to which they belong. Other scholars have linked women's subordination with their caste status. Historically, the caste system in India has resulted in greater constraints placed on upper caste women. Lower caste women have had greater mobility, particularly in the area of employment.

According to **Devaki Jain (1975)**, studies women along caste and class lines. She challenges the notion that Indian women are powerful because of their motherhood and homemaking roles they play. She suggests that in fact Indian women are powerless and that the value given to them as human beings is particularly low.

According to **Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (1984),** examine some of the diverse situations Indian women confront today. These scholars are aware that the vast differences which distinguish the lives of Indian women in different parts of the country due to caste and class make it difficult to make generalizations and to put together a comprehensive description of the lives and struggles of Indian women. However, based on their research, they conclude that Indian women struggle mainly to get enough to eat for their families and for themselves. Further, they argue that women have very little control over the conditions and products of their labor. It is clear that a relationship between gender and class and caste does exist in Indian society. This relationship needs to be further explored in order to arrive at an understanding of male supremacy and women's subordination in India. However, the literature suggests that there are also other factors, which have contributed to women's subordination such as the lack of opportunities in education.

According to **Kamla Bhasin (1990)**, discusses the problem of illiteracy among women and argues that it is one of the main reasons for their powerless condition today. She shows a clear bias which exists in Indian society (particularly in the rural sector) regarding the importance of education of boys only. There exists a view that educating a girl is a waste of money, as ultimately her role is to get married and raise a family. Bhasin emphasizes the power of the patriarchal culture of Indian society which dictates social norms for women. She suggests that while eradicating illiteracy is part of the solution, the challenge is to help the poor women not so much to read and understand written language, but to read and control their world.

According to **Shah and Gandhi (1989),** have also analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the women's movement. Most of these works argue that the one of the main reasons for women's subordinate status in India is due to the lack of their economic power. In other words, if women were to become economically self- sufficient, their status would improve. However, the above literature offers little help in explaining the power and influence that culture has in Indian society. Further, scholars have not adequately analyzed the patriarchal structure of the society.

Gender Consciousness

There is a considerable amount of literature on gender consciousness and its relationship with various women's movements around the world. There are various definitions of gender consciousness.

According to **Gurin (1990),** it supports a perception of gender roles combined with political roles that allows women to legitimize themselves. In other words, it empowers women with a sense of validity of their world view. Patricia Gurin states that gender consciousness, like other forms of group consciousness, embodies an identification with similar others, positive affect towards them and a feeling of independence within the group's fortunes.

According to **Rinehart (1992),** gender consciousness is the recognition that one's relation to the political world is shaped in important ways by the physical fact of one's sex. Furthermore, feminism, regardless of the particular form it may take, is, at its root, a powerful manifestation of gender consciousness. Rinehart also states that gender consciousness supports a perception of the relationship of gender roles to political roles that allows individual women to legitimize themselves.

According to sociologists **Nancy Davis and Robert Robinson (1991),** individuals must first perceive that inequality exists, and then decide that this inequality is sufficiently unfair that some collective action is warranted. The consciousness of inequality includes the self awareness of inequality on the part of those who are not disadvantaged. Thus by arguing that gender consciousness enables people to realize that injustices exist and that some action is needed to eliminate those injustices, the relationship between gender consciousness and the women's movement becomes clear.

According to **D.W. Livingstone and Meg Luxton (1988)** define gender consciousness by using class analogies. According to them gender consciousness includes the following: (a) gender identities, as our understanding of the normal meanings of femininity and masculinity, and our personal sentiments of affinity with these distinctions; (b) oppositional gender consciousness, as a sense that identities of feminine and masculine have been arbitrary and constraining for both men and women and a recognition that gender relations have involved domination and oppression of women by men; and (c) hegemonic gender consciousness as the willingness to either maintain or create a form of society based on the assumptions that one's own gender interests can be generalized for all. All these definitions suggest that for gender

consciousness to exist, there has to first of all be an awareness that inequalities exist. This awareness has to be followed by the desire for some kind of change.

Patricia Gurin (1990). According to her, the first component-collective orientation assumes that the group desires change in power because either it has been subordinated or its dominance is challenged. In her definition of group consciousness, collective orientation leads to collective action. In other words, one of the most important components of creating gender consciousness is a collective orientation toward the desirability of change in the status of women.

The second component of group consciousness is the individuals' discontent with the status of their social group in comparison with others outside their group. In order for gender consciousness to exist, women as individuals have to compare themselves to members of other groups and then become collectively discontented.

The third component is the legitimacy of disparities. Here Gurin suggests that members of the group have to evaluate their disparities and become convinced that these disparities stem from illegitimate sources. In other words, this means members have to undergo an erosion of faith in the traditional justifications given to them regarding their disparities. Relating this to gender consciousness, women have to be convinced that their subordinate status stems from various structural barriers existing in society.

The fourth component-identification reflects a recognition of shared values and interests that turns the concept into action.

CONCLUSION

Creating a gender consciousness among women regarding their role in society is absolutely crucial in the case of Indian women. Unless women are made aware of their existing inequalities, they will remain subordinate. This is particularly true regarding their social status. There is an urgent need for the women's movement to respond to the issue of cultural attitudes which are manifested through patriarchy The movement has to dedicate itself to the total and consistent struggle against this ideology of subservience, and the varied ways in which it has been woven into the lives of women. Women have to begin to see the struggle against oppressive cultural attitudes as part of the political struggle to challenge power relations between men and women. This is the greatest challenge to the women's movement.

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