

CHINESE WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR SOCIO-POLITICAL RIGHTS IN NEW CHINA.

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INTRODUCTION.

History of the world is replete with cruel and indiscriminate treatment of the women. In ancient as well as in medieval times the position of women folk was pitiable in all the societies of East as well as West. Same was the condition of women in old China.

Women were oppressed than man in old China. In addition to the three forms of oppression weighing upon man, women also had to deal with male domination. Mao Zedong wrote that these forms of oppressions-political, clan, religious and masculine were the four ropes of China's old feudal patriarchal society shaking the Chinese people.¹

In the 30 years since liberation, the social status of women has been fundamentally shattered. In political, economic, cultural, social and family life, women were considered inferior to man. Possessing no political rights, women were completely excluded from social and political life. Economically dependent, women were robbed of property and inheritance rights and possessed no independent source of income. Having no social status women were forced to obey their fathers before marriage, their husbands after marriage and their sons if they became widowed.² They had no personal dignity or independent status. They enjoyed no freedom in marriage but had to obey the dictates of their parents and heed the words of match makers, and were not allowed to remarry if their spouse died. They were subjected to physical and mental torture, being harassed by systems of polygamy and prostitution.³

The successive invasions by the western powers after the opium war in 1840 aggravated the situation of Chinese women. During Manchurian crises 1931 and after myth the Japanese brutally killed over 30 million Chinese, the children and women were in majority and worst affected.

For national liberation and self emancipation, Chinese women, alongwith the entire nation, proceeded a fearless struggle that lasted for over a century. They also launched a successive movement for women's liberation. The 1911 revolution kindled the feminist movements which focused on equal rights for man and women and participation of women in political affairs. The movement promoted the awakening of Chinese women. By means of these large scale mass movements. New China's socialist regime hardly took few years to clean up the filth which was left over from the feudal society that had lasted for thousand of years.⁴

The socialist system gave great importance to women's rights and provided legal protection. Presently women of China enjoy equal legal status to men. A comprehensive legal system has come into being to protect the rights and interests of women and promote sexual equality. The constitution of the People's Republic of China clearly mentions that "Women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, political, economic, cultural and social, including family life. The state protects the right and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for similar work, violation of the freedom of marriage is prohibited. Maltreatment of old people, women and children is prohibited". As per the principle established by the constitution, New China has promulgated over 10 fundamental laws, including the marriage law, electoral law, law of inheritance, civil law and criminal law.⁵

The law of the People's Republic of China on the protection of the rights and interests of women promulgated in 1992 provided an effective legal weapon for further enhancing the social status of women and guaranteeing their basic rights and interests.

Women enjoy equal rights to men with respect of culture and education. These cover school admissions, advancement to higher levels of schooling, job assignment after graduation, conferment of

academic degrees and grant of scholarships for study abroad. Women's rights to engage in scientific and technological research and literary and artistic creation.

Women enjoy equal property rights with men. With regard to marriage and family property, women enjoy equal ownership and inheritance rights with men. Widows have the right to dispose of property they inherit, without interference from any one.

Improvement of the economic status of women constitutes the most important foundations for achieving sexual equality. The Chinese government has made good efforts to upgrade and enhance the economic status of women. Chinese women have become a great force in the country's social development, making major contributions to the socialist economic development.⁶

The Chinese government provides comprehensive protective measures for employed women. According to a survey 85.3% of child-bearing female workers and staff members in urban areas enjoy a three month paid maternity leave, while some units have extended the leave to six month. Female workers during their pregnancy and lactation period have their work load and work time reduced. Most state owned enterprises where women predominate have established gynaecological clinics, rest rooms for pregnant women, breast feeding room, nurseries and kindergartens.

In China, women take full part in administrating state and social affairs, and thus have made huge contributions to the country's development of democracy and building of its legal system.⁷

Chinese women occupy an important place in people's congresses at various levels. Where the first National People's congress (N.P.C) was held in 1954, there were only 147 women deputies, accounting for 12% of the total. By 1993 when the 8th N.P.C was convened the number of women deputies had increased to 626, accounting to 21.03% of the total.

Women deputies to people's congresses at various levels have played an important role in legislative work and the administration of other state and social affairs. They pay particular

attention to the problems of education and public health, the ecological environment, the protection of the rights and interests of women, children and the disabled, social security and the general mood of the society. They are active in raising suggestions for legislation and policy making and working hard to promote advances in these fields.⁸

In old China, women were excluded from social life. New China has enabled women to make conspicuous progress in all aspects of society, especially in the fields of education, science and technology, culture, sports and public health. The Chinese government has exerted great efforts to promote women's education. They have also paid special attention to promoting adult and vocational education and eliminating illiteracy among women.⁹

The founding of new China put an end to the feudal marital and family system that had endured for several millennia. Independent marriage based on mutual love and a family life in which husband and wife are equal have become the main current in contemporary Chinese society.

Women have gained the right of self-determination in marriage. In old China over 95% of marriages were arranged by parents and on a monetary basis. Over the last 40 odd years, the degree of freedom in choosing a partner has increased significantly.¹⁰

Chinese women have gained the important personal right of being able to retain their maiden names. In old China surnames symbolised the continuity of a clan. Most women had no formal name before marriage. They adopted their husband's surname after they wed and children used their father's surname. In new China, both husband and wife have equal right to use their own names and children do not have to adopt their father's surname as was the former custom.¹¹

Women enjoy the same rights of possession and inheritance of family property as men. In old China, family assets could only be owned and inherited by men. If a widow remarried she could take nothing and a married daughter had no right to inherit any thing from her parents. Now, in the over whelming majority of

families, husband and wife jointly own family property and they have equal access to its use and allocation. It has become common practice for husband and wife to enjoy the same rights and for sons and daughters to have equal rights as heirs.

All the women of China have profited from the modern trend that has banned the binding of feet and restored women's freedom of movement. The aloofness of women and the rules concerning the women are seen in all the public places: streets, markets and theatre etc. All these factors amounted to bring a considerable change in the life style of China.¹²

The international conference of women provided a great boost to the already growing women's emancipation in the People's Republic. This conference according to the Chinese assessment was embracing a much vaster subject "half the world" as they say, it was the whole direction of women's rights at stake, since conservative forces did the best for reversing the earlier gains made at the U.N. conferences on human rights in Vienna, population in Cairo and the social summit at Copenhagen.¹³

The Vatican worked much to point the conference in a conservative direction emphasising women's "Unique nature" as mother's and circumscribing their role, thus reopening the question of family planning, abortion and sexuality settled by consensus at the Cairo conference a year ago. The advocates of female circumcision were defeated at Cairo and those advocates of women's rights to property had to face a tough threat at the Beijing conference yet, the convergence of fifty thousand women arriving from the four corners of the globe makes a real sense for the position and status for the Chinese women as well. The right of women and men to be informed to acceptable methods of family planning is recognised in the text gender based violence including physical and psychological abuse trafficking in women and girls place then at higher risk of trachoma diseases and unwanted pregnancies which has proved a corner stone for women's emergence the world over.¹⁴

"The Beijing Declaration calls for elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. Government will pledge to intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of human rights and

fundamental freedom for women and girls.

They will commit to implementing the platforms, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all policies and programmes".¹⁵

CONCLUSION:

To conclude it can be said that China is no longer the country where the man reigns supreme. His important function as the head of family in the society has come to an end. The Chinese women have achieved more prominence in all the spheres of life. Many working women and girls regard their earning as their own and not as the property of their families, study in modern school, work in modern factories and life in big cities has increased their knowledge and experience and has raised their prestige in the family. The modern women i.e. factory workers, career women and educated women have won a position in family and society far superior to that of their grand mothers.

China believes that women are a great force in maintaining world peace and this is closely linked to the future of our planet and the destiny of the mankind. Over the years Chinese women have made un-remitting efforts to maintain world peace and to fight against imperialism old and neo-colonialism, hegemonism, racism of various forms, fascism and all forms of terrorism.

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