

'Women's Education a Tool of Social Transformation'-A Historical Study Based on Kerala Society

Beena Dominic

Abstract— All the historical studies regarding to societies inevitably have been determined, or at least motivated by historical process. The core issue of this paper is scrutinizing the particular historical trends under which the concept of 'Social Transformation' has grown among women in Kerala. The theoretical and analytical approaches help us to prove its facts authentically. Here the researcher tries to go through the study of women in Kerala before 19th century and analyse their actual conditions of that age and generated how education stood as the tool of social transformation among women society. Then assess how they achieved their esteemed status in the society on the historical point of view. This paper can be considered a theoretical framework focussing on social transformation as defined through the examination of its principal ideologies and the study of the concept's reproduction through institutional organizations.

Index Terms—Social Transformation, smartha, Women empowerment, women's education, sati, devadasi.

1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, all societies have transformed in different dimensions. A society, by definition, is constantly transforming from one situation to another as evidenced through shifts in their social, cultural, ideological and artistic elements. Social Transformation lies at the radical end of conceptions of social change. It implies at the very least some fundamental changes in society's core institutions, the polity and the economy, with major implications for relationship between social groups or classes, and for the means of the creation and distribution of wealth, power and status. Within these broad features of social transformation, it is possible to discern dramatic moments of transformation in particular societies or region. There are numerous factors responsible for their development of transformation. Education can be used as one of the most important tool to transform the society. Societal change comes from the collective transformation of the individuals within the society. Literacy allows the people, to acquire a critical consciousness, particularly those who are marginalized and discriminated in society. Empowered individuals are better equipped to question and critique societal realities and assumptions and enabled them to change their situation. Rather than being merely in the world, individuals can be taught that they are actually co-creators of their real-

ity. In Kerala the group of women suffered very much through the social evils which are prevailed in the society. They were tortured in many ways. So it is the best way to overcome these problems through education.

2. Theoretical approach of Social Transformation

In this section there are number of theories and educational innovations to explore the relationship between education and social transformation

Paulo Freire (1921- 1997), the Brazilian educationalist has left a significant mark on thinking about this concept. Freire assume that the learners must understand their own reality as part of their learning activity. In his well known work 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', he refers to traditional role learning as a banking system where students store deposits of knowledge made by the teacher (Freire Paulo, 1970). Through the liberation

and education, he aims to narrow the gap between the teacher and the student thus increasing the students' creative power. Central to this model is open communication and earnest dialogue between the student and the teacher. This challenges the teacher to demonstrate their humanity and that they are not 'above' the student. In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world in which they find

themselves, they come to see the world not as at static in reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.

According to Sri Ghose Aurobindo (1872- 1950) the Indian born and Cambridge educated scholar, with the transformation and growth of the individual, society would in turn transform and evolve (Peeter Heechs,1989). To Mahatma Gandhi, Truth, non-violence and passive resistance were successfully used as an instrument of social and political transformation. He believed that education can play an effective role in developing a whole some human personality capable of resisting war, violence, injustice and oppression and building a social order where in man can live in peace and harmony with others. (Rajput J.S, 1998).

3. Conceptual Analysis of Social Transformation

The literal meaning of social transformation is a marked change in the form of a society. If the concept is taken literally, we can possibly never see a society which does not experience a 'transformation' in social terms at all. Societies have always been transformed through social processes. However, as an independent concept it appeared in a particular contextual basis, this same multidimensional context was the driving force behind UNESCO's organization of the MOST (Management of Social Transformation) programme. This programme launched a growing social scientific concept, 'Social transformation'. When we discuss the concept of 'Social transformation', we should consider that this concept has been produced and is still reproducing in the ideological streams of the 90's and 20's. When we mention 'Social transformation' as a newborn concept, we are referring to something more than the literal meaning of these two words. It is a multy- dimensional concept based on studies in the last century of a broad range of relevant fields like economic, literature and sociology. One of the defining characteristics of social transformation is that it does not stipulate specific societal changes. Thus protecting its general route of the societies that takes its way in a positive direction. (Castle, 2000). It could be said that 'Social transformation' is not a completed scientific term, but ra-

ther a concept still in its infant stages. As Stephen Castles emphasizes 'Social transformation' implies an underlying notion of the way society and culture change in response to such factors as economic growth, war or political specific sense. According to Castle, it should be established an analytical framework which is particularly relevant to the current historical period. In other words, 'Social transformation' studies could be seen as a new interdisciplinary paradigm which we wish to develop social transformation studies emerge as a research field that can lead to theorizing positive social and political actors to protect locals and communities against the negative consequences of the globalization process (Castle 2000).

4. Kerala women in 19th century (Historical Back ground)

In the caste ridden society of the 19th century Kerala women were not considered as equal sex. Their position in the society varied from caste to caste. To understand their position in society, we can go through their condition in custom; economic, religious and educational level. During that time certain social customs which prevailed in the society that enslaved the women folk of Kerala were child marriage, sati, smartha, pulapedi, devadasi system, dowry system, mode of dress etc.

4.1 Social customs & practices

4.1.1 Child marriage: One of the social evil which enslaved the women of medieval Kerala was child marriage. In the beginning of the 19th century, girls were married before attaining puberty. Visscher, a Dutch Christian Missionary who was working at Cochin from 1717-1723 pointed out that 'they (Canaries Brahmin) give their daughters in marriage at the age of eight or nine years; for if they pass their tenth year unmarried they lose caste, and are not allowed to marry. In these child marriages the girls went to live with the groom's family and had to work hard in the house. The marriage was not consummated for some years. This custom of marrying girls in their early childhood and as soon as possible though common to all castes was most strictly observed by the Brahmins. As a result of this even

in 1891 in Travancore alone there were 26 children. Wives between the ages 0 and 4, 1125 between 5 and 9, and 13, 559 between 10 and 14 (census of Travancore, 1894, p.40. In Cochin, it was 0.3 percentage between the ages 0 and 4, 1.6 between 5 and 9, and 14.8 between 10 and 14 (Report of the census of Cohin, 1894, p.76). The wicked custom of child marriage arose from distrust of female virtue observes Ma-teer, When the missionaries began their religious and social work they pointed out that 'child marriage is one of the greatest hindrances to the welfare and education of women of India.

4.1.2 Sati: One of the most cruel and widely followed Indian custom was known as 'sahagamanam' or going with her lord or sati. This custom is practiced among many of the common people in the kingdom of Malabar. In 1876, in the Tinneveli district which is very close to the southern part of Travancore, a widow dug a pit inside her house, filled it with sandal wood and dresses herself as a bride; she shut the doors, lit the pile and leapt in. When a Brahmin woman became a widow she was not immolated or burnt upon the pile. But she was prohibited from marrying a second time and had to remain a widow till her death. But her life is very pathetic. According to the then prevalent belief, the widow shall never exceed one meal a day, nor sleep on a bed, if she does so her husband falls from swarga.

4.1.3 Devadasi System: Another social evil which prevailed in the society of Kerala was the devadasi system. Devadasis were dancing girls in the temple. Historian like Sreedhara Menon (1978: p.224) pointed out that the devadasi system began in Kerala at about the commencement of the Malayalam era and it gained strength during the period of the Cholas. The main occupations of the devadasis in Kerala were singing, dancing and play acting. Earlier it was a basic change in the character of devadasi system. The main function of the devadasis hereafter was to entertain Naduvazhis and Janmis and not worship of Gods. (A. Sreedhara Menon: 1979, p.82).

4.1.4 Slavery: The institution of slavery also existed in the society of Kerala. Apart from the hereditary slavery often it was imposed as a form of punishment. In Kerala women were exempted from the punishment of execution. Instead, women criminals were condemned to slavery. Dat, a foreign traveler observes: Next to the punishment of death, that of slavery was the most severe. It was principally reserved for females....' The following are some of examples. Slavery in the most primitive form prevailed in the land even in the beginning of the 19th century.

Smartha: An evil custom which existed in Kerala which endangered even higher castes and reducing them to slavery was 'smartha' When a Brahmin woman was suspected by her relatives or by her Brahmin neighbors of illegal connection with men, the suspected women had to face a severe process of trials before her excommunication from her caste and it was known as smartha. The women were degraded to slavery and deprived from their parental community in other ways also. For example, a low caste woman allowing any improper intimacy with a Brahmin was sold to the Moplahs. Nambudiri who was condemned to commit fornication with a 'Tiati'. A low caste woman would be deprived of his eyes and the girl and her relations would either be put to death or sold as slaves to the Muslims who sent them beyond the sea. At the same time a Nambudiri do not lose caste on account of fornication with a Sudra woman. Thus women were subjected to slavery and extreme discrimination.

4.1.5 Dowry System: Another degrading custom which still continues in the society is the dowry system. In marriage, payment of dowry was and is a determining factor in deciding the match. Rao observes taking caste by caste, it was once popular among the Brahmin castes. The amount of dowry was fixed by girl's parents. The rates went up according to the academic and economic position of the bride groom. Though the government of India passed the dowry prohibition Act in 1961 the sale of girls like cattle continues even today.

4.2 Economic status

The economic status of women in Kerala in the 18th century was not a monolithic one, as it varied from caste to caste and religion to religion. One of the means to determine the economic security is the earning of wages for one's own living. But this wage earning right was denied to women. But lower caste women worked together for their master. Second means of economic independence is the right to own or inherit property and the right of inheritance. They followed Marumakkathayam system of inheritance. The 'tarawad' a corporate unit was managed by the senior male member on the mother's side. However this system gave the woman and her children economic security.

4.3 Religious status

The status of women was closely connected with the place and privilege which each religious community accorded to them. In the Vedic age women enjoyed all the religious rights and privileges which men possessed in a Hindu society. In Kerala, sanskritisation had its impact on the religious and social life of the people. In Hindu opinion of that time, 'the only respectable position of a woman is that of a wife, and the only education required by her in that station is the knowledge of the duties of a house hold.(census Madras presidency,1874,p.192).However women were by nature more religious and devotional than men. In fact, they were the most faithful custodians of its spirit and traditions.

Among the Christians also social practices accorded only a secondary position to women. Among the Christians in Kerala women were allowed to enter the church and to attend the service conducted there. But they were excluded from the office of the ruling and preaching. The Christians of Kerala adopted many social practices from the higher castes. This was true in the case of women also. The women kept themselves mostly in the house. Like Hindu women they might not speak to strange men. Under the Islam community women secure many substantial rights says Amir Ali a Muhammadan Justice in Calcutta. According to him it avails to raise her up to a certain level,

and that at best a rather low level and there leaves her to the Muslim marriage is not a sacrament but a secular institution mainly based on the theory of contract. Muslim women of poor families paradoxically had greater freedom than the women of rich families. A woman was frequently regarded as a functional piece of property rather than as a free individual and personal companion. The property could be used or misused kept or got rid of this defective view being redeemed only by family love and by the fortitude of the women themselves. One of the natural corollaries to polygamy in the Muslim community was the seclusion of women. Her duties were in the household. In the Islam community in Kerala women are not permitted to attend mosque services. During the fast month of the Muslim, the nights were alive with special open air services. Women were eligible to attend these open air services. Thus these religious had played a dominant role in the evolution of the inferior status of women in the 19th century in Kerala. This inferior religious status hindered the progress of women's education during this period.

4.4 Educational Development in Kerala

4.4.1 Role of Missionaries in education

The modernization of Kerala education system was started with the introduction of western education. The credit of having undertaken the pioneering work in this field goes to the Christian missionaries (R.J.Hepsi Joy, 1995). In Travancore and Cochin, several protestant missionaries started to work in educational field in the early decades of 19th century under the patronage of the local rulers. The most distinguished of the Christian missionaries who worked in south Travancore was Rev. Mead of London Mission Society. The CMS Mission was active in Kottayam, since 1813. The missionaries set up a grammar school at Kottayam in 1821 and also started a printing press. Among the CMS missionaries who did pioneering work in Kottayam, Bailey, Baker and Fenn deserve special mention. A school for girls was set up at Alleppy by the CMS missionaries before 1825. An English school was opened at Mattan-

cherry by the British missionary Rev. J. Dawson in 1818 with financial aid from the government.

The credit for having laid the foundation of western education in the Malabar area goes to Basel German Evangelical mission. In 1848 they started a primary school in Kallayi and in 1856 an English school in Tellicherry. Dr. Gundert compiled dictionaries and grammar lessons in Malayalam. The school started in Kallayi was transferred to a convenient building in Calicut in 1858. In 1872 it was raised to middle school and in 1978 it became a college affiliated to Madras University. This is the Malabar Christian College of today. The Brennan school became Brennan College was established in 1862 with a handsome donation made by Mr. Brennan.

4.4.2 Role of state in the education

The direct activity of state began in 1817 when Rani Gouri Parvati Bai made a start in introducing education in Travancore under state control. Vernacular primary schools were opened in different parts. Private agencies were brought under a system of Grant-in-aid in 1869. Guardians of children of the age group 5-10 were enjoined under law to send them to school. In 1834 Maharaja Swathithirunal opened an English school at Trivandrum; it came to known as rajas free school. In 1866 it was raised to the status of a college and was affiliated to Madras University. It is the nucleus of the present University College Trivandrum. In 1904 the government of Travancore accepted the scheme of free primary education in the state. It contained specific rules regarding qualification of teachers and grant-in-aid to private schools. In 1910 an inspection code was also introduced to make school inspections effective (Mary Joseph, Thomas P.J (eds), 2008).

In 1845 the Cochi Maharaja started an English school at Ernakulam. It was raised to the status of a college in 1875 (the Maharajas College today). The Cochin Education code was drawn up in 1911 to make the system of education more effective. In 1877 a private English school for the young princes of the Zamorin's family was started at

Calicut. Later it was opened to all caste Hindu boys. In 1979 it was raised to the status of a college- the Guruvayurappan College today. In Palakkat a school was started in 1866. It was taken by the Government in 1877 and it became a college in the same year the Government Victoria College today. There were many private schools. They were managed by Malabar district Board till the formation of the Kerala state in 1956. Travancore- Cochin State was formed in 1949 and S.S.L.C system with uniform curriculum was introduced in the same year. Kerala Education Act was passed in 1958. Based on this Act Kerala Education Rules were formed in 1959.

The establishment of the University of Travancore in 1937 as the 16th university was an important event in the history of development of higher education. Kerala University Act was passed by the assembly in 1957 and Kerala University came into existence in the same year. Calicut University was established in 1968. The establishment of Cochin University in 1971 and M.G. University, Kottayam in 1983 was important landmarks in the history of Kerala.

Identification of the Problem:

- The major problem in the practical implication of the concept social transformation of women is the lack of acceptance in understanding of the concept and its implications in its true spirit.
- Social transformation is a concept, which is widely used but seldom defined properly. In the case of Kerala the scholars were not much bothered about in this sect.
- The statistical problems are related to applying qualitative tools to measure a concept, which is both quantitative as well as qualitative... In Kerala, there is no foolproof design for measuring transformation. The measurements of these issues are different from that of the rural and urban area.
- In spite of the aforesaid specific steps for improving the status of women in Kerala we experience a

paradox regarding status of women in Kerala. For example in the political front out of total seats in the state assembly number of women has been more than 10%. In the trade unions and highly official level bodies of political parties women representation is very low.

- Another paradoxical thing noticed is that Kerala has the highest suicide rate in the country, which is 27 per lakh population. This is 3 times more the national average. The rate peaks at the age group of 15-29 for women and 30-44 for men. But above 60 years there is no sex difference. According to the statistics of National Crime records Bureau the rate is high for house wives. For example 1547 housewives committed suicide in the year 2000. The emotional quotient (EQ) of Kerala women seems to be diminishing.

Recommendations

Women social transformation is a multidimensional activity which can become a reality only through a process of conscious effort. This is possible only through a combined effort of many factors in the society.

- Society should change the attitude towards women. We can trust in women who can transform the family, nation and the whole world through their inborn qualities.
- Government must take necessary steps to uplift them and gave awareness about their own qualities through seminars, campaigns and other activities.
- Necessary programmes should conduct for their psychological growth and qualitative criteria like self esteem, self confidence, ability to take decisions and freedom of expression.
- Researchers should come forward to contribute their valuable efforts for the

transformation of women in Kerala through their writings.

- Programmes should conduct through media for the empowerment of women.

Findings

Social Transformation of women is an essential element in national development. Since women constitute half of the population there can be no developments unless the needs and interests of women are fully taken into account. In fact, transformed women are a nation's strength. In the Indian social, cultural, and economic context no one can achieve the whole purpose of women's transformation within a short span of time. However the women have utilized the chances given to them and made considerable progress. As a formal agency, the government of India wanted to improve the living conditions of women at different times. This is reflected in the wide variety of programmes started exclusively for the betterment of women from the early itself. Missionary activities also played an important role for their transformation. Though the concept is used widely, the opinion about the problem regarding how this goal can be achieved and how this process can take place. There are people who believe that women transformation in social level is only a myth and not going to become a reality. They argue that one woman may seem to be transformed one fine morning, but the same woman may show signs of her own weakness the very next day. So it is difficult to assess women transformation in a nut shell.

The evaluation of social transformation is an innovative approach to evaluation; it is designed to help people help themselves and improve their programmes using a form of self- evaluation and reflection. It is the use of evaluation concepts, techniques and findings to foster improvement and self- determination. It employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Kochurani Joseph, 2005). The quantitative methodology may help in the case of social transformation and it can be measured with the help of certain indicators like their professions, employment op-

portunities, way of life style and public awareness etc. But the qualitative measuring indicates their psychological traits like self esteem, self confidence, ability to take decisions and freedom of expression. These psychological, social and political criteria are mostly qualitative in nature. In Kerala these type of qualitative aspects have shown among women in different manner, still undoubtedly education had played an important role for the social transformation of Kerala women.

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