

Status of Women during Dogra Rule in Kashmir: review

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 5 July 2020

Received in revised form 29 October 2020

Accepted 30 November 2020

Available online 15 December 2020

Keywords: Women, Exploitation, Dogra rule, Kashmir

Abstract: The present research is an attempt to provide a historical overview to understand the position of women during dogra rule in Kashmir. The history of Jammu and Kashmir reveals that women enjoyed high status as elsewhere in India but there was a marked decline in the position of women in Kashmir. Women are identified with silence and deprivation. It is from 5th five year plan onwards that the role of women is recognized. Women also contributed a lot in the Kashmir economy. Besides, preparation of food and housekeeping, they also do the work of grinding the grain and maintenance of home since ages. The study is of Dogra rule and highlights the brutality done with the women in Kashmir. The attempt is to explore the women's condition and exploitation she had gone through during Dogra rule in Kashmir.

1. Introduction

It is difficult to study the social problems in historical perspective. No social problem of any period is a product of the immediate present but has its roots in the past traditions and heritage of the society. The people of the state were caught in a vicious web created by religious superstitions and social obscurantism. Amid blind beliefs, certain social evils which appeared as religiously sound had crept up in some sections of the society. By the middle of the 19th century the Jammu and Kashmir state was formed under the treaty of Amritsar 1846. The Dogra state functioned in partial, communal and unjust manner degrading the majority section of population and systematically ignored their basic human rights. Mridu Rai highlighted that the Dogra state was a Hindu state and the rulers tried their best to broaden its Hindu nature. The puerile superstition of Dogra rulers was such that Maharaja Ranbir Singh banned the catching of fish because of the belief that the late maharaja's soul had transmitted into the body of a fish. The distant past of Jammu and Kashmir reveal that women might have enjoyed a high status as elsewhere in India. But there was a marked decline in the position of women. Female children were not much desired and their sufferings became endless with the beginning of inroads of Turko-Afghan tribes for whom carrying away of women formed the prized item of booty. With the passage of time social evils started to culminate among women of Jammu and Kashmir state. In 1846 the Kashmir was sold for 75 lakh rupees by lord Hardinge, the governor general of East India Company to Raja Gulab Singh Dogra as a reward for his disloyal against his Sikh master and the people of Punjab. The new masters evinced little or no interest in the social and moral uplift of their subjects. Kashmiri women had lost everything for which they were illustrious in the past ages.

2. Review of Literature

Qazi Seema (2009) has produced a book entitled 'Gender and militarization in Kashmir'. This book is based on research submitted in London school of Economics, deals mainly with the impact of militarization on gender in the conflict situation in Kashmir in the last two decades. She has well documented cases of mass rape, rape molestation and intimidation of women by Indian forces in last 20 years of armed conflict. Though the book is not directly related to gender inequality. It gives details and analytical account of this situation in the valley with empirical evidences. Nelaseo Shobana (2010) the book entitled 'Status of Women in India'. In this book the author has focused on empowerment of women in India and their historical status of women in India, women status in ancient India and women status in medieval period. Its historical practices like sati, when women were forced to die with her husband in Hindu religion likewise jaguar is practiced. In Rajasthan where women prefer to die along with her husband.

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And other problem in medieval was child marriage. Below 18 years of age girls used to get married at early age even this practice is going on still in some states but not in Jammu and Kashmir.

Nandal and Rajnish (2014) in the study of Status of Women through Ages in India highlighted that during the Dogra rule there were various social evils that the women of Kashmir had to face and the most prominent social evil. The Britisher's quickly recognized the need to stop the said trade after the devoting and detuning famine of 1877-78. Women were kept like commodities in the state and in fact they were considered to be so unimportant that they were required to pay a big part of their earning to the government as taxes and this was done through the registration of female in Kashmir. Therefore, the situation of women in Kashmiri during 1870 till 19th century remained miserable due to the lack of government laws and policies to prohibit the heinous crime of protection within the state.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To highlight the various kinds of social evils during the Dogra rule in Kashmir
2. To explore the brutality and exploitation of Kashmiri women by the Dogras in Kashmir

3.1 Methodology

The present review study is purely based on secondary source of data. The data is gathered from different books, journals and other relevant materials to assess the status of women during Dogra rule in Kashmir.

4. Results and Analysis

The findings of the study are as under:

4.1 Position of Women

Women are important in the socio-economic development of both developed and developing economies but still they are found to be the submissive and dominated section of the society. Women contributed a lot in the Kashmir economy. Besides that they do the work of grinding the grain and home maintenance since ages. The practice of rice pounding was done in a stone mortar with a heavy pestle and then rice was extracted and cleaned. In making shawl they played important role. Raw pushm was given to the women who spun it into a red of different degree of finesse. They sold it to the shopkeepers in small quantities from whom it was brought by karkhandars. The wives of Hanjis (boatman) were engaged in fishing in rivers and selling of fishes. Another class of women was engaged. According to the British official report that 15 to 25 percent of the revenue of the state came from taxing woman. In 1880, there were 18,715 registered centers who gave a share of their income to the state in the form of taxes. Kashmir were usually sold at young age by their parents to brothel-keepers for a price that varied from 100 to 200 rupees. Child trafficking was officially recognized by the government and girl child purchase by pimps and brothel keepers was registered and sealed on stamp paper. The child sold, usually believed that they would be married off. Dogra state taxed marriages as well and the tax on marriage was so high as to beyond the reach the poor parents. The tax on marriage amounted

to as much as 3 to 8 rupees. The centers were divided into three classes and taxed accordingly:

Class-I Center: Rs 40 (Per annum)

Class-II Center: Rs 20 (Per annum)

Class-III Center: Rs 10 (Per annum)

The girls once sold had no hope to release and were assigning to work as slaves all their lives. The sale of girls has been described by Arthur Brinkman, the author of *Wrongs in Kashmir* in the following words-The classes engaged in it are owned as slaves and others who were formerly in their position. The authority of the latter is backed by the whole power of the Dogra Maharaja to whom reverts at their death all the wealth gathered during their infamous life. Should one of their bondwomen or dancing girl attempt to leave her degrading profession. She is driven back with the lash and the rods into her mistress's power .these facts are certain.

There were dancing girls in the service of Maharaja. The state charged 103 (chilkee) rupees for giving license to purchase a dancing girl. The poverty and backwardness were considered the basic push factors for the state encouraged on the system. Illiteracy and lack of education among the poor Kashmiris kept them behind in understanding this institution as an evil. For illiteracy both social reformers and state are responsible. It is a sorry commentary on the religious reforms movement leaders in Srinagar that the sad plight of the innocent young girls did not engage their attention. They never raise any voice against the houses of ill fame and immoral trafficking in women located at Tashwan and Maisuma in Srinagar. On the contrary they were more concerned about dividing the Muslim community of Kashmir on issues of lesser importance. The Dogra rulers never worked for providing education to the poor and backward people of urban and rural Kashmir. The educational backwardness of Kashmiris leads to their exploitation at the hands of the people possessing power and high social status .thus illiteracy became main force to guide the backward and poor people to throw their girls.

4.2 Trafficking in Women

Rajput landlords who had given large jagirs by the Maharajas, informs Robert Thorp, propagated the practice of women trafficking. He asserted that Rajput Dogras held a large number of concubines, some obtained through purchase, others by capture. The evil practice of kidnapping women and trafficking in them has assumed dangerous proportions in the state. The government realized the seriousness of this problem and the criminal law amended in order to give the administration effective power to put an end to this evil. Maharaja Hari Singh took rigorous step in this direction and a committee was appointed which after going into the whole question made necessary recommendations which have been accepted.

4.3 Female Infanticide

In Jammu and Kashmir state sex ratio was very low. This was because of female infanticide as well as discrimination against girl child. The girl child did not receive much attention and became victim of various infantile diseases. The sex ratio observed by Walter Lawrence for Srinagar city was 817 females per thousand males for Hindus and 916 females per thousand males for Muslims. The sex ratio in rural areas was much lower as compared to the cities. This was 721/1000 for Hindus and 895/1000 for Muslims in the year 1891. Keeping in consideration the result of early marriage Maharaja Hari Singh passed infant marriage prevention regulation in 1928; this regulation became a law in the state.

4.4 Widow Remarriage

Widow Remarriage was practiced by the Muslims, it was not allowed in Hindus. The condition of these widows was very miserable. Mr. Biscoe remarks, as there was no restriction to early marriage there were numbers of child widows who were obliged to live in their father-in -laws house and do as they were told. I came to know of the cruelties practiced on these girls especially by the Brahman priests who were often the fathers of the drowned babies.

The infants were thrown either in the river or to the pariah dogs at night so that the religion should not be disgraced.'

4.5 Child Marriage

Marriage was considered as religious duty. It was preferred to be performed as early as possible to achieve the religious credit which gave rise to evil of child marriage. Early marriage was common among all whether lower castes, Kashmiri Pandits or Muslims. The marriageable age of lower caste women was much lower as compared to higher castes women. To have an unmarried daughter in home in her teens was considered an insulting for parents and so early marriage of girls was desired. The age of marriage was 12-13 years. Early marriage gave rise to various ills like widowhood, high mortality rate and high birth rates.

4.6 Women Health and Child Birth Customs

The diet of pregnant women was controlled by her mother-in -law who gave her less food. Certain foods were offered but sometimes these ill advised dietary restrictions on women obstruct proper development of foetus and they proved harmful. The deficiency of nutrients may result in the diseases like anemia and osteomalacia in pregnant mothers. Sometimes they may cause in the death of mothers. In Jammu and Kashmir rituals related to child birth did not make women to feel that child birth is a source of power. When the delivery date was approaching the lady was sent to her husband's house from her father's house with certain gifts new clothes and pots full of curd. The gifts depended upon the economic status of the family.

The western ideas which had slowly but steadily advanced in the wake of British domination to every corner of the sub continent began to have its impact on the Kashmir. At the accession of Pratab Singh a big change occurred. The British residency took over the charge of the entire administration and introduced many administrative, educational and economic reforms. It shows the dawn of modernism in the state. Keeping in mind the women rights and their protection by the various associations and institution another reform movement in the name of Jammu and Kashmir women's welfare association came into force only for the protection of women rights, their dignity, empowerment equality and freedom from such evils which were badly damaging their reputation in the society. The association was in favour of women upliftment and criticized every form of ill practice and misconception in the society. The association believed in the modern education and wanted to erase illiteracy in the society. Finally the Jammu and Kashmir women's welfare association came first into the year 1927 as a welfare association for the upliftment of Kashmiri women. This association was formed on one aim that is maintaining one central organization which will coordinate and extend the existing works on women in the state and this association came into being only after a successful meeting with GEC Wakefield. The Maharaja Pratab Singh had donated one thousand rupees from his privy purse. After its formation and widespread recognition this women welfare organization started its works and went on its mission by educating women. The aim of the association which was women empowerment and fight against illiteracy tutorial service schools, were opened in the state which meant for the adult illiterate women. Lectures to these adult illiterate women were arranged even without any aid. Later the association published primary books in Kashmiri language and educated volunteers were also enlisted and a women's league was also established with the aim of binding women together for self development, social service and social reforms.

5. Conclusions

The distant past of Jammu and Kashmir depict that women have enjoyed a high status but during Dogra rule the position of women was miserable. The women were sold like commodity. The backwardness and poverty were considered the basic factor to encourage and was the main source of income for the state. Illiteracy and lack of education among the Kashmiri kept them behind in understanding all these social evils. Widow r-remarriage was not allowed in Hindus. Child marriage was common and considered as religious duty. Owing to early marriage various ills

rise like widowhood, high mortality and high birth rates. Women were discriminated and considered as inferior sex.

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