

Education freedom struggle as also in the field



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Education for women was a far cry even in the urban society till about the first quarter of last century; though of course, there had been very learned women during the ancient times like Gargi and Maitreyi — but these were exceptions not the rule. After the freedom struggle our country got launched, women began coming up in the forefront both as partakers in the freedom struggle as also in the field of education. But as compared to men number remained just negligible. Mostly, home had been treated as the rightful place for women in the Indian Society and the four walls of their house as an area of their functioning.

The kitchen and the maternity room had remained their sole priority and prerogative — to which they seemed to have been designed and destined. Only gradually the light began dawning on them and they began to come out and show out. Colleges even Universities and Institutes for women got started and education at all levels began being imparted to them. There appeared on the national scene political leaders of the like of Sarojini Naidu, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, poetesses of renown like Mahadevi Varma, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, musicians and dancers, professors, even Vice-chancellors and some got appointed as Governors, and judges of the High court and even of the Supreme court. But with all this scenario of great upliftment apparently visible, the state of the majority of women of the country remained a neglected and an oppressed class. Those who had risen up, their percentage was negligible. Even those who got educated — when they got married — and most of them were educated only to be finally married away in good families and to well- placed grooms-found their lot subservient to their husband's wishes and whims. If they failed in doing so they suffered —

either a neglect or a torture — mental or even physical — and lastly even a divorce — left with a couple of children to be nursed and to be looked after.

In the rural area, the life of a woman was all drudgery and deprivation — working in the fields along with their husbands; attending to the entire household then keeping on giving birth to a horde of children — nearly one in every year. A husband addicted to drugs or drink would even keep on giving a cruel thrashing to the sheep like woman. She suffered and kept suffering. Therefore has it been that In spite of the country having won her independence, the fight had to go on and still goes on for the rights of women in India. During the tenure of Smt.

Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister a National Committee, to consider upon the status of women in the country was set up, the census of 1981 female employment was put at 21. 85 per cent. The Constitution of India has not only provided for equal rights and privileges as between men and women but had gone a step further and has made special provision for women. A series of social legislations have also been enacted from time to time for raising the status of women. The Five Year Plans have consistently placed special emphasis on providing minimum health facilities integrated with family welfare and nutrition to women in particular.

This by itself means that women had remained discriminated against even in the matter of proper nutrition. The personal and religious laws have also relegated women to an inferior status. Among Hindus there are various laws which directly or indirectly affect women. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1956-1961; the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1956; the Hindu Women's Rights to

Property Act of 1959, the Special Marriage Act of 1954, Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and the Hindu Marriage Act 1956 — all these enactments have been situated only because women had remained deprived of their rights. The main piece of legislation which changed the marital status of women is the Hindu Marriage Act, which prohibits Hindus from contracting a bigamous marriage and gives the wife the right to obtain a divorce in certain circumstances.

But the plight of a Muslim woman remains deplorable. As observed by Justice Sujata Manohar “ though Hindu women have raised their legal status, their Muslim sister’s lag behind because of lack of enlightened public opinion among the Muslims”. The Judgement in the Shah Bano case raised a storm among Muslims and had to be reversed by legislation by the parliament to appease the Muslim vote bank. A Muslim marriage is just a contract which the husband can anytime break by repeating ‘ Talaq’Talaq’Talaq’tthree times.

The Muslim woman has no say in the matter and has to suffer. In spite of all laws, against dowry, the bride-burning and dowry deaths are everyday news. Such is the sorry state of affairs and the Indian woman remains to suffer.

Even when the country has ushered into the 21st century the legislation of reservation of 33% seats for women in the legislatures and the Parliament is not finding favour with some of the political parties. This is how the problem of discrimination persists. Though, of course, there are women, even Muslim women, who are holding high and prestigious offices and are entering into every field — Administrative, Judicial, Political and Social, still the proportion is abysmally small. To give to the womanhood their proper and coordinate

place, more and more education and more enlightenment among them is required.

If the lament succeeds in passing the 33% per cent representation to women in the legislatures and the parliament, it would be really a great step forward in aiding a proper status to women in India. Furthermore, a uniform civil code for all citizens of India, irrespective of community or caste shall still be a greater step forward in this direction. Let us see who can bell the cat.