

**Paper -women education**

**By:-Mrs.Rinki kumari**

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## **Topic:- WOMEN'S HISTORY IN U.S.A**

### **WOMEN'S RIGHTS.**

Throughout most of history women generally have had fewer legal rights and career opportunities than men. Wifhood and motherhood were regarded as women's most significant professions. In the 20th century, however, women in most nations won the right to vote and increased their educational and job opportunities. Perhaps most important, they fought for and to a large degree accomplished a reevaluation of traditional views of their role in society.

### **Early Attitudes Toward Women**

Since early times women have been uniquely viewed as a creative source of human life. Historically, however, they have been considered not only intellectually inferior to men but also a major source of temptation and evil. In Greek mythology, for example, it was a woman, Pandora, who opened the forbidden box and brought plagues and unhappiness to mankind. Early Roman law described women as children, forever inferior to men.

Early Christian theology perpetuated these views. St. Jerome, a 4th-century Latin father of the Christian church, said: "Woman is the gate of the devil, the path of wickedness, the sting of the serpent, in a word a perilous object." Thomas Aquinas, the 13th-century Christian theologian, said that woman was "created to be man's helpmeet, but her unique role is in conception . . . since for other purposes men would be better assisted by other men."

The attitude toward women in the East was at first more favorable. In ancient India, for example, women were not deprived of property rights or individual freedoms by marriage. But Hinduism, which evolved in India after about 500 BC, required obedience of women toward men. Women had to walk behind their husbands. Women could not own property, and widows could not remarry. In both East and West, male children were preferred over female children.

Nevertheless, when they were allowed personal and intellectual freedom, women made significant achievements. During the Middle Ages nuns played a key role in the religious life of Europe. Aristocratic women enjoyed power and prestige. Whole eras were influenced by women rulers for instance, Queen Elizabeth of England in the 16th century, Catherine the Great of Russia in the 18th century, and Queen Victoria of England in the 19th century.

## The Weaker Sex?

Women were long considered naturally weaker than men, squeamish, and unable to perform work requiring muscular or intellectual development. In most preindustrial societies, for example, domestic chores were relegated to women, leaving "heavier" labor such as hunting and plowing to men. This ignored the fact that caring for children and doing such tasks as milking cows and washing clothes also required heavy, sustained labor. But physiological tests now suggest that women have a greater tolerance for pain, and statistics reveal that women live longer and are more resistant to many diseases.

Maternity, the natural biological role of women, has traditionally been regarded as their major social role as well. The resulting stereotype that "a woman's place is in the home" has largely determined the ways in which women have expressed themselves. Today, contraception and, in some areas, legalized abortion have given women greater control over the number of children they will bear. Although these developments have freed women for roles other than motherhood, the cultural pressure for women to become wives and mothers still prevents many talented women from finishing college or pursuing careers.

Traditionally a middle-class girl in Western culture tended to learn from her mother's example that cooking, cleaning, and caring for children was the behavior expected of her when she grew up. Tests made in the 1960s showed that the scholastic achievement of girls was higher in the early grades than in high school. The major reason given was that the girls' own expectations declined because neither their families nor their teachers expected them to prepare for a future other than that of marriage and motherhood. This trend has been changing in recent decades.

Formal education for girls historically has been secondary to that for boys. In colonial America girls learned to read and write at dame schools. They could attend the master's schools for boys when there was room, usually during the summer when most of the boys were working. By the end of the 19th century, however, the number of women students had increased greatly. Higher education particularly was broadened by the rise of women's colleges and the admission of women to regular colleges and universities. In 1870 an estimated one fifth of resident college and university students were women. By 1900 the proportion had increased to more than one third.

Women obtained 19 percent of all undergraduate college degrees around the beginning of the 20th century. By 1984 the figure had sharply increased to 49 percent. Women also increased their numbers in graduate study. By the mid-1980s women were earning 49 percent of all master's degrees and about 33 percent of all doctoral degrees. In 1985 about

53 percent of all college students were women, more than one quarter of whom were above age 29.

## **The Legal Status of Women**

The myth of the natural inferiority of women greatly influenced the status of women in law. Under the common law of England, an unmarried woman could own property, make a contract, or sue and be sued. But a married woman, defined as being one with her husband, gave up her name, and virtually all her property came under her husband's control.

During the early history of the United States, a man virtually owned his wife and children as he did his material possessions. If a poor man chose to send his children to the poorhouse, the mother was legally defenseless to object. Some communities, however, modified the common law to allow women to act as lawyers in the courts, to sue for property, and to own property in their own names if their husbands agreed.

Equity law, which developed in England, emphasized the principle of equal rights rather than tradition. Equity law had a liberalizing effect upon the legal rights of women in the United States. For instance, a woman could sue her husband. Mississippi in 1839, followed by New York in 1848 and Massachusetts in 1854, passed laws allowing married women to own property separate from their husbands. In divorce law, however, generally the divorced husband kept legal control of both children and property.

In the 19th century, women began working outside their homes in large numbers, notably in textile mills and garment shops. In poorly ventilated, crowded rooms women (and children) worked for as long as 12 hours a day. Great Britain passed a ten-hour-day law for women and children in 1847, but in the United States it was not until the 1910s that the states began to pass legislation limiting working hours and improving working conditions of women and children.

Eventually, however, some of these labor laws were seen as restricting the rights of working women. For instance, laws prohibiting women from working more than an eight-hour day or from working at night effectively prevented women from holding many jobs, particularly supervisory positions, that might require overtime work. Laws in some states prohibited women from lifting weights above a certain amount varying from as little as 15 pounds (7 kilograms) again barring women from many jobs.

During the 1960s several federal laws improving the economic status of women were passed. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 required equal wages for men and women doing equal work. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination against women by any company with 25 or more employees. A Presidential Executive Order in 1967 prohibited bias against women in hiring by federal government contractors.

But discrimination in other fields persisted. Many retail stores would not issue independent credit cards to married women. Divorced or single women often found it difficult to obtain

credit to purchase a house or a car. Laws concerned with welfare, crime, prostitution, and abortion also displayed a bias against women. In possible violation of a woman's right to privacy, for example, a mother receiving government welfare payments was subject to frequent investigations in order to verify her welfare claim. Sex discrimination in the definition of crimes existed in some areas of the United States. A woman who shot and killed her husband would be accused of homicide, but the shooting of a wife by her husband could be termed a "passion shooting." Only in 1968, for another example, did the Pennsylvania courts void a state law which required that any woman convicted of a felony be sentenced to the maximum punishment prescribed by law. Often women prostitutes were prosecuted although their male customers were allowed to go free. In most states abortion was legal only if the mother's life was judged to be physically endangered. In 1973, however, the United States Supreme Court ruled that states could not restrict a woman's right to an abortion in her first three months of pregnancy.

Until well into the 20th century, women in Western European countries lived under many of the same legal disabilities as women in the United States. For example, until 1935, married women in England did not have the full right to own property and to enter into contracts on a par with unmarried women. Only after 1920 was legislation passed to provide working women with employment opportunities and pay equal to men. Not until the early 1960s was a law passed that equalized pay scales for men and women in the British civil service.

## **Women at Work**

In colonial America, women who earned their own living usually became seamstresses or kept boardinghouses. But some women worked in professions and jobs available mostly to men. There were women doctors, lawyers, preachers, teachers, writers, and singers. By the early 19th century, however, acceptable occupations for working women were limited to factory labor or domestic work. Women were excluded from the professions, except for writing and teaching.

The medical profession is an example of changed attitudes in the 19th and 20th centuries about what was regarded as suitable work for women. Prior to the 1800s there were almost no medical schools, and virtually any enterprising person could practice medicine. Indeed, obstetrics was the domain of women.

Beginning in the 19th century, the required educational preparation, particularly for the practice of medicine, increased. This tended to prevent many young women, who married early and bore many children, from entering professional careers. Although home nursing was considered a proper female occupation, nursing in hospitals was done almost exclusively by men. Specific discrimination against women also began to appear. For example, the American Medical Association, founded in 1846, barred women from membership. Barred also from attending "men's" medical colleges, women enrolled in their own for instance, the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, which was established in

1850. By the 1910s, however, women were attending many leading medical schools, and in 1915 the American Medical Association began to admit women members.

In 1890, women constituted about 5 percent of the total doctors in the United States. During the 1980s the proportion was about 17 percent. At the same time the percentage of women doctors was about 19 percent in West Germany and 20 percent in France. In Israel, however, about 32 percent of the total number of doctors and dentists were women.

Women also had not greatly improved their status in other professions. In 1930 about 2 percent of all American lawyers and judges were women in 1989, about 22 percent. In 1930 there were almost no women engineers in the United States. In 1989 the proportion of women engineers was only 7.5 percent.

In contrast, the teaching profession was a large field of employment for women. In the late 1980s more than twice as many women as men taught in elementary and high schools. In higher education, however, women held only about one third of the teaching positions, concentrated in such fields as education, social service, home economics, nursing, and library science. A small proportion of women college and university teachers were in the physical sciences, engineering, agriculture, and law.

The great majority of women who work are still employed in clerical positions, factory work, retail sales, and service jobs. Secretaries, bookkeepers, and typists account for a large portion of women clerical workers. Women in factories often work as machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors. Many women in service jobs work as waitresses, cooks, hospital attendants, cleaning women, and hairdressers.

During wartime women have served in the armed forces. In the United States during World War II almost 300,000 women served in the Army and Navy, performing such noncombatant jobs as secretaries, typists, and nurses. Many European women fought in the underground resistance movements during World War II. In Israel women are drafted into the armed forces along with men and receive combat training.

Women constituted more than 45 percent of employed persons in the United States in 1989, but they had only a small share of the decision-making jobs. Although the number of women working as managers, officials, and other administrators has been increasing, in 1989 they were outnumbered about 1.5 to 1 by men. Despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963, women in 1970 were paid about 45 percent less than men for the same jobs; in 1988, about 32 percent less. Professional women did not get the important assignments and promotions given to their male colleagues. Many cases before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1970 were registered by women charging sex discrimination in jobs.

Working women often faced discrimination on the mistaken belief that, because they were married or would most likely get married, they would not be permanent workers. But married women generally continued on their jobs for many years and were not a transient, temporary, or undependable work force. From 1960 to the early 1970s the influx of married

women workers accounted for almost half of the increase in the total labor force, and working wives were staying on their jobs longer before starting families. The number of elderly working also increased markedly.

Since 1960 more and more women with children have been in the work force. This change is especially dramatic for married women with children under age 6: 12 percent worked in 1950, 45 percent in 1980, and 57 percent in 1987. Just over half the mothers with children under age 3 were in the labor force in 1987. Black women with children are more likely to work than are white or Hispanic women who have children. Over half of all black families with children are maintained by the mother only, compared with 18 percent of white families with children.

Despite their increased presence in the work force, most women still have primary responsibility for housework and family care. In the late 1970s men with an employed wife spent only about 1.4 hours a week more on household tasks than those whose wife was a full-time homemaker.

A crucial issue for many women is maternity leave, or time off from their jobs after giving birth. By federal law a full-time worker is entitled to time off and a job when she returns, but few states by the early 1990s required that the leave be paid. Many countries, including Mexico, India, Germany, Brazil, and Australia require companies to grant 12-week maternity leaves at full pay.

## **Feminist Philosophies**

At the end of the 18th century, individual liberty was being hotly debated. In 1789, during the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges published a 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman' to protest the revolutionists' failure to mention women in their 'Declaration of the Rights of Man'. In 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792) Mary Wollstonecraft called for enlightenment of the female mind.

Margaret Fuller, one of the earliest female reporters, wrote 'Woman in the Nineteenth Century' in 1845. She argued that individuals had unlimited capacities and that when people's roles were defined according to their sex, human development was severely limited.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a leading theoretician of the women's rights movement. Her 'Woman's Bible', published in parts in 1895 and 1898, attacked what she called the male bias of the Bible. Contrary to most of her religious female colleagues, she believed further that organized religion would have to be abolished before true emancipation for women could be achieved. (See also Stanton, Elizabeth Cady.)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman characterized the home as inefficient compared with the mass-production techniques of the modern factory. She contended, in books like 'Women and Economics' (1898), that women should share the tasks of homemaking, with the women best suited to cook, to clean, and to care for young children doing each respective task.

Politically, many feminists believed that a cooperative society based on socialist economic principles would respect the rights of women. The Socialist Labor party, in 1892, was one of the first national political parties in the United States to include woman suffrage as a plank in its platform.

During the early 20th century the term new woman came to be used in the popular press. More young women than ever were going to school, working both in blue- and white-collar jobs, and living by themselves in city apartments. Some social critics feared that feminism, which they interpreted to mean the end of the home and family, was triumphing. Actually, the customary habits of American women were changing little. Although young people dated more than their parents did and used the automobile to escape parental supervision, most young women still married and became the traditional housewives and mothers.

## **Women's History in Higher Education**

Women's access to higher education in the United States is taken for granted today. This right, however, was a hard won one that belies a struggle that took nearly two centuries to accomplish. In this paper, I briefly trace this history of women's rights. I highlight the work of specific women and men who advocated for them. Such history is vitally important to the field of adult education as much can be gleaned from a look at the adult educators who paved the way for women's education.

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It's important to note that the life patterns of women were altered in many ways by their access to education in general (Solomon (1985)). The period between girlhood and marriage was lengthened by the advent of girls' secondary and college education. Early on, young women of means were the only ones to pursue academic study. Women with limited financial means could seek out and obtain employment. Academic educated women could pursue their studies or take jobs as teachers while other women could find work in mills, or other factories. Sometimes young women took jobs in mills or factories to save money for their education. Marriage, for most, was still the ultimate goal. These varied courses of action, however, prolonged the period of youth and the marriage patterns of women changed during this time. Academy women tended to marry later than others and the number of single, never-married is related to the access to education among them.

## **Reforms in a New Nation**

Social reforms for women in education can be traced from the 17th and early 18th centuries when arguments for reform in women's education were first launched in the

aftermath of Revolutionary War. Most of this support concerned the need for women's basic education while attempts to secure education for women in high schools or in universities were less audible. Demands for equal educational opportunities for women, in general, were quite revolutionary for the new nation and greatly challenged the status of women's existing place in the domestic sphere (Solomon, 1985).

Some women believed that getting an education would do more to better women's standing in society than the right to vote. Women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Wright and Margaret Fuller were radical pioneers that advocated for women's rights to the same educational opportunities as men. In her short life, Mary Wollstonecraft, a British author of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, was an ardent advocate for women's education and believed that well educated women would make better wives and mothers and contribute positively to society (Dicker, 2008). Her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791-92), a classic in feminist history, detailed her thoughts and advocacy for women's rights to be educated. Although she maintained the place of women in the home, she also argued that we must define this sphere as a public one that would support the foundation of all social life.

Frances Wright, born in Scotland in the last decade of the 18th century, believed in universal equality in education, and women's rights including the right to practice birth control. She spoke out against organized religion, slavery and capitalism. After she moved to the United States, she openly advocated for women's education. Wright traveled to the United States for the first time when she was 23 years old in 1818.

Margaret Fuller was also an advocate for women's education and is considered by some to be America's first true feminist. She defied the limitations placed on women's access to higher education to become the first woman to seek and be accepted at Harvard University. Fuller was involved in the Transcendentalist movement in the first half of 19th century and became a journalist, teacher and an activist. She is best known for the initiation of 'conversations', a series of seminars for women that were held in Boston between 1839 and 1844. These were among the first such formats for women's continued adult education. Although she voiced support for suffrage, abolition, and the urban poor, she remained somewhat aloof from the early Women's Movement in the US (LeGates, 2001) and is best known for the enthralling conversation forums she conducted for women.



