



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

State Intervention, Structural Barriers and Upward Social Mobility among Women

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Abstract

Social mobility is linked to equality of opportunity: The higher levels of men out-earning their parents, the greater downward mobility of women and the higher number of low income women unable to move out of the bottom quintile all speak to a worrying pattern in which men do better at holding on to the privileges accrued to them, while women still have more trouble. All over the world in general and tradition-bound countries in particular women are handicapped in many respects when compared with men as far as upward mobility is concerned. Marriage, managing family obligations, nurturing the child until they become self sufficient either directly or indirectly affects their chances of mobility. In countries like India, Pakistan and other Asian countries it is because of parti-local marriage and family arrangement women soon after marriage leave their fathers home and start a new with husband. It will affect their participation in income generating activities. The same institution i.e., marriage has helped many women to move up in social hierarchy. Poor but good looking girls have improved their social status through marriage as and when they marry with rich boy.

Even after getting decent job in formal sector many women reject “promotion with transfer” opportunities just for family sake. Low age at marriage generally kills their dream to get education and “dream jobs” in many cases. Hence, studying upward mobility of women is the need of hour. Academicians need to give much importance to this aspect. The present paper examines the mobility of women in colonial era and also in post independence era.

Key words

Social Mobility, State Intervention, Upward mobility, Constitutional Safeguards, structural barriers

Introduction

Historically Indian society is patriarchal in nature. Though patriarchal, the status of Vedic women was almost equal to that of men during that period. However, during Post-Vedic period her status was deteriorated on account of many endogenous and exogenous factors.

During the period of Dharmashastras and Puranas she emerged as a secondary citizen. Child marriage became popular and serious restrictions were imposed on Widow Marriage. Sati system was not only encouraged but also glorified. The knowledge of letter was denied and was made to confine her freedom. Succession rights were denied. The status of medieval women too was very miserable.

However, advent of the British to Indian subcontinent started a new era in the life of women. British India witnessed many social movements. They fought for the emancipation of marginal communities. Two centuries long British rule made a positive impact on marginalized communities in general and women in

particular. The British introduced secular and modern education in the place of sectarian education. They, for the first time in the history, allowed Dalits and women to get education. It helped at least some affluent women and urban based Dalits to get education and move up in social hierarchy.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present paper are:

- to examine the meaning mobility trends of Indian Women during the British Raj
- to assess the role of different factors of upward mobility during the British Régime
- to explore the mobility pattern of women in post independence period
- to evaluate the role of constitution, and state in promoting the mobility among the women

Analysis and Discussion

A. Education and Social Mobility of Women during Colonial Era

British gave some importance to education. Some of the British rulers, Christian missionaries, Hunter commission directly and indirectly contributed to the advancement of education. In the year 1881 itself, Girls High school was established in Bombay. In 1882 women was permitted to get University Education. **Maharishi Karve** established Women's University in Pune. All these developments took place in Port cities namely Kolkata, Madras, and Bombay. In spite of the social movements and efforts of colonial masters the literacy rate of women was just 0.6 % in 1901. By 1941, female literacy rate rose to 7.3%. Since 1881, there a slow improvement in the literacy rate of women. However, benefits of education during the British Raj went probably to urban women.

Census of India - literacy rates (age 7+)

Year	Male %	Female %	Combined %
1872	-	-	~3.25
1881	8.1	0.35	4.32
1891	8.44	0.42	4.62
1901	9.8	0.6	5.4
1911	10.6	1.0	5.9
1921	12.2	1.8	7.2
1931	15.6	2.9	9.5
1941	24.9	7.3	16.1

Elementary education made good progress by 1881-1882 as there were 82,916 schools with 20, 61,541 students compared with 16,473 schools with 6, 07,320 students in 1870-1871. But compared with the overall population of 1, 95,875,127 in the whole of British India, only 20,61,541 attended elementary schools in 1881-1882 (**Ghosh**, 2000, p. 91). Even during the colonial rule literacy rate varied from one province to other. In port cities the literacy rate of males and female was higher than the other places. The following table throws light on literacy rate in 1901 in different provinces.

The literacy rate in 1901 in different provinces of India

1901 census	literacy rate Male %	Female %
Madras	11.9	1.1
Bombay	11.6	0.9
Bengal	10.4	0.5
Berar	8.5	0.3
Assam	6.7	0.4
Punjab	6.4	0.3
United Provinces	5.7	0.2
Central Provinces	5.4	0.2

Thus, the female education or liberalization of education has contributed greatly to the upward mobility of women. With education and skills, many women emerged as teachers and nurses. Rise of professions or professionalization of certain jobs too made significant contribution to the upward mobility. Some women because of these positive structural transformations and state intervention emerged as new bread winners.

□ **Improvement in the Economic Status of Women**

British enacted a host of legislation that have directly and indirectly benefitted women of India. The most important ones are 1874s The Married Womens' Property Act and The Hindu Womens' Right to Property Act-1939. They improved economic status of women. The ban on Child marriage in 1929 indirectly helped the women folk get education, a powerful channel of upward mobility. In spite of these positive interventions, low age at marriage acted as a great obstacle to the emancipation of women. Thus there was a lot of improvement in the status of women. □

The low age at marriage or child marriages, lack of schools in country side, lack of transportation, gender discrimination, higher fertility rate, negative attitude of parents towards education, patri-local family arrangements together have acted as great obstacles to upward mobility of women. In fact, in patriarchal social system women generally have very little chances to move up social ladder. However, marriage with rich man helped some poor girls to move up in social ladder.

B. Opportunities for Social Mobility in Post Independent Period

Two centuries long British rule ended in 1947. Soon after Independence, India embraced democracy as a system of governance which created a new opportunity structure to marginal communities of India. It almost has eliminated all obstacles to the movement of upward mobility.

• **How constitution helped upward mobility of Women?**

Article 15 of the Constitution of India forbids discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Similarly Article 16 of the Constitution of India, talks about the right of equal opportunity in the matters of public employment. It states that: ... There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State. The constitution seeks to create egalitarian society free from gender discrimination. It helps women to engage in mobility process and improve her status.

• **How Emphasis on Female Education promoted upward social mobility of women?**

In post independent period, state took women education very seriously. Now, in all most all educational institutions some seats are reserved for women. This table gives information about female literacy rate in India since 1951. There was an improvement in the literacy rate of women since 1951. Unfortunately, there was gap between male literacy rate and female literacy rate.

Census of India - literacy rates (age 7+)

Year	Male %	Female %	Combined %
1951	27.16	8.86	18.33
1961	40.4	15.35	28.3
1971	45.96	21.97	34.45
1981	56.38	29.76	43.57
1991	64.13	39.29	52.21
2001	75.26	53.67	64.83
2011	82.14	65.46	74.04

Many Universities are established exclusively for the benefit of women. Here, we can mention *Akkamahadevi* Women University, *Padmavati* Women University and many others. In 2017, there were 14 Women Universities in India. In Karnataka alone there are 77 women colleges. To encourage women's education, government has established Girls hostels and working women's Hostels. All these initiatives helped to women and with help of education and training they entered new sectors of economy and emerged as new

bread winners. In tradition bound society, the role of state, constitution, legislation in the process of mobility cannot be underestimated.

Unfortunately, some of the minorities in India even today are reluctant to give education to women. Among Hindus, the literacy rate of SC and ST, Tribal women is still not so satisfactory as compared to Upper Caste Women. In rural India, the low age at marriage is still acting as great impediment to female education. □ The patriarchal value system, over valuation of son, gender discrimination, low age at marriage, patri-local family arrangements, high fertility rate among some minorities are some prominent factors that have hindered the upward mobility of women.

- **How Skill Development programme helped women?**

Government now is imparting skills to women folk through many programmes. Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship organized many skill related training programmes for the benefit for the women. Women's Vocational Training Programme was started in 1977. National Skill Training Institutes for Women dedicated itself in this task. Training Rural Youth for Self Employment considered women as one of the target group. Along with education even skill development programme helped women to move upward in social hierarchy.

- **How Development Programmes fostered the Economic mobility of Women**

Many initiatives helped women to become economically independent. In the past, The Government of India gave income tax rebate for women. In some of the Rural Development Programmes women have been considered as an important target group. Government has implemented *Mudra Yojana* Scheme to women to make them independent and self reliant. It gives business loan up to 10 lakhs. We can mention *Bharatiya Mahila Bank Business Loan, Orient Mahila Vikas Yojana, Dena Shakti Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Yojana, Udyogini Scheme, Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme* etc. In some states of India, *Stri Shakti Yojana, Swadhar, Swavlambana* programmes have been implemented for the economic empowerment of women. Reservation in jobs helped some women to move up in occupational hierarchy. Government also enacted Equal Remuneration Act, Hindu Succession Act-1956, Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act -1956. All the legislative measures have contributed greatly to economic mobility of women.

- **Upward mobility of Women in Politics**

Now, women have entered politics and they emerged as administrators, legislators and members of parliament. The saying "Men for the fields; women for the kitchen, men for the swords and women for the needle, men to command and women to obey" became obsolete. Many women now entered politics. Chief ministers namely Mamata Banerjee now and Jayalalita in the past played important role in Politics. Now, women are playing pivotal role in Zilla Panchayat, Taluqa Panchayat and Village Panchayat. The constitutional amendment namely 73 and 74 has helped women to rise up in political ladder.

Conclusion

Women during the ancient period used to improve their social status only through marriage. However, during the colonial era, some women became successful in getting formal education and training. Both these factors have helped at least affluent, rich, upper caste urban women in getting education. Some women emerged as teachers and nurses. After, 1947 the state played important role in promoting upward mobility of women. However, there are some factors like child marriage, poverty, large family size, higher birth rate, patri-local family arrangements, male-centric religious ideology among some minority groups, lack of schools in rural areas are still acting as barrier to social mobility of women. Women will become upwardly mobile only when these structural barriers are eliminated.

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