

Women Empowerment And Hindu Literature

Rajni Bala

Ramgarhia College of Education, Phagwara, Punjab, India

Corresponding author: rb_rce@yahoo.com

Abstract

Women Empowerment is a social issue more than a legal issue. Change in the existing mind set of society is the need of the hour. Need of women empowerment is needed due to the demand for natural justice and as a tool for nation building. In a democratic country like ours the protection of human rights and natural justice form an integral part of the constitution. The issue of women empowerment is very complex and multidimensional. Empowering women means to create an environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home and equal partners along with men. Literature plays an important role in the development of society. Hindu literature has been occupying the prominent position for the last many centuries. Society always tries to mould itself according to the literature which is taught to the society. Now everywhere is the demand of women empowerment. Now question arises why there is the demand of women empowerment in India. Why Lord Buddha, Mahatama Jyoti Rao Phule, Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and saints like Sant Kabir Ji, Sant Ravidas Ji, Guru Nanak Dev Ji and other great men fought for the respectful survival of women and for women empowerment in India. Even today the position of women in India is Pitiabile. Hindu literature occupies the predominant position in India. Majority of Indians follow Hindu literature and act accordingly whatever has been given in Hindu literature. So by taking examples from Hindu literature we can analyze degree of women empowerment. Principles of Hindu literature are strictly followed in India. So after analyzing the position of women in Hindu literature we can analyzing the possibility of women empowerment. Vedas, Smritis given by many Rishis as Manusmriti given by Manu, Ramayana , Mahabharata, Upanishads, Geeta etc. are important part of Hindu literature. Now we can analyze the possibility of women empowerment in India. Literature always has influenced the social life. It is the duty of women to read the literature which is helpful in their empowerment. Only empowered women can give birth to empowered women. Slave lady gives birth to slave child. Lord Buddha said” Progress of nation can be analyzed by the degree of progress of women”. Therefore Dr. Ambedkar gave equal rights to women in constitution.

Keywords: Empowerment, democratic, environment, literature.

Women Empowerment and Hindu Literature

Women Empowerment is a social issue more than a legal issue. Change in the existing mind set of society is the need of the hour. Empowerment is a process of social, psychological and spiritual development of any vulnerable section of society where economic and political measures must act as facilitator or support services. So women empowerment as a process may involve several gender issues but as a movement it must strive for gender co-operation and gender co- existence. Women play a crucial role in development of family, group and ultimately the nation. Women constitute 48% of the total population of India i.e. almost half of the total population having varied social, economic, political, regional and linguistic backgrounds. Need of women empowerment is needed due to the demand for natural justice and as a tool for nation building. The world we live in is a network of civilized societies. In a civilized world the protection of human rights, concept of justice, equality and freedom become more important. In a democratic country like ours the protection of human rights and natural justice form an integral part of the constitution. The issue of women empowerment is very complex and multidimensional. Empowering women means to create an environment where women can freely exercise their rights both within and outside home and equal partners along with men.

Literature plays an important role in the development of society. Literature influences each and every part of the society. Hindu literature has been occupying the prominent position for the last many centuries. Society always tries to mould itself according to the literature which is taught to the society. Now everywhere is the demand of women empowerment. Now question arises why there is the demand of women empowerment in India. Why Lord Buddha, Mahatama Jyoti Rao Phule , Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and saints like Sant Kabir Ji, Sant Ravidas Ji, Guru Nnak Dev Ji and other great men fought for the respectful survival of women and for women empowerment in India. Even today the position of women in India is Pitiabile. Hindu literature occupies the predominant position in India. Majority of Indians follow Hindu literature and act accordingly whatever has been given in Hindu literature. So by taking examples from Hindu literature we can analyze degree of women empowerment. Principles of Hindu literature are strictly followed in India. So after analyzing the position of women in Hindu literature we can analyzing the possibility of women empowerment.

Position of Women in Hindu Literature

Vedas, Smrities given by many Rishis as Manusmriti given by Manu, Ramayana , Mahabharata, Upanishads, Geeta etc. are important part of Hindu Literature.

M anusmriti is known as *Manav Dharam Shastra*, is the earliest metrical work on Brahminical Dharma in Hinduism. According to Hindu mythology, the Manusmriti is the word of Brahma, and it is classified as the most authoritative statement on Dharma. The scripture consists of 2690 verses, divided into 12 chapters.

Hindu consider the Manusmriti as the divine code of conduct and, accordingly, the status of women as depicted in the text has been interpreted as Hindu divine law. In Vedic era, birth of a male was

more welcome than the birth of a female child. In Rig Veda, there is a prayer for the birth of a son. In Brahmnas, the birth of son was greatly favoured. The Atharva Veda clearly mentions the unpleasantness at the birth of girl as it was prayed to God that kindly grant birth of boy here and grant the birth of girl somewhere else. Manu did not treat women at par with men. Manu was the father of Hindu religion. He made the condition of women miserable and pathetic .He formulated and implemented various laws which made condition of women miserable. His laws were responsible for deteriorating the condition of women in India. He wrote book Manusmriti containing the laws for the oppression of women and shudras. The rules of Manusmriti used to be followed till the constitution of India was implemented. Constitution of India was implemented with the Manusmriti was burnt. But even today the laws of Manusmriti are being followed strictly.

Some of the ‘celebrated’ derogatory comments about women in the Manusmriti are as:

- 2/213. It is the nature of women to seduce men in this world; for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females.
- 2/214. Women, true to their class character, are capable of leading astray men in this world, not only a fool but even a learned and wise man. Both become slaves of desire.
- 2/215. Wise people should avoid sitting alone with one’s mother, daughter or sister. Since carnal desire is always strong, it can lead to temptation.
- 3/8. One should not marry women who has have reddish hair, redundant parts of the body [such as six fingers], one who is often sick, one without hair or having excessive hair and one who has red eyes.
- 3/9. One should not marry women whose names are similar to constellations, trees, rivers, those from a low caste, mountains, birds, snakes, slaves or those whose names inspires terror.
- 3/10. Wise men should not marry women who do not have a brother and whose parents are not socially well known.
- 3/11. Wise men should marry only women who are free from bodily defects, with beautiful names, grace/gait like an elephant, moderate hair on the head and body, soft limbs and small teeth.
- 3/12. Brahman men can marry Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaish and even Shudra women but Shudra men can marry only Shudra women.
- 3/14. Although Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaish men have been allowed inter-caste marriages, even in distress they should not marry Shudra women.
- 3/15. When twice born [dwij=Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaish] men in their folly marry low caste Shudra women, they are responsible for the degradation of their whole family. Accordingly, their children adopt all the demerits of the Shudra caste.
- 3/17. A Brahman who marries a Shudra woman, degrades himself and his whole family becomes morally degenerated , loses Brahman status and his children too attain status of shudra.

- 3/18. The offerings made by such a person at the time of established rituals are neither accepted by God nor by the departed soul; guests also refuse to have meals with him and he is bound to go to hell after death.
- 3/240. Food offered and served to Brahman after Shradh ritual should not be seen by a chandal, a pig, a cock, a dog, and a menstruating women.
- 4/43. A Brahman, true defender of his class, should not have his meals in the company of his wife and even avoid looking at her. Furthermore, he should not look towards her when she is having her meals or when she sneezes/yawns.
- 4/44. A Brahman in order to preserve his energy and intellect, must not look at women who applies collyrium to her eyes, one who is massaging her nude body or one who is delivering a child.
- 4/217. One should not accept meals from a woman who has extra marital relations; nor from a family exclusively dominated/managed by women or a family whose 10 days of impurity because of death have not passed.
- 5/150. A female child, young woman or old woman is not supposed to work independently even at her place of residence.
- 5/151. Girls are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, women must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son as widows. In no circumstances is she allowed to assert herself independently.
- 5/157. Men may be lacking virtue, be sexual perverts, immoral and devoid of any good qualities, and yet women must constantly worship and serve their husbands.
- 5/158. Women have no divine right to perform any religious ritual, nor make vows or observe a fast. Her only duty is to obey and please her husband and she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.
- 5/160. At her pleasure [after the death of her husband], let her emaciate her body by living only on pure flowers, roots of vegetables and fruits. She must not even mention the name of any other men after her husband has died.
- 5/167. Any women violating duty and code of conduct towards her husband, is disgraced and becomes a patient of leprosy. After death, she enters womb of Jackal.
- 8/364. In case women enjoy sex with a man from a higher caste, the act is not punishable. But on the contrary, if women enjoy sex with lower caste men, she is to be punished and kept in isolation.
- 8/365. In case a man from a lower caste enjoys sex with a woman from a higher caste, the person in question is to be awarded the death sentence. And if a person satisfies his carnal desire with women of his own caste, he should be asked to pay compensation to the women's faith.

- 8/369. In case a woman tears the membrane [hymen] of her Vagina, she shall instantly have her head shaved or two fingers cut off and made to ride on Donkey.
- 8/370. In case a women, proud of the greatness of her excellence or her relatives, violates her duty towards her husband, the King shall arrange to have her thrown before dogs at a public place.
- 9/3. Since women are not capable of living independently, she is to be kept under the custody of her father as child, under her husband as a woman and under her son as widow.
- 9/6. It is the duty of all husbands to exert total control over their wives. Even physically weak husbands must strive to control their wives.
- 9/8. The husband, after the conception of his wife, becomes the embryo and is born again of her. This explains why women are called Jaya.
- 9/13. Consuming liquor, association with wicked persons, separation from her husband, rambling around, sleeping for unreasonable hours and dwelling -are six demerits of women.
- 9/14. Such women are not loyal and have extra marital relations with men without consideration for their age.
- 9/15. Because of their passion for men, immutable temper and natural heartlessness, they are not loyal to their husbands.
- 9/18. While performing namkarm and jatkarm, Vedic mantras are not to be recited by women, because women are lacking in strength and knowledge of Vedic texts. Women are impure and represent falsehood.
- 9/58. On failure to produce offspring with her husband, she may obtain offspring by cohabitation with her brother-in-law [devar] or with some other relative [sapinda] on her in-law's side.
- 9/60. He who is appointed to cohabit with a widow shall approach her at night, be anointed with clarified butter and silently beget one son, but by no means a second one.
- 9/70. In accordance with established law, the sister-in-law [bhabhi] must be clad in white garments; with pure intent her brother-in-law [devar] will cohabit with her until she conceives.
- 9/77. Any women who disobey orders of her lethargic, alcoholic and diseased husband shall be deserted for three months and be deprived of her ornaments.
- 9/80. A barren wife may be superseded in the 8th year; she whose children die may be superseded in the 10th year and she who bears only daughters may be superseded in the 11th year; but she who is quarrelsome may be superseded without delay.
- 9/93. In case of any problem in performing religious rites, males between the age of 24 and 30 should marry a female between the age of 8 and 12.

- 9/177. In case a Brahman man marries Shudra woman, their son will be called ‘Parshav’ or ‘Shudra’ because his social existence is like a dead body. The whole Hindu literature is against the progress of women and shudras.
- 9/61 The lady who is not having son can produce son with the help of her husband’s brother.
 - ◆ O God save my son who is going to take birth . Do not make him a girl.(Atharvaveda-8/6/25 God Indra Said” Women cannot be educated because they are always stupid”. (Rigvaeda 8/33/17)
 - ◆ Friendship cannot be made with women because their hearts are like the hearts of Leopards (Rigveda-10/95/15)
 - ◆ Women, Shudras,Dogs and Crows are big liars (Yajurveda -6/5/8/2)
 - ◆ Women give sorrows (Atharvaveda-7/3/11)
 - ◆ Ahilya, wife of Rishi Gautam was raped by Indra (Ramayana Balkand 48)
 - ◆ A father should marry his daughter before she gets the age of 12 years. If father does not follow this rule he is a great sinner . This supports child marriage in India. (Prashar Smriti).
 - ◆ After the death of husband if lady does not die with husband she cannot get rid of women body and cannot get salvation. This supports sati system in India (Vishnu Smriti).
 - ◆ Vishnu raped Brinda , wife of king Jalandhar.
 - ◆ Brahaspati raped pregnant Mamta, wife of his elder brother, Utathya.
 - ◆ Sita was dishonoured by her husband Rama when she was pregnant (Ramayana).
 - ◆ Draupadi sister of Shri Krishna had to satisfy her five husbands at the same time and defeated in gambling and dishonoured in assembly of her family members.
 - ◆ Rishi Prashar raped Satyavati in a boat and she gave birth to Rishi Vyas (Mahabharata chapter68).
 - ◆ Chandra forcefully raped Tara wife of Brahaspati and became pregnant(Geeta chapter 14).
 - ◆ Surya raped Kunti Anti of Shri Krishna and gave birth to Karan(Mahabharata)
 - ◆ Aryans used to give their ladies on rent . King Yayati presented his daughter Madhavi to his guru Galab. Galab gave Madhavi to three kings on rent. After that Galab presented Madhavi to Rishi Vishavmitra. After the birth of a son Vishavmitra returned Madhavi to her father Yayati.
 - ◆ Aryans used to present their wives to Rishis for the birth of excellent children.
 - ◆ If widow lady wants to produce son, brother of her husband can be appointed for this purpose(Gautam Sutra 2-4-9).

- ◆ If brother of her husband is not available then the person of the same caste and gotra can be appointed(2-9-6 Gautam Sutra).
- ◆ The person who has been appointed for widow who is always brother of her husband should go for intercourse, 45 minutes before the sunrise(Vishnu Dharam Sutra 17/56/65).
- ◆ If Brahmin is dead then the person of same gotra of lady can be appointed for producing son and that son will be the owner of the property of dead Brahmin(Arthshastra 3/6).

Now we can analyze the possibility of women empowerment in India. Literature always has influenced the social life. It is the duty of women to read the literature which is helpful in their empowerment. Only empowered women can give birth to empowered women. Slave lady gives birth to slave child. Lord Buddha said” Progress of nation can be analyzed by the degree of progress of women”. Therefore Dr. Ambedkar gave equal rights to women in constitution.

References

- Ambedkar, B.R. (2003) Rise And Fall Of Hindu Woman, Samyak Publication. New Delhi.
- Kuril, Bhimrao (2010) Ambedkar Ka Shiksha Mein Yogdaan, Samyak Publication. New Delhi.
- Sharma, K. (2013) Women Empowerment, Mahamaya Publications, Gya.
- Bidisha, M. and Purusottam, N. (2013) Gender Inequality In India, North Eastern Hill University.
- Ramasami, Periyar, E.V. (2000) Women Enslaved, Critical Quest, Delhi.
- Singh, Gajinder (2012) Sikhism and women, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh.
- Upadhyaya, N. (1990) Women In India, past and present, Allahabad, Chugh Publications.
- Virdi, S.L. (2003) Bharti Aurat Di Dastan Da Dastavej, Dalit Sahit Academy. Punjab.

