

## Women's Questions and Print Media in Rajputana (1900-1947)

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“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.”

- Swami Vivekananda

Right from starting of the human civilization, the woman is considered to be a universal companion of man but the bitter truth is that she has been playing a subordinate role since ancient times. The socio-economic structure is framed by her orthodox counterparts in such a way that the status and position of women in India has become a controversial subject, as it reflects the contradictory and the paradoxical nature of the Indian society. While on the one hand, she has been called *Devi*; on the other hand, she has been criticized for her impulsive nature and has been denied from the basic right of existence as a human being. The maternal society during Indus Valley civilization simultaneously converted into patriarchal society which indicates the gradual downfall of women's position in the socio-economic sphere. Manu – an ancient Hindu law maker – made derogatory remarks on the dignity of woman and considered her as “an inferior human being”.

The basic reason behind the degradation of women's status is patriarchal attitude and orthodox mentality of her counterpart. Man used his universal companion as a materialistic goods and doesn't allow her to breathe in an environment of equality. She has been considered as merely a chapati maker, baby sitter and caretaker of household property and so on. Muslim rule and Colonial rule made the situation more pernicious and catastrophic.

Due to the mist of error, delusion and superstition, the Hindu society became deplorable and depressing. Many superstitions, dogmas and undesirable rituals were propounded in the name of religion. They included extreme feelings of casteism, untouchability, child and unequal or unmatched marriages, prohibition on education and re-marriage of women (even if widowed in infancy or childhood), sati (self immolation by a wife upon the death of her husband) etc.

To protect the women from the above vagaries and inhumane miseries, social reformers started campaign to awaken India and the Hindu society. Several methods

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like framing an organisation to provide a platform for open-minded discussions (like Desh Hitaishini Sabha, Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha, Arya Samaj and Arya Stree Samaj, various caste organisations, etc.), creating awareness through man to man marking, writing books and publishing magazines with the articles hitting on the orthodoxy of the society- were used to raise the awareness among the people.

*Historical underpinnings in Socio-economic fabric of women*

The nature had created two wheels – man and woman - to proceed the civilization forward. Woman is to be considered as a universal companion of man but she has been playing a subordinate role since time in memorial.

History of women dates back to the history of human beings in the world. Ample examples can be cited with regard to the roles played by women in the history of mankind. Women were not only considered as a link in the life cycle of human beings by giving birth to offspring for retaining human life on earth for centuries but also played active roles as catalysts in the declaration of wars, annihilation of civilizations, evolution of communities etc.

In the *Vedic period* (i.e. the period from 2500 B.C. to 1000 B.C.), women enjoyed all the rights in social, economic, political and religious domain, as the rights were enjoyed by their male counterparts. At that time, women were not ornamental but the co-partners in life. During this period, sons were indispensable as fighters for the family and the clan but it doesn't mean that a girl child was neglected or ignored or received a differential treatment by her parents and the society. In this age, women used to be well educated, well-cultivated and were refined in their manners and etiquettes. Some of the hymes of the Rig Veda have been attributed to female rishis. Upanayana or ceremonial initiation into the Vedic studies at par was the rule.

The period from 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C. witnessed further deterioration in the position and status of women and womanhood in ancient times. Her educational rights now became a thing of the past as the Vedic studies became long and complicated, covering a period of 12 years. From this period, Upanayana became a formality for women. Further, the introduction of inter-race marriages (i.e. marriages between Aryan males and non-Aryan females), the evolution of the theory of transmigration and the increasing significance of sons for religious purposes, went a step further in lowering the status of women. Towards the end of the vedic age, especially in the Atharva Veda, the theory of transmigration of soul began, which had a direct bearing on the change of attitude towards women. According to Hindu mythology, it is believed that the soul of the parent achieves 'Moksha' or 'Nirvana' (freedom from material life) only if a son is born. At the funeral of an adult, only a male relative should light the pyre.

Besides, the evolution of caste system and the availability of forced or cheap labour, made the Aryans ponder over the notions of ceremonial purity. Women were

beginning to be considered impure and specially so, during pregnancy, child birth and mensuration.

In the age of the *Sutras* (i.e. the period from 500 B.C. to 100 A.D, when Shruta-Sutra, Griha-Sutra and Dharma Sutras were written) the inequities against women became fairly well defined. In the Baudhayan Dharma Sutra, an exhaustive list of do's and don'ts for men, as far as their relation with women is concerned. The writers of Dharama-Sutras went a step further and insisted upon pre-puberty marriages and held widow – remarriages in disrepute.

The period from 200 A.D. to 1000 A.D. was again a period of deterioration for the position and status of women, as the Smriti writers who flourished at this period, imposed many new restrictions upon the body, soul and very existence of the women of the day. Manu – an ancient Hindu law maker – made derogatory remarks on the dignity of woman and considered her as “*an inferior type of man*”.

The period from 1000 A.D. to 1900 A.D. was one of the rapid decline in women's status and completed the process of women's subordinations. Many new practices emerge in the society, which further degraded the status of women. Practices like polygamy, sati, jauhar, child and unequal marriages, prohibition on widow remarriages, prohibition on the education of women, the ill-treatment of the widows and the negations imposed on them, female infanticide etc. completed the vicious circle of their exploitation and made them fully subservient and dependent on their male counterparts.

It is remarkable that in the Indian society of *late 19<sup>th</sup> century*, various social reformers and reform associations, including the Arya Samaj, were working to put an end to the sorrows of the women and highlighted the deplorable condition of the women in the Indian society and became successful in the eradication of some of them. The works of Arya Samaj influenced a major part of western and northern India and especially in *Rajputana*, influenced the enlightened persons of various castes in Rajputana, who took upon themselves to correct what was wrong in their communities. Moreover, the *Child Marriage Restraint Act or the Sarda Act*, passed as a result of the long struggle of the Arya Samaj under the leadership of *Har bilas Sharda*, a Samajist of Ajmer (which was effective on British administered territories only and was not applicable on the Princely States of Rajputana), went a long way in changing the mindsets of the people.

Women not only of Rajputana but of the entire country faced oppression and suppression in male dominated society since ancient times. The movement for the upliftment of women started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Raja Ram Mohun Roy and other social reformers, in Bengal, raised certain questions against the orthodoxy of the period and against certain prevalent social evils which included Sati, education of women, widow remarriage, abolition of purdah, and agitation against child marriage.

This led to reformation in other parts of India (e.g. Maharashtra, Rajputana), where voices against these social evils, which were undermining the position of women, were soon heard and started a sort of chain reaction.

### *Marriage*

The custom of marriage, with its features, qualities and its role as a social institution determines, to a great extent, the position and status of women. A good marriage is a harbinger of peace, prosperity, and happiness for the women, while a bad one is like a nightmare and is worse than a painful chain. Marriage and post marriage problems from the past to the present form an important part in the history of the development of the women. Without radical reforms in the marriage system no real uplift of women was possible in the Indian society. Most of the disabilities from which women suffered were due to the evils which had crept into the institution of marriage itself. If women suffered as widows, it was due to the prevalence of the practice of infant marriages and the denial of the right of remarriage to widows; if they were illiterate, it was because they were married at early age, and thus their educational career was cut short; if the birth of daughters was a cause of sorrow, it was because marriage of a daughter meant the possibility of humiliation of her father at the hands of her husband's guardian and heavy expenses at the time of her marriage. The marriage custom in India had many abuses, such as polygamy, infant, child and unequal marriage, prohibition on the remarriage of widows, giving and taking of heavy dowry and other ruinous marriage expenses, and the imposition on the restriction of marriage within the narrow circle of sub-castes, etc.

### *Child-Marriage (Bal Vivaha)*

Child-marriage is a heinous practice that emerged in the ancient period and was firmly established in the medieval age and it was born from the same compulsions that perpetuated the practice of Sati.

There are many reasons to believe that this custom originated in the medieval ages and unfortunately prevailed up to present time. In the turbulent atmosphere of the medieval ages, law and order was not yet a universal phenomenon and arbitrary powers were concentrated in the hands of a hierarchy led by a despotic monarch. In India the Sultans of Delhi who held the place of the despotic monarch, came from a different type of culture. They were orthodox in their beliefs with a fanatical commitment to their religion and a ruthless method in its propagation.

During the reign of the Delhi Sultans, customs like child-marriage and wearing of the Ghungat (veil) came into practice. This age also perpetuated customs like Sati and looking upon the birth of a female baby as an ill omen, even killing newly born baby girls by various means. Amidst the feeling of insecurity, the presence of young unmarried girls was a potential invitation for disaster.



The caste hierarchy also perhaps had its role to play in perpetuating such a system. Caste which is based on birth and heredity does not allow marriages between members of different castes. But as youngsters whose emotions and passions could be ruled by other considerations might violate this injunction. Out of the necessity to preserve itself, the hereditary caste system could have helped in nourishing the practice of child-marriage.

Among other subsidiary considerations which could have helped to preserve this custom might be the belief that adults (or adolescent) boys and girls would indulge in loose moral practices. This consideration would have been more relevant in the context of the puritanical and orthodox environment of the bygone ages. The practice could also have been perpetuated, especially among the economically weaker sections, by the consideration of keeping marriage expenses to a minimum. A child-marriage need not have been as grand an affair as adult marriages.

#### *Sati System*

There has been no mention of 'Sati' in ancient scriptures. However, few scriptures like Narad Smriti does mention '*Sati as a custom of remaining a 'single woman' after the death of her husband.*' Famous examples of such women are sati anusuiya, savitri, ahilya, etc.

According to Manu-Smriti, a Hindu widow was to remain *sati*, a Sanskrit word that means chaste or pure. Gradually, the word sati was used to designate the ritual of self-immolation or self-sacrifice by a Hindu widow on her husband's pyre. Through her self-sacrifice, a widow remained pure and demonstrated her everlasting devotion to her husband.

This thought mainly came up when *jauhar* among Rajputs, when confronted with certain defeat, put their women to death by fire to prevent their enemy from capturing and dishonoring them. Self-immolation was more prevalent among elite women in the princely states of Rajputana. The social restrictions on Hindu widows that might include shaving one's hair, discarding all jewellery, and wearing simple white saris, eating only one meal a day, and being excluded from celebrations such as weddings constituted "cold" sati and could have motivated some widows to willingly commit self-immolation. Even though Sati is considered an Indian custom or a Hindu custom which was not practiced all over India by all Hindus but only among certain communities of India.

#### *Jauhar*

*Jauhar (also spelled jowhar) is the self-immolation of queens and female royals of the Rajput kingdoms of India, when facing defeat at the hands of an enemy.* The roots of this practice lie in the internecine warfare among different Rajput clans. The most famous Jauhars in recorded history have occurred at the end of Rajput battles with Muslim empires. It was followed by females and children of the Rajput clans in order to avoid

capture, enslavement and rape at the hands of invaders. The term also describes the practice of mass suicide carried out in medieval times by Rajput women to save their honor from invaders. The term is derived from two Sanskrit words, *Jau* or *Jiv* meaning "life" and *Har* meaning "to take" added together means to take one's own life. *Jivhar* was later conflated with the Arabic word *Jawhar* meaning "mettle", "jewel" or "property". In the palaces of the maharanas there was a special room of Jauhar that is called as "Jauhar Kund" before the johar they speak the slogan "jai bhavani", (bhavani is another name for durga maa) and give their handprints in the wall surrounded by the jawhar kund.

This practice is culturally related to *sati*, although it occurs at a different occasion. While both practices have been most common historically in the territory of modern Rajasthan, *sati* was a custom performed by widowed women only, while Jauhar were committed collectively by the females.

#### *Female Infanticide*

In ancient India the birth of a girl child was hailed as auspicious. An old Indian proverb lies down that a home without a daughter is like a body without soul. The coming of a daughter in the house was compared with the advent of Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth and Saraswati, the Goddess of fine arts. The usual blessing of a father at the time of his daughter's marriage was: "May you excel in learning and public speaking". No ceremony was considered complete without presence of women. The belief was that "No home is complete without a woman."

The situation, however drastically changed during the Middle Ages when India was subjected to frequently foreign invasions. The invaders booty also comprised of women suffered badly, infanticide and 'Purdah' became prevalent. Sending a girl to school became risky. There was, therefore, sudden decline in female literacy and the position of women in society. This tradition lasting till today and the killing of fetus is started with a boom.

#### *Polygamy*

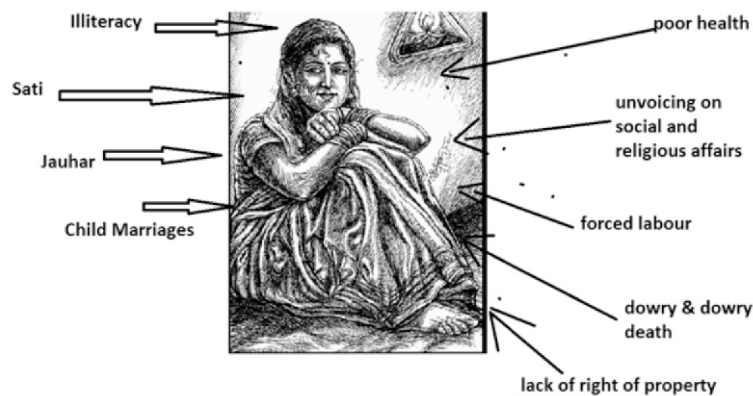
It was another evil which was prevalent in almost every part of India and in its most virulent form it was prevalent in Rajputana. The State of Rajputana presented the pitiable picture as here the practice of bigamy and polygamy was widely prevalent in the ruling and the affluent classes. It was strange that while men married half a dozen wives one after another, the girl child was forced to remain a widow throughout her life, though she might never have seen husband except at the time of the marriage ceremony. It was atrocious that old men married children, and a man of fifty married a girl of ten. Due to happenings of child marriages, the girl child would be fully dissuaded from the education and its relative activities which finally enhanced illiteracy among the females and results in their brutal exploitations.

#### *Women's education or Illiteracy*

Illiteracy among the females is one the major consequences of orthodoxy of patriarchal society. Due to the continuous foreign invasion which were subjected to

India, forced the Indian families to put their female members under their homely protection. This led to imposed limitations on the outside activities of girls. The invaders booty also comprised of women suffered badly, infanticide and 'Purdah' became prevalent. Sending a girl to school became risky. There was, therefore, sudden decline in female literacy and the position of women in society. This tradition lasting till today and the killing of fetus is started with a boom. Due to lack of education and happenings of early marriages, the the universal companion of men gradually became weak on the fronts of health and awareness which finally results in the socio-economic degradation of women's status.

#### *Condition of Women*



The above picture indicates the heinous condition of women who seems helpless as there were dozen of social problems which exists to ruined her dreams and imposed restriction on her individual freedom and didn't allow her to take breathe in an enviornment of freedom and equality.

It is remarkable to note that to create awareness in favour of social reforms amongst the public and to spread its ideology, the Arya Samaj started enormous newspapers and magazines. The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 and within three years of its foundings, a Hindi monthly magazine Arya Darpan was published.

To spread education and to fight against orthodox traditions, Arya Samaj opened schools at Vijaynagar in 1915, Nasirabad in 1923 and Kesharganj (Ajmer) in 1940. The Arya Samaj, according to the wishes of Dayanand, started an educational movement, to ameliorate the condition of women. At Ajmer-Beawar, to develop confidence, self honour and to make women independent, three Arya Kanya Pathshala were stablished, in which arrangements were made to give free education to women. It ie remarkable that Godavari Devi, a member of Arya Stree Samaj - Beawar, had such a commitment towards the amelioration of women, that she donated her property for the

sake of spread of education amongst them.

In order to educate the people and to make them think over the social issues, the Jain Community in Rajputana also started various various magazines and newspapers. The tradition of Jain newspaper, in Hindi, started from 1880, when "Jain Patrika" was published from Prayag. Till 1895, as many as six newspapers were being published by the Jain community, from different places. The name of these newspapers were Jiyalal Prakash, Jain Bodhak (published from Sholapur, Maharashtra), Jain Prabhakar (published from Ajmer), The Jain Hitaishi (published from Muradabad, UP) and The Jain Gazette (published from Ajmer). In 1900 A.D. , Jain Mitra was started by Moolchand Kishandas Kapadia, who used this newspaper as a platform, to raise his voice against the various social evils, prevalent in their community. The impact of Jain Mitra was soon felt in Rajputana. Shri Gulab Chand Dhadda of Jaipur started Shri Jain Shwetambar Conference Herald from Mumbai in 1905.

In 1920, Rai Sahab Kishan Lal Bafna started a monthly newspaper from Jodhpur, the name of which was "Oswal". Shri Prithvi raj Daga of Sujangarh and Shri Padam Singh Surana of Agra edited this newspaper. Articles related with the evils of child and unmatched marriages, polygamy, marriage of the old people, mauser etc. were published in it, to spread awareness amongst the people.

The Marwar Jain Sudharak - a monthly magazine was published from Abu Road in 1924 and Jain Jagat was published by Fateh Chand Sethi, from Ajmer in 1925. In the Jain Jagat, the articles published by Mr. Darbari Lal Nyayatirtha were considered as the most revolutionary in nature, as he sharply criticized the prevalent social malpractices.

In 1932, Sudharak was published by Rai Sahab Kesharlal Ajmera from Jaipur. From February, 1935 Jain Sikshan Sandesh was started by the Jain Shikshan Parishad of Beawar, under editorship of Shobha Chandra Bharilla and Shanti Lal Vanmali Sheth. It was a " friend of the educational institutes and a guide of the parents ". Its main aim was to spread the light of knowledge and to put off the darkness of ignorance. These newspapers and magazines tried to educate the masses against the prevalent social vices. In the issue of April, 1917, p.5, Jain Samaj wrote that " the child and unequal marriages, marriages of the old people and ignorance were destroying the very fabric of the Jain society and asked its readers to shun these social vices and motivate others to do so. It urged the parents not to marry their mi or children, as marriages was not a game of dolls.

Similarly, Shri Tara Chand Dosi, in his article, published in Jain Samaj, in May, 1997, expressed his discontentment against the practice of child marriages. His article dealt in detail with the suffering of child mothers. Shri Poorna Chand Jain, in his article, Ek Sulagta Sawal (One Burning Question) published in Taun Oswal, in June, 1940 , lampooned the very idea of the marriage of the old people. He urged the readers to

destroy the existing society and create a new one in its place, which was to be free from all these social evils.

Babu Anokhelal 'Sidakat', made fun of ill-matched marriages in his articles, which were published in various newspapers and the people to take strict action against those who perform child or ill-matched marriage and challenged the society.

In February, 1929, Ram Narayan Chaudhary and Shobha Lal Gupta started the 'Young Rajasthan', a weekly newspaper in English. In this newspaper an article entitled "Youths must Revolt", was published in which it appealed to its readers and specially the youths, to rise against certain social vices. In the another article of this newspaper an article was published, entitled "Modern Education" by Raghubir Singh, in which he expressed his dissatisfaction on the mentality of some of the educated people, who showed their disrespect towards their uneducated brothers and sisters.

Around 1928, 'the Agrawal Mahasabha' of Calcutta sent its delegation of 'Purdah Nivarak Dampattis (couples who have shunned the purdah) in various parts of the country. This delegation visited some cities of Rajasthan too. A monthly Hindi magazine entitled "Nav-Yug" was started by Seth BalKrishna Mehta and Satyadev Vidyalankar (the then editor of 'Hindustan'). In the Nav-Yug, articles related with the emancipation of women appeared, which made the readers to think over the condition of women in Rajasthan. Similarly, the cartoons published in every edition of the Nav-Yug, regarding the pitiable condition of women left a deep impression on the hearts and minds of the readers. Shri Jagdish Prasad Mathur, the writer of one such articles, appealed to rich and educated migrant daughters of Rajasthan to establish printing presses and through them work for the upliftment of women. He wrote, "the migrant daughters and sisters of Rajasthan should establish the printing presses in the same manner as was done by the wife of Ramanand Mishra of Bihar- the founder of 'Purdah-Nivaran Andolan'. 'She sold her gold ornaments to establish the 'Ashoka Printing Press' in order to work for the upliftment of women in Bihar."

On 25th January, 1936, 'Shri Marwar Nav Yuvak Jain Mandal', Bombay published an open letter in their magazine Jain Jyoti, in which they requested the subjects of Marwar to write applications to Maharaja of Jodhpur, requesting him to make law for the prevention of child and unequal marriage and issue an Act prohibiting the sale of girls. The Jain Mandal also suggested different ways to eradicate these social evils out of which some are following -

- 1) There should be an Act, the name of which should be 'Kanyavikraya Act or 'Sale of Girls Act'.
- 2) It should be applicable on all the communities living in Marwar. It should be made applicable also on all the subjects living outside the territory of Marwar.
- 3) Child marriage, sale of girls, marriage of the old persons should be made an offence.



- 4) If anybody is found to take money in lieu of marriage of his daughter or of other female member, that amount should be forfeited by the government.
- 5) If anybody marries his daughter before the age of 14 years of / and his boy before 17-18 years of age, should be punished.
- 6) The amount of 'Tika' should not be more than 500 rupees.
- 7) Marriage register should be maintained in which the age of boys and girls should be registered.
- 8) If any person feels difficulty in getting his daughter married on account of financial problems, the deficit should be made good by Raja.

Umesh Chaturvedi 'Sahitya Bhushan Kaviratna' wrote a poem entitled "Udbodhan", i.e. an address to the youth of nation in which he asked the youth to march ahead on the path of progress with all their might. He asked them not to be afraid of the difficulties, challenges and the oppositions that they would meet, till the final goal is achieved. Similarly, Shiv Dayal Vaishtha wrote an article "Yuvaon Se", i.e. letter to the Youth in which he asked the youths of the country to come forward and take charge of the situation and apply their power, courage and enthusiasm in wiping out the moral and social evils of the society.

Mr. Dindayal 'Dinesh', a Samajist of Ajmer, wrote a story entitled "Kusum" which was published on 10th September 1938, in Navjyoti, in which he tried to present the psychological changes of a young girl, who got married to a middle aged fellow of 48-50 years. This unmatched marriage demolished the desires and interests of Kusum. Her silent suffering reflects the condition of Indian women, which considered the husband as god. Her story forced the readers to think about the sad plight of such helpless creatures, who were a victim of the unequal or mismatched marriages.

In 1937, one of the youths of Porwal community wrote an open letter entitled "Mewar ki Porwal Jati", which was published in Navjyoti, in which he highlighted the social evils prevalent amongst his community members. According to him, the sale of girls was a particular characteristic of the Porwals and in them, the birth of the girl child was celebrated as a bigger celebration than the birth of a male child. By promising to marry their girl-children to any unsuitable or mismatched groom they took huge amount of money or loans from the prospective groom's family.

Smt. Kamla Kumari Shrotriya wrote an article "Shikshit Mahilayein aur grihakarya" ( educated women and housework) which was published in Navjyoti, August 1938, in which she lamented the fact that educated women had started to despise the daily house works and have left them on the maids. Even an important work of child rearing was handed over to the domestic helps and the educated women have freed themselves of this important duty also. Smt. Kamla Kumari Shrotriya highlighted the physical and mental agony of these children, who were thusby reared. The disadvantages of lack of emotional bond (between the child and mother) and the



emotional blankness that such children faced were discussed in her article. She asked the female readers to do their housewors and daily chores themselves.

It is interesting to note that P. Sheshadri, the Principal of Government college, Ajmer, wrote a poem entitled "Widow", in which he depicted the sorrows of the young widows. This poem was published in the Har Bilas Sharda Commemoration Volume. It can be said that awareness was generated to enhance the declined conditions of women through various methods in which press proved to be a milestone in eradicating social miseries by publishing articles, poems journals etc.

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