

Advances and Challenges: An Analytical Exploration of Women's Struggle for Rights

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Abstract

No doubt the woman has been hatred, neglected, slaughtered, sacrificed and rejected in different religions, cultures and civilizations throughout the human history. Mostly she has been relegated a secondary position in all walks of life. She has been considered an inferior creation, handmaiden, impure, a symbol of evil and a bone of contention. She has been treated the worse than slaves. In modern western world the voices for the women rights were raised in 18th century. In 19th century conventions were held and declarations were passed by women activists. Gradually the movements and organizations for women rights were founded to raise the voices and to achieve the goal. The slogans of women rights: freedom, liberty, equality and independence were the main theme of these movements. The movements of women rights reached at culmination in the end of 19th and beginning of the 20th century under the title feminism. Now in west the representative of women rights is the movement of feminism. This movement can be encircled in four waves. The representatives of this movement have claimed that they have achieved a lot in this respect. In this article our aim is to analyze that

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either woman has gotten the rights or she is in a new imprisonment and enslavement under the attractive slogans of liberty, freedom and rights.

Key Words: Ancient Civilizations, Modern, Woman, Rights, Liberty, Feminism

I.1 Introduction

In human history woman has been hatred, ignored, negated, slaughtered, sacrificed and misunderstood. Her role and status were misinterpreted. She has been considered an inferior creation, handmaiden, impure, a symbol of evil, a bone of contention and worse than slaves in different religions, philosophies, cultures and civilizations right from ancient times to the beginning of the movement of humanism in 14th century. Along with other ideologies and innovations humanism led to the movements of rights, freedom, liberty and independence which gradually culminated in the name of feminism in contemporary age. Our focus is to analyze that whether woman has gotten his rights in modern era not?

I.2 Research Objectives

- To explore the status of woman in pre-modern era.
- To give the background of the movements of women rights in modern age
- To indicate the motives behind women right movements
- To illuminate the slogans of equality and freedom
- To analyze the achievements and setbacks of women rights movements
- To point out the real issue in respect of women rights

I.3 Research Questions

- Why woman was considered inferior in pre-modern era?
- Why she was treated as handmaiden?
- Why scholasticism failed to acknowledge the dignity and esteem of woman?
- Has woman achieved equality, independence, freedom and liberty in modern age?

- Is she now better than pre-modern era?
- Are women or the representatives of their rights have identified the root cause of this dilemma?

2 Research Gape

Now we are going to introduce the issue of the women rights in the perspective of renowned civilizations of the human history. The root of this issue has been spread till the ancient age. If we study the history of woman carefully, we can find that in different religions (myth or manmade religions) on one side and in different ideologies on the other hand we find that in all previous civilizations woman was rejected, neglected, considered impure, treated as handmaiden and ignored as a human being. She was deprived of her fundamental human rights. Let us try to have a look on the status of woman in different civilizations of the world in different ages of human history.

3.1 Woman in History

There are extremely shameful views about woman in different civilizations of the world. According to Plato woman should be a common property.¹ Reproduction of the human species is the only purpose of woman life.² For Aristotle male is superior and female is inferior.³ Male is ruler and female is subject only.⁴ In Greek woman had no right to own property, to give opinion in any matter and to interfere in the affairs of state.⁵ In ancient Rome husband was authorized to physically punish or kill his wife on her any mistake.⁶ Domestic violence, sexual assault and physical abuse of a woman were the common practices of ancient Egyptian culture.⁷ Homicidal abuse, victimization and killing were the routine life of a woman in ancient Arab.⁸

The brutality of Arab's was at its peak. According to Quran they were habitual to bury their daughters alive.⁹ The situation of woman in India was extremely miserable. She had been considered wretched. She was not allowed to ornamentation, wear colorful dress and participate in functions, festivals and marriage ceremonies. Even she had no right to live after the death of her husband. So, there was the custom of Sati. According to which a woman should burn alive with her husband. Unfortunately, despite many restrictions this custom is still in practice in some areas of India.¹⁰

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In ancient China female was considered as the property of parents, husband and children. She was bound for foot binding.¹¹ In ancient China, people used to bind the foot of the daughters in child hood. The purpose of this custom was realizing them that they are dependent and subordinate. It was also meant to limit the mobility of the girls and prepare them for absolute obedience. This custom was known as foot binding.¹²

3.2 Woman in medieval period

In medieval period woman was considered deceitful, incompetent, handmaiden, concubine and adulterous.¹³

3.3 The Gist of the Findings of Pre-Modern Era

We can conclude that in ancient ages or pre modern era generally woman was deemed inferior, imperfect and impure. She was considered a cause of misfortune. So, men could kill, slaughter and sacrificed her to gain the goodwill of gods and goddesses. She was neglected and ignored as a human being. She had no will, no power, no choice, no freedom and no right. She was treated as a handmaiden, concubine and adulterous only.

3.4 Woman and Modern age

The foundation of modern era in west was set in 14th century by the emergence of the movement of 'Humanism'. This movement flowered in the form of different religious, social, cultural, political, economic, educational, ethical and moral changes and reforms in modern West. The slogans of women rights were raised in 19th century which reached at peak in 20th century in the movement of feminism. But the woman of this modern era despite the attractive slogans of rights is facing severe ethical, moral, sociological and psychological problems. Although here we have no aim to discuss about feminism movement in detail anyhow, we will give a gist of this movement in continuation of the women rights struggle in modern West.

4.1 Historical Background of Women Rights Movements in West

It has been acknowledged by the proponents of women rights movement that Abigail Adam was a trailblazer of this movement. She started this movement with her letter to her husband John Adams in 31st March 1776. He (1735-1826) was one of the prominent leaders of USA who headed the Revolution

of America. He became the second president of USA (1797 to 1801). His wife Abigail struggled for the women rights specifically for the right of female education and for the obliteration of slavery. Her son also became the president of USA.¹⁴

4.2 Women Convention.

In July 19-20, 1848, the 1st women convention held in New York. This was ended with the declaration of sentiments. After the decades of struggle this declaration paved the way to the 19th Amendment-the right of vote to women. In 23rd January 1849, Elizabeth Blackwell became the 1st doctor in America. A women's Rights Convention held in Akron, Ohio in May 29, 1851. Sojourner Truth was an activist of women's rights. She was previously an enslaved. She delivered a remarkable speech in this convention.

“And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne 13 children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?”¹⁵

4.3 The History Rights

In 10th, December, 1869, Wyoming granted woman the right to vote; holding the office and ever 1st time passed the woman suffrage law. The first birth control clinic was opened by Margaret Sanger in October 16, 1916 in USA. According to the Comstock Laws the birth control was forbidden. Her clinic was sealed. Consequently, the women rights movement took a new turn and a new organization came into existence 1921 under the title: American Birth Control League which led to the present Planned Parenthood Federation of America. In **April 2, 1917** the first American woman elected as the member of the House of Representatives. In August 18, 1920 in the light of 19th amendment the right vote was granted to all citizens without any

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discrimination. The year 1932 opened the new horizons for American woman. Amelia Earhart got the honor of becoming the first women pilot of USA. The law against the discrimination of passed in **February 16, 1945 under the** Alaska Equal Rights Act. In December 1, 1945 the 'Civil Rights Movement' started when in a bus a black seamstress woman Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat for a white man. In **May 9, 1960, the birth control pill was introduced and commercialized** by 'The Food and Drug Administration (FDA). To negate the discrimination in pay on the bases sex, race, or creed was passed in June 10, 1963. Similarly in **July 2, 1964** to end the discriminations in employment on the bases of color, creed, nation, sex or race The Civil Rights Act was passed. In **June 30, 1966** an organization was founded for the equal rights of a woman in all respects i.e. social, political, economic etc. Equal rights for financial assistance in all educational programs without discrimination of all kinds were granted in June 23, 1972. The Supreme Court of America gave the right of abortion to woman in Jan. 22, 1973.

4.4 'The Battle of the Sexes'

A tennis match was played between the male and female champions of the tennis in Sep. 20, 1973 under the slogan 'The Battle of the Sexes'. The match was won by a female player and was declared a historic triumph of women by the winner female player. The first woman associate justice of the Supreme Court of USA was appointed in July 7, 1981. An American woman got the title of the first American woman in space in June 18, 1983. American Democratic Party first time nominated a woman as the vice president in July 12, 1984. This nomination was ever first in the American history. The first female was appointed as attorney general of USA by an American president in March 12, 1993. Similarly, in Jan 23, 1997, a female became the secretary of state of USA. In Sep. 1994 an act was passed by president legislation was done to protect the women from the victims of all kinds like domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, stalking and other

gender-related violence. In Jan.24, 2013 bans were lifted for women serving in US army to achieve high positions. Hillary Clinton was nominated as presidential candidate in July 26, 2016. This movement of women rights reached its peak by the sworn of the Kamala Harris as the first color vice president of USA.¹⁶

5.1 Women Rights and the movement of Feminism

5.1a First Wave

Abigail Adam the wife of John Adam (the prominent leader of USA who headed the Revolution of America in 1776) took the initiative for women rights personally. **In July 19-20, 1848, the 1st women convention held in New York. This was ended with the ‘Declaration of Sentiments’. After the decades of struggle this declaration paved the way to the 19th Amendment-the right of vote to women.**

5.1.b Second Wave (1963 - 1980s)

This second wave of feminism started in 1963 when Betty Friedan (1921-2006) an American writer and women rights activist published her book under the title ‘*The Feminine Mystique*’. *The gist of this book was that women do not agree for their limited role as wives and mothers. Three million copies of that book were sold within three years.*

5.1.c Third Wave (1990s)

In this phase the feminist on one side raised the slogans of liberty, equality, empowerment, personal freedom and protection from sexual harassment and on the other rather than reform their attitudes they instigated women to articulate their sexuality and individuality.

5.1.d Fourth Wave

According to some scholars there is nothing new in Fourth Wave. It is a continuity of third wave to some extent.¹⁷

5.2 An Over View of the Achievements of Women Rights movements

No doubt as a result of this struggle, women achieved:

- Liberty
- Freedom
- Individuality

- Empowerment
- Equality

5.3 What a Woman Paid the Cost of These Achievements?

- Family system
- Motherhood
- Relations
- Modesty
- Sincerity and faithfulness
- Values
- Protection
- Peace of mind
- Contentment
- Sexual abuse and harassment

6.1 The Miserable Situation of Woman in Modern West

Modesty and faithfulness are the highest traits of human personality. Achievements in excess of liberty, independence and freedom made woman like a boundary less property. An extreme persuasion of individuality, subjectivity and personal identity deprived of woman from all human values and relations. As unnecessary restrictions are inhuman similarly unlimited freedom is irrational. Beauty of life is in the balance of both liberty and limits. Woman started her struggle to secure herself from the violence. Woman started her struggle to secure herself from the violence. Unfortunately, she is suffering from extreme violence in all walks of life. Among all sexual violence and harassment are the main issues to which she is facing in the main hubs of this post-modern world. A constant and continuous fear of insecurity, loneliness, isolation, insincerity, unfaithfulness, sexual abuse, violence and harassment has snatched her piece of mind and destructed her spiritual and mental health.

6.2 Women in America.

In modern Western world mostly, America is leading to all such kinds of activist movements. The situation of woman is very poor there. For example, according to a survey the rate of sexual assault in America is one in every 68

seconds. An eye awakening survey of European Union disclosed that one in twenty women from the age of fifteen to above have been sexually assaulted in European Union. The offense of femicide is also at its peak in European Union.¹⁸ These days in England due to the domestic abuses there are number of problems to which a so called empowered and independent woman of the modern West is facing like insecurity, violence homelessness and financial burdens as a single parent.¹⁹

6.3 Violence Against Women

According to a survey updated on 29th March 2024, in USA more than half of women have faced sexual abuses, violence and forcible rapes. The highest sexual assaults risk age in USA, UK and other European countries is between 12 to 34 years. The number of women is at least three times more among all victims. Not a single place is secure from such abuses. Markets, workplaces, parks even college and university campuses are not secured from these brutalities. According to a survey 43% of total campus crimes are forcible sexual assaults. Society has become so much inhuman and trustless that maximum assaults are from their family members, relatives, and friends. In this regard the terms 'stranger rape' and 'acquaintance rape' have been introduced there. The survey is based on reported cases only. While the unreported cases are many more than reported cases. In this regard the most surprising thing is that according to a national 2020 study in US: By graduation, over one-quarter (26%) of female undergraduate students and almost 7% of undergraduate male students report experiencing sexual assault.

²⁰

6.4 Psychological effects

Along with painful and shameful experience of sexual assault the humiliation, broken family system, deprivation from motherhood, loneliness insincere atmosphere and loss of modesty suffered woman in post-traumatic stresses disorders like mental health disorder, personality disorder, depression and anxiety. Post-traumatic stress disorder instigates her towards the use of alcohol, drugs, self-harm and suicide.²¹

7. Conclusion

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Consequently, there are number of mental health clinics, trauma centers, psychological and psychiatric hospitals have been established in all over the Europe and specifically in USA. This situation is so much worse that one adult in each five has faced mental and psychological illness in 2021 in USA.²² The increase in the mental health of US women from 2008 to 2019 is very much shocking i.e. 2016, 21.7%; 2017, 22.3%; 2018, 22.8%; 2019, 24.5%.²³ The situation of women in UK is not much different from USA in this regard. It has been revealed in surveys that twenty six percent of women between the ages of fourteen to twenty-four suffering from mental illness.²⁴ Women are facing more problems than men in respect of mental health and their problems have been increasing day by day as compare to men. It has been pointed out that in women the main cause of mental illness is the abuse, violence, harassment and forcible rape.²⁵

8. Findings

In the light of above discussion and analysis we can say:

- In pre-modern era woman was considered as a subject which is impure, inferior, handmaiden, deceitful, incompetent, concubine and adulterous.
- In modern era movements for women's domestic, political, economic and social rights were started and slogans for her liberty, equality, independence and empowerment were raised.
- No doubt woman won the right of vote, got the positions in offices and freed herself from all ethical responsibilities and family bonds.
- If the purpose of modern woman was only the achievement of above said goals, then she is successful but if her struggle was for respect, prestige, dignity and modesty then she is an absolute looser.
- Actually, now she is in a new enslavement. She has been trapped in the attractive slogans of equality, liberty and empowerment. Under this deceitful plan she has been deprived of from each human value.
- In pre-modern age she was a subject only and in modern era she is a commodity and a tool for pleasure, enjoyment and to enhance the business and capital.

- On the name of freedom, the modern age has deprived her from identity.
- The status of modern woman is worst then ancient. She is devaluing and insecure in homes, markets, parks, workplaces, hospitals, schools, colleges and universities.
- The main cause of this catastrophe of modern age is the atheistic understanding of the phenomena of creation. The mere material interpretation of this universe has snatched each and every aspect of dignity from human being.
- The only solution of all the dilemmas is the spiritual interpretation of the phenomena of life.

9. Suggestions

In this article we have tried to describe and analyze the position of woman from ancient times to today. What is real solution of this issue? It requires another article. As we have mentioned above another research to look into this matter in the perspective of Islam is required.

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