

Laws, Women's Day and the 21st Century

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Abstract

The predicament situation of women in society has always been the concern of socialists and those who believe in the welfare state. To address women's plight, International women's day is celebrated worldwide on every 8th day of March. The present paper highlights the brief history & purpose of women's day and highlights women's position in ancient Indian society. Thereafter, the paper elucidates the role of 21st-century women in various fields of life, particularly in the Indian Railways. This includes various incidental and consequential tasks involved in some technical and mechanical centric jobs of the railways.

Keywords: *Women's day, gender equality, manusmriti, choosetochallenge, loco pilot.*

Introduction

International women's day is celebrated with joy and amusement every year, on March 8. This day is celebrated to enhance and improve the rights of women all over the world. "The theme of international women's day of 2021 is #choosetochallenge"[1]. The main motive of celebrating such specific days across all over the world is to do every possible thing to make a more gender-balanced world.

The campaign's theme, #choosetochallenge, is a call to action for driving gender balance all over the world. The need for "gender equality in the world" has now been realized to make this world a better place for every human being and for the enhancement of every section of society, both socially and culturally. If we look into the historical background of this international event, then we will see that, "for the very first time, the women's was celebrated by the Socialist Party of the United States of America, on February 28, 1909" [2] in New York. After this, in 1910, the International

Socialist Women's Conference suggested that the women's day should be held annually, every year.

"It happened on March 8, 1917, that the women in soviet Russia gained the right to vote and that day of the eighth march became a national holiday there" [3]. That 8th day of March continued to be celebrated by the socialist movements and communist countries every year, and finally, "it was adopted by the United Nations since 1975" [4].

After being recognized by the United Nations, in the year, 1995, at the "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a historic step was taken by 190 countries of the World" [5] and they all decided to abide strictly on 12 basic critical areas of concerns, which were related to women and envisioned a world where each woman and girl can exercise her choices, such as getting Education, participation in politics, to earn their livelihood, and living in society freely, and absence of violence and discrimination against women.

Now, with the passage of time, the women in society have done a great job, due to such empowerment programs and over the years, the United Nations and the various laws of the different countries have effectively promoted the participation of women, at par with men in almost every field, and in achieving sustainable development, security and full respect for human & fundamental rights.

The empowerment of women also continues to be a central & prime feature of the Indian laws, so as to enable the woman to express themselves properly, socially, economically and politically. For example, in The Indian Constitution, Article 15(3), provides special provision for women and children that enables the state to make special provisions for women and children. Also section 13(2), in The

Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, provides grounds for divorce which are exclusively available to women.

Then, in The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, the section 6 makes a woman member of the family as coparcener to inherit the ancestral property just like as male member of the family, from birth itself. Also, section 14 of the said act makes a female Hindu an absolute owner of her self-acquired Property. There are many examples of such laws that strengthen the position of women in society and take a step to achieve the goal of gender-equal society. Apart from these statutory provisions, the aspect for woman to develop herself properly are widening day by day.

Need for Women's Day

Yes, we all know that women were not treated well in the ancient times in every society of the world, whether it be western or Eastern societies. In the context of Indian mythologies, the most relevant manuscript is Manusmriti. "Manusmriti, which is an ancient legal text among many Dharmashastras of Hinduism, is the very first Sanskrit texts that were translated into English in 1776 by Sir William Jones" [6]. It was chiefly used by the Britishers to compile and formulate the Hindu law in British India.

According to ancient Hindu mythology, the Manusmriti is the very word of God Brahma, and it is also classified as the most authoritative statements of Dharma. The script consists of 2690 verses divided into 12 chapters.

"It was written by "Manu", who was the first human being and also the first king in the Indian tradition" [7]. On reading the comments and thought on the position of women in society, which are given in the text, one can easily understand that how brutally and inhumanly the women were treated.

The verse 3/8 [8] contended that," one shouldn't marry woman who has have radish hairs, redundant parts of the body, one who is often sick , one without hair and excess hairs and one who has red eyes."

Verse 3/12 [9] says that," Brahman man can marry Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaish and even Shudra woman, but a Shudra man can marry only Shudra woman."

As perverse 3/109, "A wise man shouldn't marry a woman without a brother and whose parents are not socially well known."

Also in verse 9/149, "such women aren't loyal and have extra marital relations with men without consideration of their age."

Also in Medieval India, women were made overloaded with responsibilities. The basic need, that is, Education was available to very low extent. Practice of slavery was also in progress. "The women in this era were entitled as Temple dancers, Devadasis and so on. Women were subjected to cruel and inhumane practices like Sati Pratha, Parda system, Child marriage, Dowry etc."

So, on analyzing the situation of women in past, it can be seen that, it gives the result that they were subjected as, definitely, not human beings. It was a male dominant society in the past and women were oppressed in all the fields of life.

In order to afford women equal rights and opportunities in every aspect of life, the need for celebration of such kind of international events has arisen, so that everyone will become aware of this serious issue of gender inequality.

These kinds of international events give a strong message to every person and every community and society, that gender equality is a must to eradicate various social evils from the society and to ensure the following goals-

- To end every form of discrimination based on gender.
- To eliminate all forms violence against all women, including sexual, trafficking and other heinous exploitations of women.
- To secure women's full and effective participation vis-à-vis equal opportunities for women at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life.
- To promote sustainable economic growth and productive employment and also to ensure decent work for all.
- To make towns and human settlements inclusive, safe [10] and resilient.

Hence, the need for celebration of such internationally recognized events is the requirement and demand of time.

Role of Women in 21st Century

The 21st Century is the current century. It began on January 1, 2001 and "it will come to an end on December 31, 2100" [11]. The initial years of the 21st century has witnessed the rise of global economy, global concern over terrorism and increase in the power of the private enterprise. Also, more specifically, the role of women in the 21st century has been increased and they are provided with facilities to develop themselves fully and express their calibre to the fullest level in every dimension of the society whether it is social, cultural, educational, economical etc. fields and so on. Various laws and provisions have been made by different governments of the states to empower women. But the concern of this paper is to highlight the role of the 21st century women in the Indian Railways.

Role of Women in Indian Railways

The Indian Railways, which is India's national railway system, is operated by the central government, through the ministry of Railways. Although, the subject of railway is provided in the Union list of the Seventh schedule at entry number 22, of the Constitution of India, though, the Indian railways is managed and operated and managed largely by state governments. "It is fourth largest railway network in the World" [12]. The first railway proposal in India was made in presidency town of Madras, in the year 1832 [13].

At that time, there was no women employee in it. But in today's 21st Century, there are more than one million railway workers employed in the Indian railways, among which there are more than One Lakh women [14]. Not only this, this figure is constantly increasing. It is also to be noted that special & peculiar safeguards are provided for women railway personnel so that they get the right working environment at the worksite. The Matunga Road Railway Station of the western railways is going to be the first railway station which is going to be completely operated by the women personnel[15].

Surekha Yadav- First Women Loco Driver

Surekha Yadav is a 53 years old lady[16] who is a loco pilot, that is Railway Engine Driver, of the Indian railways. She became India's first female loco pilot in 1988. She drove the first "Ladies Special" local train in central railways. A momentous & remarkable moment in her carrier was on March 8 2011, (on the International Women's day), when she became Asia's first woman train driver to drive the train named "Deccan Queen", running from Pune to Chattrapati Shivaji Terminal, through a difficult but scenic topography.

She set a benchmark of women's equality in society by becoming a train driver and paved the way for several others to follow her[17]. She broke the notion that some technical works, like train driving, cannot be done by the women After her success, many women were motivated to become train drivers and many of them, for example, Laxmi Lakra, Samta Kumari etc, became train drivers in the Indian Railways.

Other Fields of Women's Contribution in Indian Railways

At the Ajni Railway Station in Maharashtra, there is a complete team of track maintenance staff consisting of women only. These poor ladies of that area, who wants to contribute to their family income and live a respectful and happy life easily gets this job of track maintainer and earns a reasonable income for themselves and their families. Maningar Station in Gujrat, is a unique station. It is solely run by women staff. Here women take active role in the day to day management of the station and carry out this service fluently without almost zero complaints and quarries. Women workers and engineers are provided with special chances for their enrolment in Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala, Punjab, which is a major rail coach manufacturing company for the Indian Railways. Mostly constables, Head constables, ASI,SI, Inspector etc, nowadays, are women in RPF, which is Railway Protection Force, established by The Railway Protection Force Act, 1957[18]. The main objective is to protect and safeguard railway property and to combat crime against them. Besides all these major fields in Indian Railways, women are also employed in maintenance of railway carriages, sanitation

programs, office works, management of railway's resources like electricity, steel, water etc. and other fields of railways in India.

Challenges Faced by Women

The main challenges which are faced while achieving gender equality are:

- Inadequate human, technical and financial investment.
- Weak consideration and monitoring mechanisms at the national level.
- Limited attention to neglected groups and issues.
- Insufficient data and research.
- Violence directed towards women
- Stagnant cogitation of people.

In order to overcome these challenges, we all have to broaden overthinking and notions and should try to learn to respect others and treat them equally, with humanity.

Conclusion

It can be said that the role of women in 21st century in railways is most significant and notable. Not only railway but other fields like Airways, Judiciary, Executive, politics, Information and Technology etc are operating and performing well in India due to gender equality in its society. Also women are playing key role in educating their children and making them eligible and capable enough to serve the society and the nation. Making something "better" doesn't always mean gigantic, world-changing steps. Sometimes, it can also be a small move, as, change starts from oneself.

DO YOU KNOW- "Men are wired to focus on one task, whereas, Women are comparatively better in multi-tasking." [19]

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