

Pandita Ramabai and Woman Empowerment: A Symbiosis

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Abstract

This paper discusses on Pandita Ramabai, and her ways of developing Indian society. The article compares how woman are placed in Indian community at the time of Pandita Rambai, and their position in present Indian community.

Keywords: *violence against women, culture, Indian society, inequality, gender gap.*

Introduction

The division, of male and female other than the biological division is artificial. These divisions are created by using religion, culture, caste and other social institutions in society. It is established again and again in a healthy manner through all the possible means in a society with an illusion in the minds of the people that it is natural. The best example of this is Ann Oakley's study of tribal culture, where the roles prescribed for men and woman varied from one community to another. So as most of the feminists argue, the unwritten rules or norms in society are created to support or lay down for the convenience for one group because it was created by the group (i.e.,) the male member of society. As these norms continue even in the 21st century, we are in a situation to speak about woman's development or empowerment, the other half or weaker section, Government programs to help woman, safety measures to support woman, etc. Due to the continuous patriarchal mind setup, woman are seen as lower than men in society. They are seen as sexual objects which are one of the reasons for increase in incidents of atrocities against woman. Many customs which are formulated many centuries back, are against woman are being followed till today. They could not be still abolished in spite of laws being enacted to prevent them. Many woman do not think why we are segregated from mainstream society? Why for men there is no separate programs to develop or why there is not a term named "men empowerment."? Because still, the world is only for men where they are dictators and woman are followers, and they don't have a separate identity, as woman are in the essence of men right from birth till death. This can be seen by fewer woman in higher

positions in any field. The reason why woman are not achieving what they need can be viewed by two aspects. The first is they face barriers like inability to access resources, marriage, responsibilities, and hurdles they face in their life, make them decide not to dream for their career and be dependent on males till the end of life, etc. The second aspect is many woman wrongly think about what men do, if they do, they become an empowered woman. This article is about Pandita Ramabai a 19th-century ardent feminist who achieved what she dreamt of an equalitarian society. A promoter of woman's education who identified what Indian woman needs and how Indian society could be developed. Pandita Ramabai is a strong woman who rose up against all evils and proved through her life that woman could achieve what they aim for.

The Indian Society

Culture plays a vital role in human society. Culture is a way of life with values, attitudes, needs, and expectations binding people together as a community. Many types of researches on cultural studies are carried out today. For example, the French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu used the term cultural capital to describe not the material wealth, but the power and status accorded to particular social groups because of their educational credentials, cultural awareness, and aesthetic sensibilities. Thus culture is an explicit system that includes music, literature, dance, art, which could be enjoyed for their own sake; every society has developed a variety of expressive events to break the monotony of day-to-day living. These are all known to be ritual. It refers to a tendency to judge different ways of life by the standards of their group. The patterns of behavior of

people who belong to culture other than our own are measured and evaluated in terms of standards and norms, which we are familiar with Indian society is not an exemption. Indian society has its own culture and follows it even if there is globalization, modernization, etc. The similarities and differences between Indian communities at the time of Pandita Ramabai and the present Indian society are discussed.

Similarities

- Indian society places woman in a position as exhibitors of Indian culture. Their ultimate aim should be none other than portraying norms and culture by making it as their lifestyle. For example, many women accept beatings from their husbands if they do not cook properly (National Family Health Survey-5).
 - Indian societies always keep women as dependent creatures on men. Cremation of parents cannot be done by a girl.
 - Men in Society do not accept women as equal to them. This is evident from the increase in cases of violence against them. There was a **46 percent rise** in complaints of crimes against women in the first eight months of 2021 over the corresponding period of last year, and over half of these were from Uttar Pradesh, the National Commission for Women (NCW) reported.
 - Childless mother is looked down in Indian Society. A husband can marry another woman if his wife is not able to bear a child. (In the present society, If a woman does not have a child, the whole blame falls on the wife, and not on the husband and the husband is not ready to take any medical examination like sperm counts etc. In some cases, many clever men would go individually and take medical tests, and the result would come like he had a low sperm count or any other problem; he would hide it from the family members and, together with them, blamed the wife). The study done by Bharadwaj in all major cities of India in the year 2000 reported that childless women face stigma in all aspects by the community in which she lives in. They face harassment by in-laws. The study conducted by Risemen between 2000-2002 conducted among the upper-class women reported that they have a fear of divorce due to childlessness.
 - Women are not allowed to be single. According to the 2021 census, Single women reportedly constitute 21% of India's female population, being **close to 73 million** in number. These include unmarried, divorced, separated, and widowed women. Remarriage for women in India is not permitted in Indian society. Most of the unmarried women consists of young girls who do not attain the age of marriage, are about to be married
 - Divorced women are looked down upon in Indian society, from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. While the absolute number of divorces has increased from 1 in 1,000 to 13 in 1,000 over the last decade or so, India remains at the top of the list of countries with the lowest divorce rates, it said.
 - Inter-caste and interreligious marriage are not accepted in Indian society (2.1% Inter Caste marriage and 1.3% interreligious marriages (HDR 2019).
 - A Woman's father is seen as ashamed if he is not giving his daughter to marriage at the right time.
 - Caste and religion play a significant role in Indian society.
 - Women do most of the unpaid work in Indian society. (Unpaid family workers, industrial outworkers, home workers and casual workers are Predominantly-Human Development Report 2019)
 - Women Commercial Sex Workers are looked down upon in society in spite of changing their names from prostitutes to commercial sex workers.
 - In most of homes, decision is taken by the male member in the home. In India the head of the family is a male member.
- Still today Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) India, ranks 140 out of 156 countries released by the world economic forum depicts the poor status of women. Unless the attitudes of women toward women empowerment are changed women cannot achieve what they need. The present Indian community, in most aspects is similar to the Indian community at the time of Pandita Ramabai. There are very few differences which are discussed below. It has

an accepted image for the ideal wife, daughter, daughter in law. Whatever the role woman play she has to follow the ideal image framed by the Indian society. A woman cannot do whatever she wants even today.

Differences

- Increase in the age of marriage
- Education of girls is accepted if it does not disturb any priority like marriage, economy, son's education etc.
- Woman go out for work but for a low wage and many cases woman are ready to leave the job if there is no one to take care of the children.
- Emergence of nuclear family system from joint family system can be seen in India due to work but for festivals and other ceremonies they connect with the joint family.
- Political participation of woman as ward councilors, Panchayat Raj president are encouraged as woman can be puppets in the hands of their husbands. As per the election commission of India the percentage of woman Mp's in India is ten percent.
- Dressing patterns and technological usage has changed but the mindset of the people has not changed.

The differences mentioned above show that the Indian society did not undergo many changes after the period of Pandita Ramabai.

Evil Practices Against Woman in India that Continues from the Period of Pandita Ramabai

Child Marriage

Child marriage in India, according to the Indian law, is a marriage where either the woman is below the age of 18 or the man is below the age of 21. As per the latest NCRB data, child marriage cases rose by around 50% in 2020 compared to the previous year.

Female Infanticide

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) nearly 4.6 crore (45.8 million) females are 'missing' in Indian demography in the year 2020, mainly due to pre and post-birth sex selection practices stemming from son preference and gender inequality,

- The Atrocities against woman in the name of caste is happening in Indian Society still today.
- Widow - According to Mohini Giri a veteran activist in the fight for woman rights and a widow herself who was nominated for the Noble prize in the year 2005 said that there around fifty five million widows in India which is equal to the entire population of Tanzania and South Africa. Though sati (a woman jumping into the funeral pyres of the husband) is not taking place at present but they are still subject to patriarchal traditions, religious legislations and extensive prejudice in the inheritance rights.
- Violence against woman that happens in India from time immemorial.

How the Ardent Feminist Overcame the Hurdles she Faced in her Life as Well as from the Society she Lived in:

The Indian society at the time of Pandita Ramabai had many evil customs against woman. The strong mind of Pandita Rambai would have emerged from her father a Brahmin who was very much strong in teaching his little wife Sanskrit as woman are not allowed to learn Sanskrit. As a result Ramabai's parents started to live in forest where Ramabai was born. A family is an important tool for making a better child and a better society. The family not having one permanent place wandered from one pilgrimage to another, but the early lessons on Sanskrit was taught to her.

The early experiences of Pandita Ramabai to become a reformer of woman in Indian society are as follows:

- Ramabai's parents did not compel her to marriage and she was single till the age of sixteen.
- She gained knowledge in different languages namely Kanarese, Bengali, Hindustani as she had always love for books and parents had the habit of reading news papers and she followed it from early years. Even today it is unable for a girl or woman to reads news papers if at all they do they get comments like "news paper reading is not important than household work do it".
- The important incident which made her strong is was the death of her father followed by her mother. The

burial place for Bhramin community (separate burial palces for separate community was allocated) was three Kilometers from their living place with the help of two Brahmins, Ramabai and her brother carried the body to the burial place and performed the last rites.

- The idea that Indian girls and woman are suppressed and education is the main tool to bring them up came to Ramabai as she and her brother travelled to many parts in India and spent their time in teaching Sanskrit to girls wherever they go.
- She became a young Sanskrit scholar and she was conferred a title Saraswati (The name of Indian God of education Saraswati) after examination in front of assembled Pandits in Calcutta.
- She got married to a Bengali man as per the civil rights act. Her husband died after nineteen months of their marriage due to cholera.
- She was left with a girl child. The brave lady decided to get more training on educating herself and moved to England in the year 1883 for further studies and Montessori training. Her only purpose to America was to learn and educate the Indian Woman.
- Her view to upgrade Indian woman made her start a society for ladies known as Arya Mahila Samaj which had high caste Indian woman working with the objective of promoting education to woman and abandon child marriage.

The incidents happened in life of Pandita Ramabai made her a strong woman and upgraded her thinking to save woman who were slaves in the hands of men.

Contributions of Pandita Ramabai to Indian Society

The Pandita Rambai worked with the aim to create self reliant Indian woman. Ramabai opened schools on 11th March 1883, for Indian widows which provided shelter and food with the support of Christian mission and association she formed in England to collect money to build schools in India. The students were given vocational training to make them economically independent. The first book of Pandita Rambai was "Morals for Woman". When famine struck the western province of India in late 1890's she concentrated on famine victims. She translated Bible in Marathi.

Conclusion

On the positive side woman are catching up in basic areas of development. Legal barriers to gender equality have been removed in most countries: Woman can vote and be elected, they have access to education, and they can participate in the economy without formal restrictions. But progress has been uneven as woman pull away from basic areas into enhanced ones, where gaps tend to be wider. Woman make greater and faster progress where their individual empowerment or social power is lower (basic capabilities). But they face a glass ceiling where they have greater responsibility, political leadership and social payoffs in markets, social life and politics (enhanced capabilities – As mentioned in the Human Development Report 2019. The report clearly depicts where the present day woman lag behind throughout the world from which Indian woman cannot be separated. Woman have to fight against all evils that take place against her for this they have follow the steps taken by the earlier woman pioneers like Pandita Ramabai. Not only evils for themselves to develop they have to have an aim to achieve and work towards achieving it not minding about the family, social and other kind pressures against them. Many do not know about this ardent feminist and our Indian society is greatly indebted to her and I assure this paper will create an interest in the minds of reader to know more about Pandita Ramabai.

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