

Q. No. 3:

How the colonial era influenced the status of women in subcontinent?

Answer:

The colonial era (1857-1947) has influenced the status of women significantly. That era introduced reforms which expanded women's role in society, it also entered patriarchal norms and systemic inequalities. Positive and negative impacts of colonial era are discussed in upcoming paragraphs.

1- Positive Impacts of Colonialism on Women:

The colonial era has left significant impacts on women's life and status in the society. This impact was because of the reforms to abolish oppressive practices, promotion of education, and

new opportunities for economic and professional growth. Although these reforms often focused on urban and upper-class women.

i- Legal Reforms to Abolish Harmful Practices:

The colonial era abolished several regressive practices to protect women. The Sati Regulation Act abolished the outlawed widow immolation (Colonial Reforms and Women's Rights in British India, 1890). Incidents of Sati dropped by ~~90~~ over 80% by the late nineteenth century.

ii- Reforms in Inheritance Rights:

Earlier than colonialism women of Hindu communities were not allowed to get their share from inheritance. Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937

allowed widows to get share from their husband's property. Property inheritance cases were increased by 20% after the act. (Report on Women's Property Rights in India, 1940). So, new laws gave women limited inheritance rights.

iii- Expansion of Education Access:

Enrollment of girls in schools was 2,000 in 1870 which rose to 20,000 in 1920. (Census of India, 1921). Colonialism introduced formal education for women in subcontinent.

iv- Promotion of Professional Training:

Vocational and professional training allowed women to enter fields dominated by men. By 1935, 5% of medical graduates were women.

(Medical Education and Women in Colonial India).

V- opportunities in Social Activism:

Social movements gained momentum during colonial era. By 1941, From 1900 to 1940 women's participation in social reform organizations grew by 30%. Which shows active participation of women in social reforms.

VI- Role in Urban Economic Development:

Colonialism brought industrial revolution which created job opportunities. By 1941, 72% of women in Bengal were engaged in industrial work-force of total labour.

VII- Legal Age Reforms:

authorities introduced laws to stop

Leave a line space between headings for neatness

early marriages. to protect minors.
 The average marriage age of girls rose from 10 years in 1881 to 13 years by 1921. (Demographic Studies of British India). The Age of Consent Act raised minimum age for girls to 12 years.

VIII - Emergence of Women in Public Life:

Women started to take part in public movements on leadership roles. By 1930, there was 15% membership of women in Congress. (Women and Politics in Colonial India). Sarojini Naidu became 1st women president of Indian National Congress.

2 - Negative Impacts of Colonialism on Women:

While colonial rule benefited some women, but it

entrenched inequality and perpetuated patriarchal systems. Many policies like education, politics and economic advancement served disproportionately excluding rural and marginalized women. These challenges limited broader progress of women in society.

i- Patriarchal Norms:

Child marriages persisted in villages despite the reforms. Nearly 40% of girls were married by age 15 years in 1921 (Census of India, 1921). Colonial authorities often upheld traditional patriarchal systems.

ii- Unequal Distribution of Education

Benefits:

Rural families preferred boys' education over girls'. Literacy rates for rural women was 0.5%.

in 1911 compared to 10% for urban women. So, access to education was confined to urban and upper-class.

iii - Economic Exploitation:

Women used to work on tea plantation under exploitative conditions. Female plantation workers earned 50% less compared to men for similar work. (The Economic History of Colonial India). Women in rural areas faced harsh labour conditions and low wages.

iv - Exclusion from Political Representation:

Women were denied voting rights under the Government of India Act 1919. By 1947, women represented less than 1% of legislative assembly members (Women and Politics in Colonial India). So, women were

largely excluded from the political process.

v- Decline of Traditional Industry:

The decline of handloom weaving left thousands of women jobless.

By 1900, 50% of traditional weaving households were collapsed. British economic policies devastated traditional industries.

vi- Disparities in Legal Reforms:

Muslim women's rights were governed by conservative religious clerics. Only 10% of property inheritance rights inheritance cases involved Muslim women by 1930.

(Women Rights Across Communities in Colonial India). Many legal reforms excluded Muslim and tribal women.

vii- Cultural Alienation:

Indigenous crafts led by women declined under colonial era. Over 60% of traditional crafts had disappeared by early 20th century (Cultural Shifts in India). The introduction of Western ideals disrupted traditional gender roles.

Conclusion:

The colonial era's impact on women in the subcontinent was a mixture of blessing and curse. Legal reforms, educational opportunities and professional advancement benefited women but these benefits were confined to urban elites. Rural women faced systemic neglect, exploitation which reinforced gender inequalities.

Good attempt!!