

Status Of Women In Tamilnadu During The Time Of The 18th 19th And 20th Centuries, (India)

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Abstract: The prevalence of female infanticide, child marriage, sati, purdah system, denial of widow remarriage, denial of property rights, denial of basic and higher education, equality of rights etc. Comparatively to men, the status and position of women of these districts were really “worse”, Most of the poor villagers of these districts were finding it very difficult to make both ends meet. Poverty, diseases, un employment, illiteracy, denial of basic rights made the people to live a life of disgrace, scarcity and depression. “The Condition of its women is the truest test of a people’s civilization. Her status is her country’s barometer. Judged by this test, India occupies a very low position indeed. Through the Brahma Samaj founded in 1828, he aimed at eradicating all inhuman practices, which heaped sufferings on women in the name of religious sanctity. These revivalists established powerful organizations like Dayananda Saraswati’s” Arya Samaj” (1875), Swamy Vivekananda’s “The Ramakrishna Mission” (1879) and Mrs. Annie Besant’s “Madras Hindu Association” (1904). These now organizations attacked the reformers but supported some reforms in the Hindu Society. Education is a powerful instrument since education enables women to gain more knowledge about the world outside to be more skilled and to have good self image and self-confidence.

Keywords:

<i>Female Infanticide</i>	:	<i>The crime of killing a Female child.</i>
<i>Child Marriage</i>	:	<i>The very low marriageable age for females.</i>
<i>Sati</i>	:	<i>A Hindu practice whereby a widow immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.</i>

I. INTRODUCTION

This article is dealing with the status of women in the time of three centuries.

Tamilnadu faced several other vital social evils which were uncivilized in character and content. The prevalence of female infanticide, child marriage, sati, purdah system, denial of widow remarriage, denial of property rights, denial of basic and higher education, equality of rights etc.

During the courses of early part of the 19th century the southern districts of Tamilnadu particularly the districts of Thanjavur, Pudukottai, Madurai, Salem, Coimbatore and Rannad were totally backward, undeveloped in terms of the absence of schools, hospitals, homes, Roads, Transport facilities and all other basic amenities of modern civilization. Hence, the people were mere illiterate, uncultured, uncivilized and yearn to taste the fruits of modern civilization. Comparatively to men, the status and position of women of

these districts were really “worse”, Most of the poor villagers of these districts were finding it very difficult to make both ends meet. Poverty, diseases, un employment, illiteracy, denial of basic rights made the people to live a life of disgrace, scarcity and depression,. For the poor villagers, everyday, a one time meal had not been assured, but, as per the existed social order, for everyman, irrespective of the gender, right from “the birth to death” they had to carryout a variety of rites and rituals which they could not avoid and at the same time felt it a “burden”. The birth of a girl child in such a poor, village family had been looked upon as a bad sign, a burden, a curse, because, while the family was under the clutches of poverty, scarcity and financial constrains, they could not enjoy the birth of a new born girl baby.

II. STATUS OF WOMEN IN TAMILNADU

“The Condition of its women is the truest test of a people’s civilization. Her status is her country’s barometer. Judged by this test, India occupies a very low position indeed. While recent years have seen great advance in the place taken by women in politics and social reform, they have still to go a logway before they can be said to have taken their rightful share in the service of the community.. It is not an easy thing to analyze causes and effects in the complex working of Social change. The historical survey cannot, in the least attempt to draw clear-cut lines of development and arrive at unassailable conclusions. In the inter play of religions and cultures to which Tamilnadu was exposed together with the whole of British India under a western government during our period, however, a few fields can be and must be staked off in which the Christian faith undoubtedly made a marked contribution. At the turn of the 19th Century, it became increasingly clear that Christianity was totally itself against agnosticism and materialism, which was growing among the educated youth in Tamilnadu, as well as against Hindu traditionalism with those Hindus who cherished now ethical and social concern, an indirect result of Christian influence.

Through the Brahma Samaj founded in 1828, he aimed at eradicating all inhuman practices, which heaped sufferings on women in the name of religious sanctity. He refuted the idea that women were inferior to men and stood for equality in matters of education, social life and property rights. As a result of his campaign, the education of women is equally important for the life of the nation as the education of men. Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s vigorous campaign against the inhuman practices prompted the British Government to prohibit ‘Sati’ in 1829, which had been, for the first time, the British colonial government ventured into the sphere of ‘personal law’. It was the beginning of a whole era of effort to change women’s subordination by both legal and social methods. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, another noted reformer, had initiated a movement for Widow Remarriage Act of 1850’s. Though this resulted in the enactment of Hindu Widow’s Remarriage Act of 1856, in terms of actual achievement, the results seemed to be meager. The Widow Remarriage campaign resulted in the formation of a number of Associations like the “Bombay Widow Remarriage Association” (1866) and the “Rajamandry Social Reform

Association” (1878). Both these legislations were opposed by the orthodox sections of the Society. Social pressures were brought against Hindu reformers ranging from social out caste to threats of violence from orthodox people. A literate mother means more to the nation than a literate father. And yet only three women out of every hundred can read and write in the whole of India. Out of 21,70,000 girls between the age of five and ten, the census records only 4,29,000 as literate giving an average of nearly two percent. The government report on education gives about 2,000,000 as girls enrolled in primary schools, of whom 1,300,000 are in the first standard. It appears that 90% of the girls never reach the fourth standard. The most serious obstacle to female education is of course early marriage. But after that comes the lack of good women teachers.

In all this wider context, three realms of definite Christian impact on social change stand out the education of children, the status of Women, and the treatment of the depressed classes of Indian Society. As in most countries of the world, the strongest factor instrumental for social change in Tamilnadu during the 19th and 20th centuries was the development of education, causing not only the rise of new classes of society, but also lessening the rigidity of class differences by its tendency for universal spreading. Tamilnadu has the distinction of its Christianity having stimulated that progress much earlier and for a long time more strongly than Christian in any other region of India. The establishment of the British rule in India brought in tremendous changes in the Socio economic and political life of the Indian society. The socio-religious reform movements of the 19th Century was one of the consequences of Westernization in India. This had both a religious and a social tinge. In the religious field, the movement aimed to combat superstitions, attacked idolatry, Polytheism etc., In the social sphere, the movement aimed at eradicating evils like infanticide, child marriage, ban on Window remarriage and caste system.

Veda Samaj, a charitable society formed to pronounce the need for awareness of social change and uplift as a reaction to and effect of Christian thought and life, atleast with regard to sanctions of society and in terms of reforms rather than revolution and expected regeneration impulses from them, especially for the uplift of depressed classes of society, particularly women. The influence of Veda Samaj led by C.V. Rangananda Sastri to take up the cause against infant marriage, but his agitation was abortive in 1865. He and his friends were more successful in the field of female education, but failed again in their advocacy of widow marriage through the Madras Hindu Widow Marriage Association which had been formed. The antagonism of the Hindu Sabha of 1880 and the fact that it was largely the Maratha Brahmanas and seldom the Tamil Brahmanas in Madras as well as in the rest of Tamilnadu who fought for social causes for the failure.

When considered the literacy of women according to religion, the Parsis head the list with 734 in a thousand, next comes the Jews with 338, followed by the Christian with 203 of Indian Christian Women, 120 in every thousand are literate of Hindu Women, only 21 in a thousand are literate and of Muslim Women only 15 in a thousand are literate. These facts constitute a loud call to Indian Christian Women wherever

they are to do their share in removing the appalling illiteracy from the women of India.

One of the terrible blights upon the home is the practice among the Hindus of child marriage. At the time of the last census, there were 5,002,000 'wives' under the age of ten and 801,000 under five. There were actually 44,000 baby-wives under one year. These marriage contracts lead to the early withdraw of girls from schools and are a prolific source of many evils, such as enfeebled physique, impaired mind and premature death. The cruelty of the custom is seen when it is remembered that these so-called marriages of baby girls are legal and have religious sanction, and if the husband dies, the baby wife is a widow and ordinarily can never remarry. A leading Hindu says "Early marriage is the greatest evil of our country. It has stood at the very springs of the life of the nation and prevented the normal expansion of which it is capable. In this connection, mention must be made of the 'Sarda Act' – named after Diwan Bahadur Harbilas Sarda who introduced it – which became law on 1st April 1930.

According to its provisions, it is now penal in British India to solemnize the marriage of male children under the age of eighteen and female children under the age of fourteen. Immediately, before passing of the Act, there was a great rush in all parts of India to effect infant marriages with the hope of escaping its penalties when once it came into operation. This accounts – according to the census Report, for the enormous increase of infant marriages reported in 1931, though it is said that the age of marriage has been steadily increasing during the last fifty years. It is sure that the Act is creating public opinion on this subject is bound to be seen in the next census. One may all the more confidently entertain such a hope, because of the part taken by leading women's organizations to place such a social reform measure on the statute book.

Enforced Window hood, had been another perilous social evil that perished the life and future of a sizable number of young Indian women out of the 171,000,000 women, more than 26,000,000 are windows. In other words, fifteen out of every husband women are supposed to be widows. The treatment of widows in India, varies in different provinces and even indifferent families. The crud custom of 'Sati' - burying alive the windows along with her dead husband was the order of the society in the past. This practice of Sati was also abolished by the British government. But, who that has known anything of the Indian home life of today can deny that even now, that the young Hindu Widow very often presents the most pitiable sight in India. Shunned as an inauspicious thing by friends and foes, debarred from all family feasts, stripped of all jewelery, disciplined through the strictest tests and doomed to pass the rest of her life in household drudgery, the Hindu Window is reminded, by words, looks and deeds, that she is but receiving her just dues for the heinous sins she must have committed in a former birth. And the future of a child widow had been barbaric in character and treatment. In 1931, there were 321,701 Widows under the age of fifteen, 105,482 under the age of ten and 30,880 under the age of five. Baby Widows under twelve months numbered 1515.

These revivalists established powerful organizations like Dayananda Saraswati's "Arya Samaj" (1875), Swamy Vivekananda's "The Ramakrishna Mission" (1879) and Mrs. Annie Besant's "Madras Hindu Association" (1904). These now organizations attacked the reformers but supported some reforms in the Hindu Society.¹² They were ready to allow and sponsor education of women, the remarriage of child widows, raising the age of marriage, and uplifting the low castes. They incorporated a good deal of the programmes but all this was to be done within the framework of Hinduism. They did not want to imitate the Western Model of Liberation and to deviate from the ideals of chastity, purity, unselfishness and service pursued by the Indian Women. The ideal of Sita, the subordinate and oppressed Pativarta, defined the limits of advance of Indian Women. It is clear that staying within the framework of Hinduism meant for women a maintenance of class – caste form of patriarchy, which defined their position as mothers, wives, subordinates to men in the family and finding spiritual identity in their service to their husbands.

Swarnakumari Devi organized a Women's Association, namely the "Ladies Theosophical Society" in 1882 at Calcutta. The association aimed at cultivating friendly relations and spirit of service among Indian Women and it provided training for poor girls to become teachers. She also formed another association called "Sakthi Samithi", in 1886, to help the orphans, Widows and to foster an active interest in the welfare of the country. In Poona Panditha Ramabai started the "Arya Mahila Samaj" in 1882 with the aim of educating child widows. She also started the "Sarda Sedar" at Poona, the first home for widows in 1889. It was involved in social service activities such as relief work for orphans, destitutes and victims of famine. K. Veerasalingam, the pioneer of social reforms in the south founded the "Widow Remarriage Association" and "Widows Home" at Rajamundry and Madras. "The Hindu Social Reform Association" was established at Madras in 1892 by G. Subramaniya Iyer to promote social reform among the Hindus including female education, removal of restrictions as to the marriageable age and remarriage of widows.

The basic struggle of every woman is the quest for a fuller humanity and her own dignity. A woman in our society is expected and even forced to find her security in conforming to prescribed roles and thus she is made powerless. Patriarchy is a power relationship in our society by which women's labour, sexuality and fertility are controlled, resulting in the subordination of women. Unequal gender relations have become the characteristic features of our society life. The authoritarian structures of religion, family and society do not permit the development of women's authority. Mass Media, literature and culture communicate patriarchal values and effectively make women believe themselves to be second – class citizens.

The oppression experienced by Dalit women is different from that of non-dalit women. They face a thousand oppressions by the triple headed monster of caste, class and gender. For a Dalit Woman, her identity is established as a "Dalit Woman" and not simply as a "Woman". Her oppression is more due to her dalitness. Since our society is not only a male – dominated society but upper caste male dominated society, a Dalit Woman's problems are unique, she is a Dalit

among the Dalit. A Dalit Woman's life is the most unprotected and insecure in our society. Millions of Dalit Women live in an atmosphere of constant violence in their homes and in the Society at large. In the life of a Dalit women, the struggle for survival is as complex as her existence. She is a Dalit, a Woman and a Coolie Labourer. Too after it is learnt that the Dalit women are molested, raped, abused and subjected to all kinds of sexual crimes and even murdered. In society, they are considered inferior third class citizens even by non dalit women because of their caste.

Dr. Ambedkar rightly pointed out that political democracy without social democracy has no meaning. Social democracy is to obtain a society based on the noble principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Dr. Ambedkar also head initiated the mode of activating social democracy by sticking to the goals of "Educate, organize and Agitation. As Ambedkar again stressed that "The Mahatmas have come and the Mahatmas have gone, but the "untouchables remained remained untouchables". So, Dalit women need to be empowered to protest against the oppressive system. As Julia Kristeva said, "If women have a role to play, it is only in assuming a negative function, reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning in the existing state of society. "This summarizes the whole thing that the Dalit women have realized the fact that they have to start to rebel against the existing anti-dalit social order and to secure the basic and fundamental rights as guaranteed by the constitution of India.

Women's problems became social problems because there problems reflect the suffering of one half of human beings conditioned by the oppressive socio-cultured traditions, cultural norms and values. It is often said that women have a double burden, but it is not only "the triple burden" by saying the women have to engage themselves in the major culture, they have to and must do extra works, they have to bear children and bring them up. Considering the magnitude of problems faced by women, it is not possible for the government alone to shoulder the entire responsibility of service provision and the development of women. A meaningful partnership with the voluntary sector is necessary to integrate the women in development. The non-governmental organizations have a role in the efforts to involve woman in all areas of development, planning and implementation. They have played a major role in experimenting with different approaches and strategies of work in women's development. They have influenced government policies for women's welfare.

"Women issues cannot be considered in isolation. The life of a human being is many-sided. There are different aspects of life like the economic, legal, political, aesthetic, personal and religious sides. The social aspect is blending these aspects together. If development has to take place, the social attitudes, values and institutions should also be changed or modified in the desired direction. Though this is a pre-condition for development, social change has always happened very slowly. Any social change will certainly bring about discontentment and resistance in the wake. So the socio-cultural changes should be selective and should be introduced by stages. India has missed a rapid transformation in the direction²¹. Though social institutions like joint family system, patriarchy, fatalism

are falling, the caste system continues to be powerful in political parties and government.

Education, demonstration and persistent persuasion can do a lot in quickening development. Education is both the seed as well as the flower of development. If creates self discipline, power to think rationally and to probe into the future. Destiny of India is now being shaped in her class rooms" declared the Educational commission (1964-66) in its report. Education of the girl child is the best remedy in development vitiated by gender disparity, change is the only constant factor, but for the sake of change, one cannot change everything. Certain elements basic to the fabric of like such as love for the mother land, respect for individual fellow beings and elders, family loyalty less attachment to wealth and income, tolerance, unshakable faith and a constant devotion to duty are unchanging, necessities. Programme of the National Social conference, in striking consistency also the facilitation of the return of baptized Christians into the Hindu fold not the only influence of the Arya Samaj on the National Social Conference.

In all this wider context, three realms of definite Christian impact on social change stand out: the education of children, the status of women, and the treatment of the depressed classes of Indian Society. As in most countries of the world, the strongest factor instrumental for social change in Tamil Nadu during the 19th and 20th centuries was the development of education, causing not only the rise of new classes of society, but also lessening the rigidity of class differences by the its tendency for universal spreading. Tamil Nadu has the distinction of its Christianity having stimulated that progress much earlier and for a long time more strongly than Christian in any other region of India. The establishment of the British rule in India brought in tremendous changes in the Socio-economic and political life of the Indian Society. The Socio-religious reform movements of the 19th century was one of the consequences of Westernisation in India. This had both a religious and a social tinge. In the religious field, the movement aimed to combat superstitions, attacked idolatory, Polytheism etc., In the social sphere, the movement aimed at eradicating social evils like infanticide, child marriage, ban on Window remarriage and caste system.

Education is a powerful instrument since education enables women to gain more knowledge about the world outside to be more skilled and to have good self image and self-confidence. Education not only helps women to gain knowledge but also provides the necessary inner courage and inner strength to face the challenges of life. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rightly Pointed out that, if education is given to women then it will lead to education of home, society and the world at large. Great social reformers have given foremost importance to female literacy for the simple reason that mother is the primary teacher of the child. Some believe that the status of women during the vedic age was good. When the downfall occurred is not clear but the current status of women is deplorable. The importance of women's education was very much realised during the post independence period. Efforts were taken to improve the literacy level of women. Employment is an instrument of empowerment. Education has played a significant role directly and indirectly in the evolution of women's employment. Education equips women

for employment. The more education a woman has, the more likely she is to be in a better job.

The origin of the Indian Women's Movement in elite associational politics of the Late 19th and early 20th centuries shaped the movement in several important ways like (a) the male direction, (b) the concept of complementary sex roles, (c) absence of a radical onslaught on patriarchal bases of Indian culture, (d) orientation towards dignified presentation and not mass mobilization. In spite of these, within the AIWC Women themselves came forward as actors and there was a genuine orientation towards women's autonomy and towards a more democratic liberal ideology. The organizations helped women to come out of the home, to fight against oppression and against structures of patriarchy with independence, when the constitutional equality was guaranteed and the Social Welfare Board evolved grants in aid programmes for Women organizations, a period of acquiescence began. Achievement of freedom not only generated optimism, but it was felt that legal enactments against social evils and welfare-oriented programmes for women could ensure gender equality. The Five year plans of the Government aimed at providing assistance to women and children through education, health programmes and employment.

III. CONCLUSION

Apart from these practice of Female of Infanticide, there existed some other social evils such as "child marriage", "Sati", "Denial of widow Remarriage", The purdah system", Denial of property rights to women. "Denial of women Education, equality and other privileges. Hence, the status of women during the 18th and 19th centuries was at low ebb, hence the British government and other social Reform movements tried to abolish these social evils.

During the course of the 18th century, India, especially Tamilnadu was very much backward, packed with full of negative elements of human progress, culture and civilization. The society was very much orthodox and caste ridden, superstitious and quite unwilling to accept any new change or order in its social structure. The social order was not balanced and there was marked hierarchical up and downs between man and man, there was no equality, freedom and all other elements of modern civilization. Their condition and status of women was worse and they were treated more or less "Slaves" and expected to serve the husband and children as "unpaid" servants. Comparatively, the status of rural woman was more pathetic and they were even deprived of getting the basic amenities such as upper garments, education, equality and even the freedom to express their feeling and ideas.

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