

# STRUGGLING FOR A RESPECTED IDENTITY OF THE “GRIHALAKSHMIS” IN INDIA – A SPECIAL TO THE POST- INDEPENDENT PERIOD

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## Abstract:

The worth of a civilisation can be seen in terms of the space given to the womenfolk in the society. Over the years, it is seen that women, as being part of different social classes, ethnic/racial/national communities have made their own movements or have been contributed to different mixed gender social movements. As a result, of which they have been able to achieve some amount of respect and freedom in the typical Indian society. But, the due respect and dignity women actually deserve was denied by the traditional patriarchal society. So, this paper will primarily focus on how the question of women which was neglected many times earlier has become a key issue in contemporary period. The movement of women after the freedom struggle will help to analyse how women has exclusively raised their issues through various protests as well as movements and to which extend they were able to achieve some amount of success in their way. Though women fought for their rights but today it is seen that there are gross violation of rights of women for which the problem of facing humiliations, exploitations, oppression by them aren't decreasing but increasing day by day. So, this paper will attempt to focus on the shift of traditional role of women from housewives to the protector and defender of one's own rights through active participation in various protests and movements as well as establishing various organisations.

KEYWORDS: Women's movement, society, active participation, women's rights.

## INTRODUCTION:

Over the years, it is seen that “women” who is being worshipped as the Goddess of power, prosperity and knowledge is often given an inferior position in the male dominated society. So, providing such a superior position to women as compared to the Goddess in the society creates a kind of confusion in my mind which gives rise to certain critical questions –

- 1) If women are regarded as the “Goddess of wealth” then why in many instances it is seen that they are not given appropriate property rights?
- 2) Though women are regarded as the “Symbol of prosperity and fortune” then why in many families the birth of a baby girl is regarded as the burden on the family?
- 3) If women are regarded as the “Goddess of knowledge” then why in many families' parents preferred more to send their boys to school rather than to both boys and girls?

In this context let us have a brief discussion on the condition of women from the colonial period-

During the ancient period women occupied a low status in the society as customs like sati, child marriage and polygamy were widely prevalent. Widow re-marriage was strictly prohibited. As women were being deprived of education as well as various socio-economic, political rights they confined themselves to the four walls of the house. But later the social reformers took up the cause of women and tried to reform the pitiable conditions of women. The injustices and atrocities done on women in the name of religion and

tradition was for the first time opposed by a man named Raja Ram Mohan Roy who strictly opposed the inhuman tradition of “Sati”. Along with him other reformers like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, B.M.Malabari, and M.G.Ranade made several reforms for the upliftment of the position of women. At that time there were certain women organisations organised by men. But later on the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century women organisations were organised by women. In this context we may refer to Sakhi Samiti in 1882 which was organised by Swarnakumari Devi, sister of Rabindra Nath Tagore. Pandita Ramabai also founded Arya Mahila Samiti.

The beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century brought many women to the public sphere from the private sphere as the “freedom movement” provide enough space for participation of women in the movement. Women from liberal homes to conservative families, urban centres to rural areas, young age to old age, all came forward to fight against the colonial power. They thought the freedom of India means freedom for all. If the injustices done by the colonial rulers can stop then there will be no injustices, violence among the Indians as they will be set free. But their dreams did not materialise. The “Indian Constitution” which was the most important outcomes of freedom movement, provides several laws, articles to make equal all its citizens. But in practice, the division still exist. So, in this paper I want to analyse the struggle of women in India after Independence.

### STRUGGLE OF WOMEN IN INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE-

After Independence women came to the forefront in large numbers to fight against the atrocities and injustices done on the poor peasants. The uprisings of various peasant movements like the Telangana movement, Tebhaga movement saw the active participation of women to resist the conditions of extreme poverty, exploitation by feudal landlords and slavery.

In the 70’s in Uttarakhand, women came forward to participate in the Chipko movement which was founded by a Gandhian named Chandi Prasad. In this movement women hugged the trees to protect them which also helped in maintaining the ecological balance of the slopes of Himalayas. Later on Sahada movement also women participated in large numbers arguing on the issues like violence in the family faced by women.

The emergence of “Progressive Organisations for Women” (POW) fought against dowry, eve teasing, molestation, unemployment etc. The growth of middle class women’s organisations also played a major role in making women conscious and empower. Reference could also be made to that of “Self Employed Women’s Organisation” (SEWA) in Ahmadabad and Working Women’s Forum in Madras.

It is seen that women realised that by associating with men but later they realise the fact that they have achieved nothing by doing such activities. So, in the later 70’s it is seen that women focussed on specific women issues like dowry, rape, molestation etc. They fought exclusively for their rights.

### THE REPORT “TOWARDS EQUALITY” (1975)-

India after signing the UN Declaration of “Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW) formed a committee to focus on the issues of women all over the country. This committee after its investigation made a report “Towards Equality” in 1975 which reflect certain failure of state policies to eradicate the inequalities faced by women in the areas of education, health, training, property rights etc. Thus, it gave the solution to change the status of women through various women’s campaigns.

### THE PERIOD (1975-80)-

During this period “Forum against Rape “which later came to be known as “Forum against Oppression of Women” (FAOW) was formed in Bombay. It took up the cases of physical violence against women which includes rape cases like the Turbhe rape case.

In the late 80’s there was a large scale availability of funding both from government and international sources, so that most “autonomous” groups are now actually funded non-governmental organisation (Menon, 2003). However it is increasingly being recognised that this kind of government programme aims at empowering women only to the extent that it would serve the purposes of education for population control through, for example, drives against child marriage. This has resulted in a distinct shift from ‘struggle’ to ‘development’ in the agenda of women’s organisations (Menon, 2003).

In the 90's another feature is that a common platform has emerged at the national level with women's wings of national level political parties-All India Democratic Women's Association, All India Women's Conference, National Federation of Indian Women and Mahila Dakshata Samiti- and three national level women's organisations, that is, the YWCA, the Joint Women's Programme and Centre for Women's Development Studies, getting together on specific issues (Menon, 2003).

From 1990 onwards it is seen that women are being exploited, humiliated, and molested like anything in anywhere. Over the years the Indian states has a long continuing tradition of dominating of women. The post- independent Indian states has become an active agency to transform a backward ,overwhelming rural, society into a developed, modern, educated, urban one. There is a need to look at the role of state, Constitution, various policies and its impact on the conditions of women to understand the trends and pattern of change that have taken place in the lives of women over the last few decades. It is seen that there are several acts like the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956, The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961(Amended in1986), The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986, The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act 1987, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013. But a day doesn't pass without a newspaper report of rape, molestation, sexual harassment or victimisation for dowry.

So the burning question in contemporary period is "Why?" Are the laws aren't appropriate or the measures taken by the policies aren't adequate? So from my point of view it is not only the sole responsibility of the government to make laws and protect the interest of the women. The common people should change their mentality towards one another. Indian society as very much patriarchal and conservative in nature thus it failed to realise the importance of women. As, Kamala Bhasin rightly observed: "HISTORY HAS ALWAYS REMAIN HIS-STORY, NOT HER-STORY". Though in some instances we found large number of politicians, business women etc but the ground reality is that the situation of Indian women is very poor. In most cases, women are being exploited by women rather than men. It mainly happens in the cases of relationship between a landlady and her servant, high-caste women and low-caste women, rich women and poor women. So, rather than exploiting each other they should try to help each other. The educated women should try to make conscious about the rights of the illiterate ones, rather than taking the chance of their illiteracy and helplessness. The educated people should guide the poor and needy ones to sent their children to public schools which don't need any high amount of substantial fees like that of the private ones. They should try to make them aware of the fact that education is the best way to come out of all sorts of discrimination as well as deprivations in the society. It is known to all that "GOD HELP THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES". In the process of empowering women the men folk should come to the forefront. They can also help those women organisations as well as those NGO's working for the issues of women by providing certain suggestions as well as providing certain amount of fund. They should treat women at first a human being and then as their own sisters, mothers. Rather, then viewing them as inferior sex, helpless persons, burden on the male members as well as comparing them with that of slaves or objects made for their sexual satisfaction. Once people change their mentality and selfish motives towards one another, the society will become a violent-free, peaceful society in which the true sense of democracy will prevail and the cause of celebrating "Independence Day" by both the sexes will become meaningful.

Thus, it can be concluded, by saying that "There is no worth of offering puja to "GODDESS LAKSHMI" until and unless we know to respect our own "GRIHALAKSHMI".

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