

WUTHERING HEIGHTS OF THE INDIAN WOMEN – A WITHERING CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTION?

DR. PRABHU KUMARI VANAMA

Abstract: The perceptions on the status of Indian women is constantly on change right from the times immemorial. The popular lives and legends of a few women recorded in the annals of the Indian history mostly highlight the luminous side of their lives, while studies on the subaltern sections of the society though not many in number rarely brought to foray the atrocities and agonies faced by the women. This study perspicuously summarizes and surmises the pivotal tribulations faced by women in the societal and the political sphere and their resultant impact in changing the contours of the constitutional framework as well as the state of affairs of the women in society and politics that forms the basis of basic human rights of women. As such, this study pragmatically provides a platform to analyse and understand the title i.e., whether women are flying towards wuthering heights or being withered away.

Key Words: Human Rights, Law, Politics, Society, Women

The Rearing Intents:

1. To evaluate the emanating pressures on women in the family front
2. To retrospect the pivotal entity of women in the political periphery
3. To create an awareness on the wuthering and withering trends of women in India

The Resources: The present study is prepared after consulting a plethora of sources scattered in the form of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary at the Madras Institute of Development Studies, the Secretariat Library, the Ethiraj College for Women, Bharathi Women's College and the Connemara Public Library in Chennai. These sources can be further dually classified into both Bibliography and Webliography.

The Timeframe: Timeline is immensely important in focusing the attention of the study on macro aspects in a micro level, for it will in turn helps in creating a thorough awareness on the proposed subject. Hence, the focal point of this study starts in the year 1981 i.e., the year in which Behmai massacre took place in Uttar Pradesh and continues till date.

The Region: The dynamics of studies on women spreads beyond horizons and hence it is imperative to confine this study to India as its' heterogeneous cultures imperatively throws open multifarious facets of the role of women in society and polity, for, these form the prime areas of this study to research and analyse in detail the cohesive plight of the women.

The Rapid Societal Stride: The vulnerability of women to abuse and brutal depravity continued from times immemorial. The enigma of this offense is that during the ancient period or medieval period, when invaders inroads occurred, women became victims. During the ancient and the medieval period, these kind of atrocious activities occurred only when aliens attempted to capture power. Soon after the decline of the Gupta Empire, when Hephthalites occupied Kashmir and advanced into the Ganges valley, they

forced women for intercourse and massacred men to occupy the domain. Similarly even during the medieval period one can witness such unlawful activities being continued under Ghuris and, Ghaznavids. Likewise, similar happenings happened on large scale during the regime of Haider Ali, Tipu Sultan and also Aurangzeb. The holocaust at the time of partition, i.e., the rape of women continued in a massive scale. However, the facts here crystal clearly corroborates that either during the ancient period or the medieval period, women were horrified only by the intruders and invaders and not by the fellow brethren. This forceable culture swiftly continued unchecked during the British rule. at the time of Partition of India and Pakistan too. Such incidents boosted this animal culture to creep so deep into the minds of men that people are constantaneously witnessing the outraging of the modesty of women so brutally by the men of same place and at times even community.

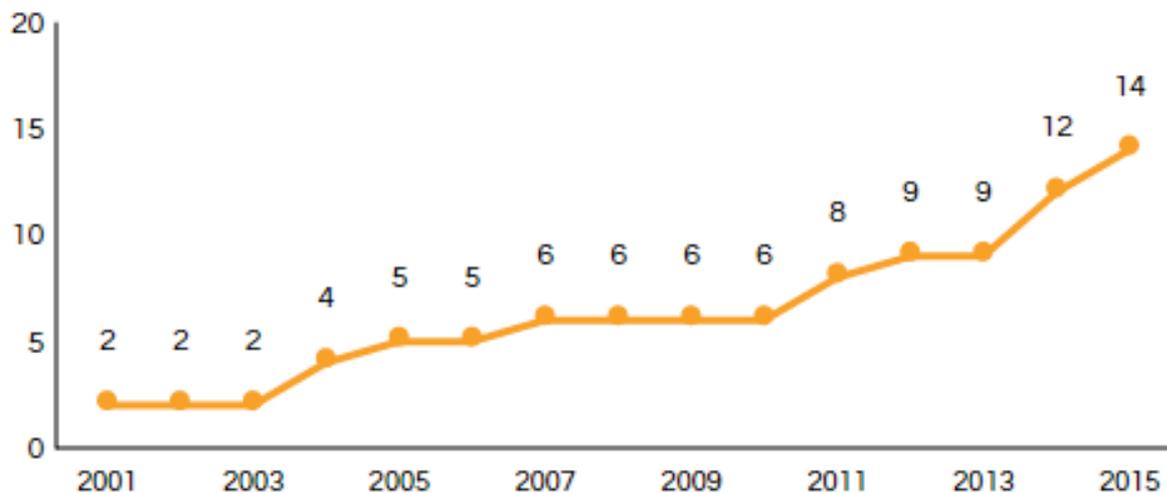
Of late, this plight of women did not change even during the contemporary i.e., the present period. In fact, people personified *this wartime sexual violence transforming into an all-time sexual violence on women*. A befitting example for this can be traced back to the days of Phoolan Devi of Ghura ka Purva (Uttar Pradesh) when she became a victim to this act of violence. The entire episode became quite popular because she was gang raped by high caste outlaws and she took revenge on them along with her gang in 1981 by executing 22 Thakur caste villagers. Further, raping of women by the husband or family members too, saw the light of the day Still the question of marital rape remains untouched and unsolved till date. A befitting example for the marital atrocity of similar activity is the brutal ordering for the rape of a married woman in public by 12 men for her unauthorized relationship and inability to pay the fine for the same at Birbhum District of West Bengal.

The Robust Political Partaking: It is heartening to place it on record that the role of media in highlighting the harassments on women along with the consequential suffering in the State of Uttar Pradesh instigated many women to come to the political forefront amidst anguish though many of them are not much thriving well in the said front. While India has a good record of women holding all the important posts in the country, the overall participation of women in politics is not very satisfactory. At the ground level, women voters outnumbered men in a few States of India such as the States of Uttar Pradesh and Goa to 59.48% and

81.74% in 2012, but when it came to the policy making category i.e., in Parliament, only 85 seats could be occupied by women out of the 787 Members of the Parliament.

Statistical reports say that the percentage of women contesting the elections in India is growing year after year on one hand and the sprouting of new political parties for bettering their state too is gradually but steadfastly growing. The girding up of women's issues and women oriented agenda by these parties too is stupendously on the rise in the new millennium and the following graph chart corroborates this crystal clearly.

No. Of Regd. Women-Oriented Parties, 2001-15



Source: The Election Commission of India

It is pertinent to note here that the registration of number of political parties not only tremendously increased year after year in the new millennium, but the ratio of the entry of women into the parliament of India too stupendously headed ahead reaching an all-time high record of 11.4% by 2015. The inherent reason for this nascence of gender issues oriented women parties was that these parties are privileged with 100% tax exemption under the Income Tax Act 13A. According to Jagdeesh S.Chhokar of Association of Democratic Reforms

Tax exemption is a primary draw to register a political party: Of course, success in elections to such parties is not reachable and is perceptible only as a blue moon in the sky. Another strong point for the sustenance of these parties till date is that once registered, political parties cannot be deregistered.

Economic independence, many a times elevated the plight of women, though theoretically speaking it added to the work pressure of women in the home front. At the all India level, economically active women are only 25.7%. Astoundingly rural women forfeited the urban women in economic generation as the rural women populace formed 31% of the income

generating mass, while only 11.5% of the urban womenfolk took interest in self earning.

The Roaring Revelations: The basic human rights of the women is to live with self dignity. Whereas, a peep into the societal strides of women through the pages of history reveal that they faced the turmoil of rape right from the early ages and till date this enigma remains. According to the National Crime Record Bureau, crimes against women increased by 7.1% from 2010. However, the appreciable step in facing this all-time crisis by women took place with the Government attempting to resolve through legal legislations such as the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 2013 under which acid attacks or attempts to acid attack, sexual harassment, act with intent to disrobe a woman, voyeurism and stalking and the Juvenile Justice Bill of 2015 was passed by Rajya Sabha, through which juveniles below the age of 18 are also punishable. These stupendous legal laws for protecting the modesty of women came into force, of course by the wide protests of citizens throughout the country after the Delhi Gang Rape in 2012.

The spate of recent shameful incidents terrify women to the core. Statistics suggest that the cases

registered in the capital city of Delhi alone increased from 73,902 in 2013 to 1,47,230 in 2014. However, it also has to be taken into account that due to the creation of new laws and awareness amongst the public, the years following the mass protests and the proclamation of the above laws witnessed the registration of more number of crimes. In the societal sphere though the laws are attempting to elevate the stature of women to wuthering heights, still their state remains shattered and withered.

In the arena of politics too, it is pertinent to surmise here that though the representation of women in politics is on the raise, the ratio is not significantly noteworthy, for, only those women who possessed a strong family support thrived individually well as none of the registered parties could not even cross the 1% threshold of the vote bank. It is apt to surmise here that the media revelations about the women of contemporary India that they are steadfastly rising to the wuthering heights remain as a thousand billion dollar query as the benchmark question of Women's Reservation Bill itself still did not go ahead in Lok Sabha. Though the bill was passed on 9th March 2010

in Rajya Sabha, it could not be taken beyond that point as adequate support is still at the lowest ebb.

The 18 year old journey of this bill corroborates that amongst the successful women, mostly those who hail from a strong economic or political family background could come to the forefront and others wither away with the passage of time and clime as till date the bill could not find the light of the day. As such, for women, India is electorally a dismal landscape and highlighting this Suman Kant, the wife of the former Vice President of India opined that the roaring assurances of transforming the plight of women by a few women here and there cannot make a difference as India does not have enough number of women in the decision making process.. In fact, women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for justice or democracy, but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the perspective of women at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.

References:

1. *Macro History and World Timeline* in <http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/india1.html>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Hindus
3. Amartya Sen, *The New York Review of Books* (New York), 10, October 2013
4. <http://www.ibtimes.com/partition-india-pakistan-rape-women-epic-historic-scale-1387601>
5. *Mid-Day* 10 August 2015
6. *Hindustan Times* 22 September 2014
7. Richa Shanker, "Measurement of Women's Political Participation at the Local Level: India Experience" in [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/MexicoNov2014/Session%206%20India%](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/MexicoNov2014/Session%206%20India%20), p. 5
8. Oxford India Policy Blog, 14 October 2013
9. <http://www.youthkiawaaz.com/>
10. *India Spend* 25 February 2016
11. *The Hindu* 30 April 2014
12. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Census of India*, (New Delhi, 2001)
13. <http://www.more.com/about-us>
14. *BBC News* 22 December 2015
15. *The Indian Express* 3 January 2015
16. *The Times of India*, 9 March 2010
17. *Business Standard* 31 March 2015
18. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, *Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with particular emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership* (New York, 2005), p. 5

Dr. Prabhu Kumari Vanama/ Assistant Professor/ Department of Historical Studies/
Bharathi Women's College (A)/ Chennai – 600 108 (Tamil Nadu)/