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Gender Oppression:

The Practice of Sati in British India

Dissertation submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Literature and Civilization.

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution.

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Dedication

I dedicate this humble work to my beloved family, especially my mother who always being my support and my guide through the hard situations in life.

To my beautiful sisters and brother who always gave me the strength to overcome my difficulties.

Finally to my gorgeous baby sister who came to enlighten our life.

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Abstract

The present research work aims to shed light on the Horrifying Sati traditional practice followed by Hindus, and its religious beliefs among Hindus living in India. For instance, this tradition refers to a woman who burns herself willingly on the funeral pyre of her husband. Moreover, this study endeavors to examine the cultural and religious influence that drives women to sacrifice themselves. Henceforth, it also tries to investigate the conceptions as feminism movement and women oppression to achieve full gender equality between men and women in the Indian society. Women struggle to break out the societal boundaries and the exploitation of religion which excluded them from all important matters parts of life. However, this study first tends to give an overview on the historical side of sati tradition by following it from its beginning to its end. How it existed, developed, spread and expanded to different countries in India. Then, it focuses on how this system become illegal in British India, and was abolished officially to protect those innocent widows from these injustice customs and traditions who were just victimized by the rituals. Thus, through the process of this research a conclusion is reached, in today's India sati is described as a "ritual suicide", and almost every Indian citizen believe that sati was not a religious tradition even if it was mentioned in their sacred texts and supported by their society , Indian government should ban this tradition from existence completely .

Keywords: Feminism movement, Gender inequality, Hindu beliefs, Sati tradition, Women oppression, Women status

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is one of the biggest and oldest religions in the world, and it had been preserved for an extended period in the Indian sub-continent. Hinduism is a lifestyle bounded with Indian history and culture. However, there are many sacraments in it. Sati (also known as “Suttee”), burning a woman alive with her husband body, is the most influential and controversial sacrament. Furthermore, a woman dies alongside her husband because she believes it as her duty.

The debate on Sati is a controversial theme between scholars due to the unknown data about it, some of them regard it as the most barbaric and evil practice in India, but for Hindus is a symbolic and sacred tradition, thus many religious texts have either directly or indirectly mentioned Sati practice or its afterlife benefits.

For instance, in Sati tradition it is believed that the women clean theirs, their husband’s sins and misdeeds, by entering the burning funeral pyre along with her husband’s body. This tradition had been followed since ancient times in India, and was considered as a dignified sacrifice, a glory and a way to clean the sins of the spouse and his family, but some consider it as a private matter of spouses who follow his/her loved one into death, and with time it became public and society being a male dominant restricted it only to a woman.

Though India has developed, and the Indian society has been progressed and moved forward, the act of Sati continues even today in the 21st century.

For a long time, the practice of sati had been part of the Indian society. Sati is an illegal act and was prohibited in Indian society in 1829 but even today we see women practicing it, which might be voluntary or forcefully.

For many ages people continued to justify this practice saying that it glorifies the widow into a goddess , as they related this ritual to the mythology of the goddess Sati , since she was the first woman to immolate herself . This devotion and perfection thus transcends her to the higher platform making her goddess of worth of worship. The question here remains that is sati a good wife because her devotion transforms her into a sati goddess? Is she a goddess worthy of worship? Or is it all just about material benefit for family and village?

In the light of what has been mentioned above, women were forced to continue this dark tradition through the centuries even if they did not want to, to maintain their position and honor in the society. It is said “man is the crown of creations”, this represents the power of male dominant over the woman, and gender discrimination against women in unequal Indian society.

Thus, the purpose of this research work is to provide an in depth look at the historical background of sati tradition, its beginnings and origins. Then, it investigates the causes behind why women sacrifice themselves on their husband’s funeral pyre. Also, it sheds light on women gender oppression and their struggle to become independent and equal as men. Finally, it focuses on the abolition of sati act in a British Indian society.

The Present research work is posed to start investigating this research:

1. How this system came into existence? What are the factors that led to its spread?
2. Is it a voluntary act or an obligatory one?
3. Is it still carried on by Indian people even today?

The following hypotheses are suggested for the above research questions:

1. The practice of sati might have emerged for two reasons: first, because of myths of their goddess sati who immolated herself for her husband or the religious texts that supported this act paved the way for this practice to spread. Second, to keep the women safe from the enemy invading their territory.
2. If it was a voluntary act, then it was considered to be the greatest form of devotion of a wife towards her dead husband. However, as time passed sati became a forced practice. Women who did not wish to die like this and end their marriage were forced to do so in different harsh ways.

3. Even if it was prohibited several times by Indian rulers and British Empire; sati is still carried on by Indian people until today. At least, there were some cases recorded between 2000 and 2015.

Moreover, the present research work is divided into three chapters: the first chapter deals with the dark history of sati custom and how it developed, spread and expanded in different parts of India. Why women used to commit a suicide in different ways just to glorify themselves, their family and the society as well.

The second chapter focuses on the oppressed women caste in India, and how being treated badly in male dominant society. Then, it shows the role of feminism in women's life, and their fight for change and transformation from a low bad position to a higher platform in society.

The final chapter expresses the impact of the British Empire on Indian society socially and culturally, and how its system helped to stop and prevent sati practice, though it still committed in some countries in India which is more explained in this research work.

Chapter one: The dark History behind Sati

1.1 Introduction

In India, millions of women are abandoned from society when their husbands died. Excluded and marginalized, they face a life of poverty and injustice. However, women who lost their husbands are obliged to preserve their honor and their social life. The ancient Hindu tradition sati, where a widow would burn herself on her husband's pyre is still practiced in some areas today and still considered to be the ultimate of woman sacrifice and devotion. Therefore, this chapter reveals the dark side of sati tradition and its religious beliefs among Hindus living in India. Also, it discusses how and when this system came into existence, and why women would sacrifice themselves on their husband's funeral pyre?

Furthermore, this chapter gives more explanations about the custom of sati and how it developed, spread and expanded in different parts of India throughout history.

1.2 The History Behind Sati; A Banned Funeral Custom In India

Figure 1

History behind the origin and abolition of sati system in India



([Ancient Funerary Relics and Extraordinary Rituals], 2018)

Sati (or Suttee or Su-thi), literary means a good woman, a good wife, or chaste wife. It is the traditional Indian Hindu practice that was and still considered as the ultimate form of woman sacrifice and devotion (Gilmartin, 1997). Throughout history, the status of widows in many societies has been deplorable especially in India because the deaths of husbands had a direct impact on the primary source of their economic well-being as well as control over their sexuality. Furthermore, the burning or burying of widows with their deceased husbands occurred at various times in places as diverse as Central Asia, South, and Southeast Asia and Fiji (Leslie, 1993).

Historical records tell us that sati occurred for the first time during the reign of emperor GUPTA between 320 CE to 550 CE (Thapar, 2002). Thus, it means that this rite is relatively recent in relation to the history of the Hindu religion. During the rule of Gupta sati was written for the first time on stones, as it was recorded also in Nepal in 464 CE.

However, this custom began in Madhya Pradesh in the year 510 CCE, and also spread to Rajasthan and since then this ritual has been performed repeatedly over the centuries (Yang, 2008).

Vidya Dehejia (1994) states that this ritual was practiced initially in the royal family and among the nobles only, or princes and warriors, the “Kshatriya” caste and later it spread to the lower castes, becoming widely practiced among all social classes, and areas such as Kashmir .

Between the 15th and 18th centuries sati was at its peak, and during this period every year 1000 widows were burned alive mostly in India and Nepal. However, this custom was also recorded in Cambodia, Burma, the Philippines and some parts of Indonesia, but in Sri Lanka it was practised only by queens (Nandy, 1980).

1.3 Myths and Origins

Figure 2

Daaksha- Glorious Hinduism



([Sati- Glorious Hinduism], n.d.)

According to mythology, the term of sati is derived from the original name of the Goddess sati, also known as “Dakshyani”. The story roots go back to some ancient Hindu beliefs, where it was reported that sati was the favorite daughter of Daksha, but when she married against her father wishes he humiliated her and her husband Shiva, so she decided to protest against him by immolating and burning herself to death in front of attendees to maintain her husband’s honor (Kinsley, 1998). Thus people used to justify this practice based on this tale. However, when sati burned herself she was not a widow, hence this practice is quite unrelated to this tale. Furthermore, there was another custom in the history of India called “Jauhar” that may have a close connection with the origin of sati. According to the mythology the ancient Hindu warriors were losing a battle, their wives would commit suicide collectively to prove their devotion to their slain husbands and to preserve their honor from being defiled by enemy (Oldenburg, 1994). Hindus believe that a righteous

woman who joins her dead husband to the fire will free herself and her family from the suffering of the resurrection and rebirth process.

1.4 Sati in Holy Books

The sacrifice of women upon the death of their husbands or musters is an ancient custom practiced by most people of the world at some point in their history, and this frightening habit was associated with spiritual aspects related to post-death beliefs. For instance, Women were often sent to their death to accompany their husbands during the journey to the afterlife (Thapar, 2002). However, if the wife dies first, then absolutely it is not the husband's duty to follow her to the other world. In fact, most husbands will find it as a golden opportunity to remarry again. And if the woman needs and demands equality, then the religious "men" will convince her that it is the will of the gods and she must accept her. Moreover, the Brahman scholars justified the practice of sati from the Holy Books and as scholars affirmed that sati is imposed on a righteous woman, and interpreted the practice as not suicide that is prohibited by the scriptures. It was also considered a good deed that forgives the sins of the spouses and guarantees their salvation and that they will live together after death.

There are also justifications for this in Vishnu Smriti: "It is one of the duties of a woman after the death of her husband, to maintain her chastity or to climb on the pile after him" (Vishnu Smriti, 25-14).

In addition to this, Manu Smriti one of the holiest books of Hindu law , the sati is not mentioned even though it promotes permanent monasticism and austerity for most of the widows .

In purana, a religious text is considered sacred by Hindus has a clear verse that indicates sati practice; this verse says that women have to immolate themselves after their husband's death: "It is the highest duty of the woman to burn herself after her husband" (Brahma Purana, 80-75).

Even though there are many direct indications of sati practice in Holy Books, but there are another religious texts which do not support it and are against this custom. “A person must not die before the end of his life” (Shastri, 1960).

Many people still do not believe in Sati and say that the verses are misinterpreted; some people interpret these verses as a voluntary act performed by widows and not an obligatory one.

1.5 The Commission of Sati in India (a widow burning)

Figure 3

The History behind Sati, a banned funeral custom in India



([The practice of sati required widows to jump into the funeral pyre of their husbands] , n.d.)

The “sati” system in India requires that a woman whose husband dies to join him by burning herself to be close to him in his life and after his death. Just as an Indian society is characterized by the multiplicity of its customs, traditions, languages, religions, cultures, and civilizations, it is also distinguished by the oddities and wonders of customs that are rarely found in other societies.

A professor of history at Delhi University, Vinod Raja said that sati is derived from the word “Asti” which means the pure or holy woman who burns herself for her

husband. And according to the philosophy of the “Rajput” class, sati means a righteous woman who became able to present herself as a gift as she believed that by doing this; she will rid herself and her family members from the re-resurrection, or the embodiment.

Also, he mentioned that: women of that historical period used to perform this custom as an expression of loyalty and courtesy to their husbands and to preserve their honor being defiled by the invaders (Dehejia, 1994). In addition, the Hindu Sacred books of Vishnu mention that the Sati habit was practised between the first and the second centuries AD, and was considered an alternative for women who could not provide a decent and honorable life for themselves after her husband passed away. Besides, the professor indicated that the method of practising this system was when the husband died, whereby his body was taken to the pyre, and his wife was ordered to be adorned with the best clothes she had, and the best perfume. Then, she would follow the funeral procession, accompanied by her family until she reached the crematorium. After that, the wife was ordered to sit next to the body of her deceased husband and begins to cry until she reaches the point of losing her sanity . Afterwards, some men would tie her over her husband’s body and pour a flammable liquid over them and set fire, until their bodies would be burnt to ashes. Additionally, he mentioned that the young girls who got married at a very young age, most of whom are ten years old, are not excluded from the sati, and they have to burn themselves under the pretext of preserving their honor being polluted by someone after their husbands (Islam Web, 2004).

1.5.1 From voluntary to force

The ancient Hindu tradition sati, when a widow should burn herself with the husband’s body, at the beginning was a voluntary act considered to be heroic and courageous, but later it became a forced one. According to the Indian custom tradition’s sati symbolized to a closure marriage, as a sign of dutiful wife and was practised voluntary (Hardgrave, 1998). In fact, many of its accidents were optional and perhaps this was happening in that society as a result of social pressures that may

reach the point of obliging . Despite that, there were cases where a woman wanted to burn herself, but others were trying to prevent her. However, within time this practice became more obligatory. There are several incidents about women who were forced to die (Altekar, 1956). For instance, there are accounts describing women being forced to sit on a coffin before being lit and tied to prevent her from escaping. In Such cases which women were given drugs, just to continue this practice (Ayyar, 1992). Typically, the burial takes place within the day of the death, making the decision about sati quick. And if the husband died in another area the widow was burned at a later time, and although women who did not want to practice sati, they were forced to do so in different ways. Especially, when a widow had no role to play in society she was pressurized to accept Sati (Bosworth, 2005).

1.5.2 Different ways of execution of Sati

There were different ways in which the ritual of sati was carried out. Most stories about this custom differ from one region to another, some of them describe women either seated on the husband's funeral pyre, or lying down next to them, and others say that women would jump or walk into the pyre after it had been lit, while another accounts report that women would sit on the pyre then lit it themselves (Suttee, 1870). Moreover, the practice varied from one region to other, and every place had its traditions and multiple ways in practicing sati. Therefore, in other regions of India women are prevented from applying sati even if they want to. Even though, there is a different version of sati which is called the "symbolic sati", when a widow wears the bride clothes and sits near the body of her husband, but leaves before setting the fire (Buckingham, 1827).

Some torturous methods of execution were prevalent back then. For instance, before a woman is placed on a funeral pyre, she could take poison or drugs, so that she either start dying slowly or at least becomes unconscious whereas, in some situations women were forced and tied by men even beaten to stop them from running away. Sometimes, the widow herself would get snake bitten or use a sharp blade on her throat or waist before entering the pyre.

1.5.3 Societal exceptions to Sati

There were certain rules that excluded some women from this practice. The first sati rule stated that any widow, who was pregnant, menstruating, or having very young children, could not participate in this ritual. Particularly, the women who committed sati were said to have died pure, which people believed, means that she will have a good karma and a much better life when she was born again. But this justification did not work for Brahman women because they were already belong to the upper class, so they could not benefit from sati thus did not have to practice it (Yang, 2008). However, in other occasions if a widow did not have any survive children to support her, as the widow woman did not have a statue or respect in society, she was seen as a burden. As well as, it was not allowed for her to remarry after the death of her husband. Therefore, it was expected for her to kill herself and accept sati even young wives whose age does not exceed ten are not exempt from the application of sati (Narayan, 1997).

1.5.4 Sati handprints and Sati stones

Figure 4

The History behind Sati, a banned funeral custom in India



([Sati handprints at Mehrangarh Fort], n.d.)

The ritual of sati was practiced in northern India before the Gupta Empire, and its name was “Anumarana” and it was not famous, nor was it limited to widows (Thapar, 2002,). But it included the suicide of any person close or loyal to the deceased, whether male or female at the funeral. As the relatives, his servants, followers or companions committed suicide because the era they made for the dead (Dehejia, 1994). As for the widow s burning of herself, meaning the woman as it is understood today, it spread after the end of the Gupta Empire around the year 500, after the decline of Buddhism in India and the Muslim conquest. In other words, women of the royal families who were afraid of invaders, by giving up of their lives, they left their handprints on the stones as memories. And to be remembered as valiant and devotion wives. And today these evidences are still existed in Rajasthan, which is called devil or sati stones, to symbolize the great honor of the queens towards their husbands.

1.6 Impact of sati on society

Sati affected the people of society both materially and spiritually. For instance, if a woman performed sati then she brought honor and prestige to the family and village. Thus, the family or the village became sacred and advertised place. They gain power or a better position in the society. In fact, many considered sati as a way to increase their profits in business. Such as Brahmin priests gain respect and wealth due to this holy event. Furthermore, the immediate family, local shopkeepers and transport companies can make huge profits from the visitors to the sati site. Actually, traders and priests may benefit financially more than the family. As the place which Sati was performed became a worship place of devotion and people started to visit annually.

In today’s community sati is not seen common in society but once a year is enough to sustain this ideology. And by these women can be controlled socially, and people can benefit from this materially (Jarman, 2002).

1.7 Conclusion

To conclude, the practice of sati had been part of the Indian society for ages, and people nevertheless believe in it till today. Though, it was once a horrifying custom that was sometimes pressured for widows to prove their loyalty and to test their strong bond towards their husbands. Thus, this chapter first aimed to identify this tradition and to give a brief historical background of its debate and origins in India. Then, it investigates the exclusive causes that results this banned custom and how people used to justify it.

Later on, this chapter presented an in dept look into the sati tradition by examine its themes and how it impacted on society both materially and spiritually.

Chapter two: Gender Oppression

CHAPTER TWO: Gender oppression

2.1 Introduction

Since Ancient times, women had a fragile position in India. And it seems that there have been enormous changes in the role of women over the past few millennia. However, women suffered from oppression and gender discrimination and struggled a lot to fight against racism and to create new identities for themselves. Moreover, to gain equal rights as men in any other field. This chapter aims first to study the history of Women's oppression, and their status since ancient times, and to investigate the Indian society rules that controlled and dominated women whether are equality, education, marriage, gender oppression or violence. Then, it gives an overview about the caste system that divided the Indian society into social groups and placed women in a typical role. After that, it shows how women rise against injustice by calling for feminism and demanding for their rights and changing their future.

2.2 The History of Women's Oppression

In India

The Indian women have been oppressed for ages and also have been traditionally considered as the deity in her home. Furthermore, female child is taught to be sensitive, loving and caring and therefore assigned to manage household work, child nurturing and motherhood. On the other hand, males are raised to be strong, dominating and aggressive in nature and henceforth to become able to work and to manage the finances of the house.

Violence against women and sexual and gender based violence are the violent acts the victims of which are primarily or exclusively women or girls.

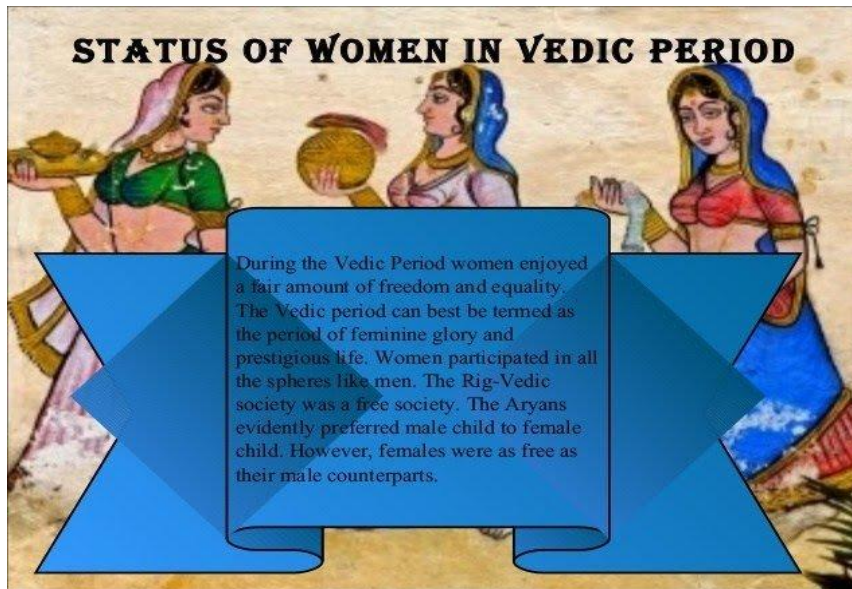
Such as violence is considered as a form of "hate crimes", which are committed against women or girls just because they are females and can't take any forms.

It is said that women in ancient India enjoyed high position in society, and they were equal to men in all aspects of life. Especially in the early Vedic period or as it was called the rig period between (1500 BC and 1000BC), women played a significant role. They had opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual

standard. As there was no sati system or early marriage, and we can say that this era was a “golden age” for women in the Indian society (Kuzmina, 2007).

Figure 5

Status and position of women in Ancient India



([Status of Women In Vedic Period], n.d.)

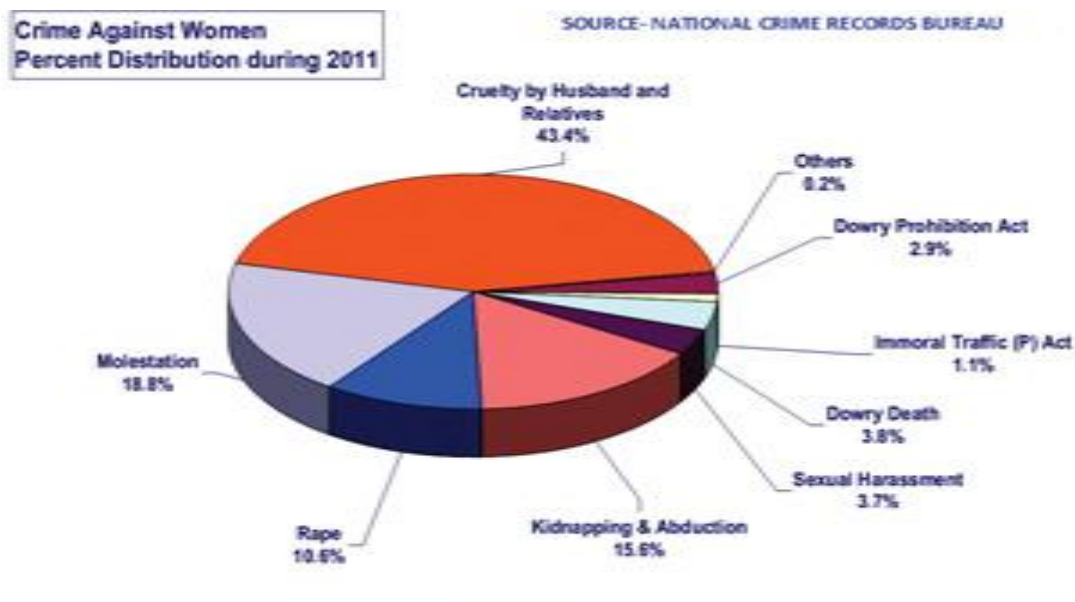
However, later Vedic period started many abusive trends against women and they became discriminated since then. In fields such education and other facilities, even child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and polygamy further worsened their position. In short, this period brought a cruel environment to women’s society. Though, the Manusmriti laws had changed their conditions. Here women gained more respect and the right for education but was only limited to the Brahmins (Thapar, 2002). But soon these laws was polluted and women became more oppressed .And within the progress for ages , their status was still quite bad and more worse in the Gupta period. Moreover, they were not allowed to go out alone or to be independent in their lives. As a result, the other banned practices and customs became widespread in India and acceptable norms for women even today.

CHAPTER TWO: Gender oppression

2.3 Crimes against women

Figure 6

Crime Against women percent Distribution during 2011



([Khabar: Crimes Against Indian Women Rise], n.d.)

2.3.1 SATI

The practice of burning widowed women on their husband's funeral pyre existed for centuries in India. Even though this was formally abolished by the British during when they had imperial control over the country, the practice continued. In 1987, the controversial case of "ROOP KANWAR", a widow who committed Sati in her village in the state of Rajasthan. Even though her family claimed she did it voluntary, many believe that she was either drugged or forced. The case went to court. But no one was charged, Because of the strong public reaction to this resulted in the government implementing the "The commission Sati (prevention act)" (Trial by fire, 2004)

2.3.2 Female infanticide/ sex selective Abortion

Female infanticide is one of the worst forms of the systematic gender discrimination faced by women in India. Due to the nature of the cultural norms present in India, girls are considered unworthy and a liability to their family. Women

leave the family after marriage, and the dowry payment is an added expenditure on the family. The advent of technology has resulted in the practice of sex-selective abortions. Ultrasound techniques are used to determine the sex of a child, and female fetuses are systematically aborted (Nehaluddin, 2009).

2.3.3 Child marriage

Marriage is not a choice for most Indian women. Small minorities of women, part of the urban elite, have a role in deciding when and to whom they will get married. Even though the legal minimum age for women to get married in India is 18th, this regulation is not enforced effectively and stringently older than them, and they are not given a choice in the matter. Brides are then forced to remain in the households and serve their husbands; which excludes them from being able to receive even the most basic human rights. They do not have access to education, and this limits their opportunities for finding work. Statistics show that more than 60 percent of Indian women in the rural sectors are married before the age of 18. As with many statistics related to the country, the averages vary greatly depending on the states. In states like Bihar and Rajasthan, the percent goes up to 84 (Nehaluddin, 2009).

2.4 The status of women in society

Women in south Asian are usually mistreated. Cases like infanticide, child marriage, and the rape of lower caste women, honor killings, and dowry murders are widely common in the society. In ancient India this was because of some Hindu sacred texts that considered women as low castes, animals and dogs, and allows for women to be treated inhumanly. However, women had no existence in society without the context of men. Thus, the sati ritual was considered logical to them. Many families were afraid that after the death of her husband the woman may go astray, so sati was the solution for them.

Moreover, women in India as history enlists were objects to be used by men they had no right of freedom as widows or in education and child marriage was prevalent and through feudalism, women were more and more exploited by religion and society, and thus they were excluded from all important social and economic parts of life.

CHAPTER TWO: Gender oppression

Social pressure was very strong in certain parts of India. In some regions, even today wife is treated as appendages to their husband, and they must follow their husbands to death or remain chaste through her life. Even though women in today's generation are treated as equal to men, but they don't seek such rights, words such as 'women are equal to men' are only printed in books (Jarman, 2002).

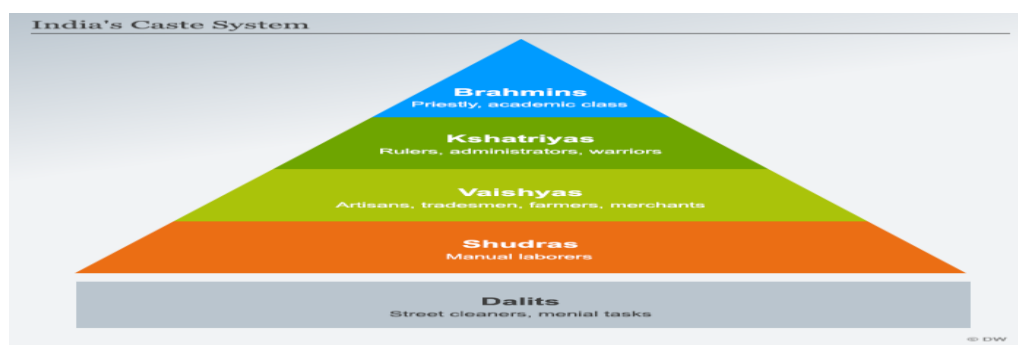
2.5 The Caste system in India (Concepts and Origins)

One of the most segregation and what later became a system of discrimination has been that of caste in India. This system is considered to be among the world's oldest forms of surviving social stratification that goes back to more than 3000 years old.

Originally, the word caste is actually not an Indian word; however it is derived from the Portuguese traders "casta" which means race. This system became into existence through the Manusmriti law, an essential and authoritative book in Hindus in India that justifies and acknowledges the caste system as the basis of social order and regularity of its population. However, it divides Hindus into rigid hierarchical groups based on their karma (work) and dharma which means (duty).

Figure 7

India's Caste System



([India's caste system: weakened, but still influential], n.d)

Furthermore, Many people believe that the groups originated from Brahma , the Hindu god of creation .The four classes were at the top: the Brahmins (priestly people), then the Kshatriyas (who were rulers , administrators and warriors) , the Vaishyas (artisans and merchants, tradesmen and farmers) , and Shudras (laboring

classes), whereas the fifth class was called the Dalits or the “Untouchables” because they were at the last hierarchical caste system and they were regarded as animals. The main castes were further divided into about 3000 castes and 25000 sub castes, each based on their specific occupation (Bayly, 2004).

2.5.1 Racism between males and females

Historically, gender discrimination and inequality between males and females had existed in India for centuries. Women had struggled from enormous issues and tried to survive in a male dominant society. Moreover, racism and gender oppression towards women had started since the ancient India where records say that in the beginning women enjoyed a high position in society and were equal to men in all aspects of life, and they had more respect. But, with in the progress of the ages women started to lose their place in the society and their rights too, whether the right of making choices or the right to be independent in their own life. Furthermore, new customs were created: sati child marriage and polygamy, and women had to fulfill all these Indian traditions in order to maintain their status and respect .Moreover, the Indian society was based on rigid caste system which created difficulties for women to be controlled by the social norms of the male dominance. In other words, the first thing that children learned is about gender roles, equating maleness with inferiority subservience. Boys learn to exercise their power over girls whereas girls learn to submit (Pande&Astone, 2007).

Patriarchal norms have marked women as inferior to men and gender discrimination continues in every aspect: be it education, health protection or participation, always females are treated unequally.

2.5.2 The Effects of the Caste system on India

C.H. Cooley (1909) defined caste as that: “when class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste”.

In other words of Lung Berg: “A caste is merely a rigid social classes into which members are born and from which they can withdraw or escape only with extreme difficulty” (Lung berg,n.d.).

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Caste is a very ancient system in India. And it had an impact on the Indian society both socially and economically for centuries. From its beginning, this system was its purpose to create balance between different social groups and to unify its population of the Indian society. However, later this system created gender discrimination, inequality and causes its differentiation into thousands of classes based on lineage or kinship that are difficult to define. Caste not only dictates one's job but also dietary habits and interaction with members of other castes as well. Members of a high caste enjoyed more wealth and opportunities, while members of a low caste performed menial jobs. Moreover, the system had led to the upper castes being privileged over the lower castes, which were often repressed by those higher up on the caste scale. For ages, inter-caste marriage was forbidden, and in villages castes mostly lived separately and did not share amenities such as wells (Ghuyre, 1996). Outside the caste system are the "untouchables", who were the most social class that suffered the harshest and most racist cases in the world. Their jobs were considered such as, toilet cleaning and garbage removal which made them therefore considered to be polluted and not to be touched (Bayly, 2001).

Although, the country's constitution officially abolished the "untouchables" in 1950, discrimination against "Dalits" still exists on the basis of a social class criterion. And almost most people remain in one caste their entire life and marry within their caste.

2.6 Feminism in India

In medieval period the culture seemed predominantly male. In medieval times women were given secondary positions, they were the problem of injustice, oppression, and exploitation of women, such as Sati, child marriage, polygamy and female feticide. They were lived in deplorable and terrible conditions. Furthermore, they had no rights to acquire knowledge, or access different fields as males in education or any other aspect (Sharma, 2017).

The concept of feminism involves changing the profoundly rooted practices of society and making women aware of their existence. They are also expected to realize their devaluation and exploitation.

Feminism is a new chapter in women's history, a new idea, a new vision, a new drama, a new direction.

Moreover, the feminist movement has created more awareness in women's life and in society as well, and has brought new standards as equality and justice between males and females. In fact women realized that they existed independently. Satibandi law (1829), widow remarriage legal recognition (1856), female feticide prevention (1870), Voting rights for women (1921), and last but not least, child marriage law (1929) (Beasley, 1999).

These important crucial laws had created a special consciousness among women. In which women became aware of their absolute rights, and had played a big role in this social cause.

2.7 Women's Empowerment: (Woman's Wright in India)

The status of woman in the Indian society was controversial. The situation of woman in India was always on the stake and needs lots of empowerment in all spheres of life. However, after the first wave of feminism movement, women started to demand for their rights and for their equality. Hence, this stage played an important role in changing the regular concept of woman role in the Indian society. Another two movements such as: the social reform movement and the nationalist movement that paved the way to create consciousness of the need for improvement in women's condition. Furthermore, women became able to enter many other fields and had many rights like fighting against alcoholism, slavery and fighting also for feminine causes like reform in marriage and divorce laws. And they created new identity for themselves and a high position in the society as they had equal rights as men in every aspect in life (Bhuyan, 2006).

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Women realized their pain and took courage to stand, and today women are working with men in every field. In fact in many fields have made remarkable achievements by providing their special talents, and it has created a new world.

2.8 Conclusion

In this age of ascending feminism and focus on equality and human rights it is challenging to represent the position of woman during the ancient time and how they were treated badly age after age. However, this situation did not last. Women in India overcome many difficulties to change their role in the society and create a respectful position. And today despite all the crimes that happened and still happened in India, women become more powerful and having more rights to stand up against their society rules which controlled India for several ages. To sum up, in this chapter the concepts of racism and gender oppression are sheds light on. Also, some crimes against women are mentioned such as sati, child marriage, and abortion to reflect a brief image of women's oppression and gender discrimination in the Indian society.

Chapter three: The Abolition of Sati custom in British India

3.1 Introduction

Sati tradition despite being banned by many Muslim rulers of India, by Britishers and recently by the Indian government, it remained in practice till today. Many factors such as holy rituals, religious beliefs, social pressure and lack of education are the main reasons which are why we cannot eradicate it. Thus, this chapter represents the domination of the British rule over India, and its impact on Indian's traditions and cultures. It also shows the role of the empire in preventing the practice of Sati. And why this practice still exists in India. As a result, the chapter at the end analyses the Reasons why women took this custom as voluntary act, and sometimes they become forced by society, those innocent women who died for no reason, but victimized by the society.

3.2 The British Rule in India

The British imperialism in India is probably the most controversial and the most hotly debated aspect of y of the British Empire's history. The Europeans and the British traders initially came to India for commercial purposes. Due to The industrial revolution in Britain, that led to the increase in demand for raw materials for factories there. Meanwhile, they also needed a market to sell their finished goods. India gave such a platform to Britain to satisfy all their needs .The 18th century was a period of internal power struggle in India and with the worse situation in power of the Mughal Empire; the British officials were given the perfect opportunity to establish their hold-over Indian subcontinent. They did these through enormous wars, forced agreements between countries, additions of alliances with the different regional powers all over the country. Furthermore, their new administrative and economic policies helped them consolidate their control over the country. As a result, the British were able to control the trade with India. They defeated their foreign enemies in trade so, that there could be no competition. Also, English education was introduced to create a class of Indian learners who would help the British in ruling the country, and strengthen their political power. All these measures helped the

British to establish and maintain their rule over India (Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1909).

3.2.1 The East India Company

During the British rule in India, England succeeded at establishing the East India Company. At the beginning it was formed for exploitation of trade with the East Indies for spices, Integrated by royal charter on December 31, 1600. However, later this company became involved with politic matters of the country, and acted as an agent of British imperialism in India from the early 18th century to the mid- 19th century (Henige, 1970).

And with its help England was able to extend her territorial frontiers to the Indian subcontinent. This company also had another hidden purpose was to extend England's wealth and to become economically powerful. Moreover, Britain used many strategies to stay in control of India. Which after it became the owner of most of its lands, and change their situation from traders to conquerors. Thus, England was the domination power who took decisions, and running the state affairs, and controlling their culture and their customs and traditions (Windle, 2012).

3.2.2 The British India

In 1858, the East India Trading Company transferred the rule of India to the British crown, which became the British raj (Fair, 2014). This was a period of a direct rule of British over the Indian subcontinent. Thus, the term "British India" had been used (and still used) to refer to the areas under the rule of the British east India company in India from 1600 to 1858. The term has also been used to refer to the "British in India" (Glanville, 2013). Terms such "Indian Empire" and "Empire of India" were not used in legislation, the monarch was officially known as empress or emperor of India and the term was often used in Queen Victoria's speeches and prorogation speeches. Hence, it was a symbol to represent the domination of the British over Indian subcontinent. And after a hundred years of invading, Britain did not change only the Indian territories but also changed its perceptions, ideas,

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identities, and their society rules, also brought new ideologies and new laws to the Indian society.

3.3 The Impact of the British on the Indian culture

Indian society maintained many and different practices that were totally gender oppressive to woman. Such practices included sati, female infanticide, and child marriage; all these practices caused suffering, pain, and even death to the woman and girls too. Furthermore, India's lands were invaded from British colonialism. The British greatly changed the course of the way Indian lived their lives. The alterations impacted India and changed the country to what it is today (Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1909). Although British colonialism can be viewed as a negative event that occurred in world history, British colonialism into India helped positively transform India's culture and economy. They proceeded to do this by removing the practice of sati, integrate culture, help industrialize their land, create a better government, and a better economy (Narayan, 1997). Moreover, the British saw themselves as a force for enlightenment, especially for women. However, to support their claim, they pointed to the laws liberalizing women's legal position. Between 1722 and 1947 they presented nine major reforms. This includes the laws preventing female infanticide, sati and child marriage, and those rising the age of consent, allowing widow remarriage, and improving women's inheritance rights. They were also supported by Indian reformers. But their support for the issues was often ambiguous, and their actions on other issues contradicted their claim to be a progressive influence. This also impacted on the hierarchal caste system, which divided certain groups of people into different levels of status. Moreover, this system provided males with the ability to abuse women in lower castes without any consequences. Those women were subjected to violence, intimidation and public shaming in order to maintain the gender inequality.

3.4 The Abolition of Sati

Sati came to its end in the 19th century when India was under British rule. In 1829 a British man William Bentinck prohibited Sati and by 1862 British forced the princes of India to put an end to the sati practice. Today Sati is regarded as a crime according to the Indian penal code and one who performs Sati will be given a punishment of mandatory life sentence (Salahuddin & Ali, 1965). However, the practice continued, and there are a lot of unreported cases every year. This is because of the society and some important sects or castes of Hindu religion encourage Sati even after its prohibition. When the state banned sati the society demands it; therefore, this creates a conflict between them. Nevertheless, Sati is still being practiced in India. However, if we talk about classical Hindu culture, widows are not allowed to use jewelery, colores, flowers, or henna, and they have to shave their heads, sleep on the ground, do degrade and disgraceful work, fast and pray for their dead husbands (Nehaluddin, 2009). The women from lower caste or an untouchable woman are exempted from the things mentioned above. In Rajput's caste, a widow has to sleep in the corner of a small room while atoning for a year, and she may be despised and exploited for sexual abuse by the relatives. Therefore, to escape from the torture and abuse, most of the widows would consider burning themselves alongside their husbands (Chaudhuri, 1976). But first, to describe how this evil practice was prohibited, we need to go through lot of historical landmarks which will be discussed below.

3.4.1 The Role of Religion and Missionaries

If historical facts are true to be believed, the practice of sati was prohibited several times between 15th and 18th centuries. However, Sati was more prevalent in the 14th century than any other period the Vijaynagar Empire. Many scholars like Nuiz, Caesar Frederick, and Barradas mention in their work that the 15th and 16th centuries also had many examples of sati practices. In the 14th century, this was performed by the warriors, Goudas, and Gayakas classes of Hindus. Even before the British, the Christian missionaries resisted the sati practice in the name of humanitarianism (Sarojini, 1961). The Bombay government banned sati and warned the rulers of

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Gujrat such as DevgadBaria (1840), Baroda (1840) , Lunawada (1840), Rajpipla (1840), Mahikanta (1843) and Palanpur (1848) on performing the sati act. But many of them violated the law and were punished accordingly (Shaukla, 1987). Furthermore, sati was a social institution during the Mughal period in India. Sati was a normal thing both for Muslims and Hindu, but it caught the eyes of many foreign travelers of this period. In 1582, Mughal emperor Akbar banned Sati, and in 1663, Aurangzeb tried to end it again (Chaudhri, 1976). Even the Portuguese, French and British, who had come to India during the European colonial period, tried to stop

Sati. In 1850, the British hardened their rules again this practice. Sir Charles Napier ordered that any Hindu priest presiding over a burning widow to be hung to death. Also, the princely states of India were also pressured during this period to exclude Sati completely. Even many Muslim emperors tried to save the widow and have succeeded in many of their attempts, if not all, thus many widows were saved by them.

3.4.2 Prevention of Sati Act (1978)

On September 4, 1978, there was an incident in the village of Deorala in Rajasthan. An 18 year old married woman named Roop Kanwar was forced to become Sati when her husband died after eight months of marriage. She refused and escaped, yet a group of men from the village drugged her and burned her. After all, she was burned to death by her in-laws. In Roop Kanwar's incident, the people who forced her to die were arrested, but Roop Kanwar became a deity, and a temple was built for her (Nehaluddin, 2009). Police investigated the case and these men were arrested. In the light of this incident, the government created the Prevention of Sati Act in 1987, making it illegal to force or encourage any woman to commit Sati and anyone who did so would be punished by death. This act passed many laws in order to protect those widows, and any other actions or ceremonies related to this practice would be punished because it is inhuman. However, some widows still choose to become Sati at least four cases were recorded between 2000 and 2015.

3.5 Is Sati Still Existing Today?

After the British prohibited sati in 1928, as well as many practices were stopped in India. Furthermore, many legal measures were presented to improve the position of women. For example, Widow Remarriage was permitted in (1856), sanctioned inter-caste and inter communal marriages in (1872), in (1929) preventing child marriage (Muthiah, 2008). All the movements severely criticized the caste system especially the practice of untouchability. Nevertheless, Sati is still being practiced in India. Here are some examples of Sati practices even after its abolition:

Recently in 2008, a 71 year old woman sacrificed herself by performing the act of Sati. The witness claims that she wore a new dress and attends her husband's funeral.

When the husband's body had been almost burnt, and the villagers were ready to leave, she jumped into her husband's funeral pyre and sacrificed herself by dying alongside with her husband. This act dismayed many people because; it was performed in the 21st century despite being illegal and forbidden by the Indian law. This incident is an example that shows us how these kinds of unfortunate happenings can occur in rural India (Ahmad, n.d.). This was just reported incident, and many unreported Sati incidents happen all over India, which the Indian society is unaware of, even in the 21st century. Another incident was the case of KuttuBai (65) in 2002 in the state of Madhaya Pradesh, Vidyawati (35) in 2006 in Utter Pradesh, Jankrani (40) in 2006 in Madhaya Pradesh (Jarman, 2002).

3.6 Sati, Is it curse or bless?

To answer this question we need to go through the historical and the cultural side of this custom in Indian society and why women would practice it? , and is it forced or voluntary? I believe the research that I made in this dissertation can answer all the questions that are related to this subject. Sati tradition is difficult to comprehend because of its coercion and voluntary attributes. According to some scholars, it is a voluntary act, but some scholars consider it as obligatory. For I can say if it is a voluntary act, it is none other than suicide, and if it is obligatory, then it is murder. What happened to Roop Kanwar on the day she died is still a mystery. Normally any

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country would call it murder, but India calls it a traditional ritual. Indian males have prominently used religion as a weapon to dominate women. Moreover, title is derived from the book of Sati, the blessing and the curse: the burning of widows in India. In this book, John Stratton Hawley analyses the status or the position of women in Rajasthan and how women become Sati. Finally, is this practice a curse or bless it depends on: To those who revere it, sati symbolizes ultimate loyalty and self sacrifice. However, to those who deplore it, sati is a curse, a violation of every woman's womanhood (Hawley, 1994).

3.7 Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter focused on the Indian society and its banned practices during the British Rule. Then, it shed light on the Indian government role to abolish Sati completely. Also, it focused on the cultural and religious influence that helped to prevent this practice as well.

Moreover, this chapter has also analysed whether the custom of sati is a curse or bless? By discussing why women would like to choose, or are forced to commit this suicide. Although, this custom was prohibited several times first by the Muslim rulers and Britishers, then by the Indian government there were different cases that happened and still occurred in the 21st century.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

GENERAL CONCLUSION

3.8 General Conclusion

This dissertation leads to the conclusion that even sati was injustice practice for women, but at the same time they still keep it as tradition for centuries. It symbolizes the “virtuous woman” or the “pure wife” who follows her dead husband to the afterlife and has a good karma.

As we have seen above, sati began as a story illustrating the intense power of overwhelming love. But when people praised that act of love, it became an instruction manual for how everyone should be! Thus, the practice took hold in some communities and became solidified into a code. But with time Indian women, either physically forced by society or physiologically coerced by the religion, embrace the cult of sati. It also negates the cult of sati as a purely religious activity that reflects women’s loyalty and devotion to their husbands and religion.

Moreover, the first chapter defined what is really meant by sati, by giving more explanations and details about it. How widows used to practice it and what are the motivations behind this wrong deed, by justifying it using religious texts and holy books. Besides, it shows historical facts that witness on women’s sacrifice towards their husbands.

The second chapter dealt with the evolution of women’s position from ancient times to the modern age. Their ability to overcome the struggle and the oppression which they suffered from by men, such as infanticide, child marriage, polygamy, sati ... etc. This chapter first addressed the concepts as the caste system in India by giving a brief explanation about its definition and origins. And what are the effects of this caste system on the society. Then, it aims to highlight the Feminism movement in India and women calling for their rights and empowerment.

Finally, the last chapter represents the domination of the British Rule over Indian traditions and cultures. By first gives an overview about Indian people and their situations before the Establishment of East India Company and its contribution in the abolition of sati. After that, it investigates the motivation behind woman’s sacrifice.

And why they nevertheless proceed to keep these inappropriate traditions and practices even in the twenty first century.

Finally, If the Indian society did no longer encourage these usual rituals women would have been living a better life. Especially those harmless widows who died for no reason, but victimized by the Indian traditions.

Future researchers will be rich and diverse, what can be dealt with in future research for instance the analysis of different cruel customs that had been gender oppressive for women in Indian society such as : Child Marriage and Female Infanticide.

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