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WOMEN' S STATUS IN A FREE WORLD: A MODERN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Religion and law tell us that we are all alike and equal, but society tends to prove us the contrary. The most important and argued difference is that between men and women. The evolution of the role of women within a community took place throughout centuries and it has not completely finished yet. Women have found themselves interpreting many parts on the 'stage' of life, from key characters to ones of very little importance, but always present in the spotlight. From goddesses to slaves, from the symbol of sin to the image of holiness, women have had a difficult path in understanding their purpose, their limits, and most importantly, their freedom. Today's society reveals a modern perspective of this issue, one that in earlier times would have been strongly disapproved. Women are no longer 'the better half' of someone or something, they are their own selves, they represent their own ideas and beliefs, they can be leaders, mothers, wives, heads of companies, in one word they are free. We live in a world full of opportunities, a world that some of us are proud to call a free society. It was a time when only one woman succeeded in being a queen. Now, there is nothing holding us back from becoming 'queens' in our own lives.*

Keywords: *change, society, women, patriarchal society, modern world, women's right, equality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Change is a natural condition and the world must be accustomed to it. It is not an option. The world in which we live today looks in this particular way, only due to the factor mentioned above. Industrial revolutions, the boom of the economy, of the social studies, the many discoveries in medicine, all have strongly influenced the development of society.

Because society is a pure human construction, it is without question that change affected people and especially women. Even though religion and law create the impression that we are equal, we all have the same rights

and liberties, reality is quite different from this idea. Women's role inside a society and, even more, inside a community, a smaller group, like a family, has suffered huge transformations. This study tries to highlight some of the most important changes, that have led to a certain perspective on the condition of women in relation with that of men.

2. WHAT IS THE WOMEN'S STATUS?

2.1 A Historical Evolution

The modern society has brought on visible aspects, which are different from the way in which this entire issue is viewed. However, this is not valid for every corner of the world

and also women have not managed to achieve true equality. History shows us that the status of women has occupied a secondary position to that of men, which is quite interesting, considering the fact that in prehistoric times the woman was the leader of the family.

Once a stable living appeared, forming small communities, the roles seemed to change, and man, due to his physical abilities, took over the control of the settlement. Women's importance diminished considerably. Because power was now measured through physical strength, women did not have decisional power. Therefore, it was not long until a true patriarchal community was born.

Slowly, many of the rules, which we still follow today, date from that period of time. Man was the leader of his family but also only a man could rule a community, women did not have any power, only duties.

What is worth mentioning is that in some communities women could embody goddesses, like in Ancient Rome, Ancient Egypt and even in some African tribes. Still, this did not improve the status of 'mortal' women. They were considered inferior to men. In Ancient Rome, for example, politics was a closed world for women, a man's world.

As the monotheistic religions appeared, women had even more to lose, because what came next was a clear domination of the female race. The Middle Ages saw women as nothing else than objects, that were at the full disposal of men. They were not educated, as it was felt that they did not deserve to be, they did not have the right to their own judgment.

'If the child be a girl she should be put to sew and not to read, for it is not good that a woman should know how to read, unless you wish her to become a nun' (Paolo Da Cretaldo, ca.1320).

The influence of women in that period of time was often underrated and even though some might have had extraordinary powers, their fate was sealed, in the hands of man. Violence was often used to teach women their place, when the husband required anything from his wife, the woman had to fulfill, otherwise a painful experience would be waiting for her.

Furthermore, the famous '*witch hunt*' primarily regarded women as they were considered the Devil's instruments.

The Renaissance did not bring much changes in the way in which they were perceived. Women belonging to upper classes did not face so many problems as regular people, peasants; however, when it came to the issue of marriage, noble women had to accept an arranged marriage, a business.

The Victorian Age brought important changes and many consider this periods the starting point in the emancipation of women and the true birth of feminism. It was an age characterized by important industrial revolutions, cultural and social revolutions, as well as political ones. Queen Victoria, Mother of Europe as she was called later on, held the power within the English monarchy and not her husband, who was quite odd. There are some theorists, who believe that this is actually the starting point of the emancipation of women, but at an ideological level, because inside the society not much had changed. Women were still required to take care of their families, to obey the commands of their husbands, they had no power over their life, as they were still considered incapable of taking the right decisions. A legitimate question would be: How is it then possible to consider this the starting point of feminism?

Firstly, the idea that a woman was head of a State in the presence of a man is of a great importance. It is a first landmark in history. Secondly, the lower class women began to support themselves and their families sometimes. Women started working in factories, in hospitals as nurses, in law. Women began to understand their powers and were not afraid to take on different responsibilities.

The 20th century was the turning point in the way in which women were perceived. Even though in the 19th century, women received some form of education, assured by the church, the true transformations came in the 20th century, when women understood the necessity of political involvement in their struggle for equality

The first sign that women were going in the right direction was the fact that they began



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to work in the same fields of activity as men. In 1910, the first policewoman was appointed in America and by 1919 in Britain. Also, due to the *Sex Disqualification Act*, in 1919, women started being lawyers, doctors, even some who were married, having their own careers. They managed even entering the army, forming the women branch, participating in wars.

By 1970, women were paid the same wages as men, women were protected by different laws prohibiting discrimination against women in education, employment and training.

Today, a great number of women are paid even more than men, working in all areas. The myth that women cannot do the same things as men has been proven to be false in today's society.

2.2. Women and Religion

Religion has been a complicated subject all throughout history, being used to justify even the worst crime that mankind committed. In relation with women, religion has created a certain context that men have used intensely to put women in a position of inferiority.

In the Middle Ages, as we have previously stated, women were seen as the Devil's main instruments due to their impressionable, weak nature. The Bible story of Adam and Eve, Eve being responsible for the Fall, explains the female nature. Women were considered to have a sinful nature as well. The most important roles within a religion, the priest, the bishop and the Pope were held and some are still held by a man, never by a woman. It is worth to mention that in some places of the actual building of the church, women are not even permitted to enter (e.g. the altar).

After observing the behavior towards women, motivated by religion, one might think that women are doomed, having no way to

escape their terrible fate. But this is not true. All religions of the world do the same thing and that is protecting women. In the Muslim culture, women are protected up to a certain point, they must be well taken care of by their fathers, by their husbands and by their children. The same thing is sustained by Buddhism. Christianity is not the exception, the Virgin Mary is a powerful example in this sense, and also many female saints who are celebrated at least once a year.

Religion is not against women, it never was, but it was interpreted as such by men who desired the power for themselves. The fascinating story of the female Pope, whose existence has been hidden for so many years, Pope Joan, comes to prove once again that women are not the instrument of the evil and that in God's eyes, women and men are truly equal.

Today, the rules have certainly changed, women being able to become priests, thus fulfilling important spiritual roles.

2.3. Women and Politics

Politics has proven to be a very captivating area that holds a great number of opportunities. Because we live in a society, we are bound to regulate it from time to time, as it changes as much as the humans that form it. Therefore, if the feminist current wanted to 'speak up', then this would certainly be the path to success.

Today's world is under the influence of policies, of political regulators. In the past, the association between the idea of authority and the image of a woman would have been unthinkable, this was until Queen Elizabeth I, who managed to prove that women belong in this world as much as men. What is worth mentioning is the fact that not only was she the queen, but also she refused the idea of a husband, being prepared to take on the huge

responsibility of reigning over the kingdom on her own. Queen Mary, Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth II were the symbol of power in a world where authority was in the hands of men.

The scene of politics is grand and there is room for everyone on it. The problem is remaining on that stage, for it is so difficult to gain a permanent place. Women are driven by fair, clear purposes, which is why they succeed in staying in the spot light. They do get lost in this game of power, perhaps because they are not accustomed to this exercise, to this function that opens so many doors. Also, women are considered to be the 'ornaments' of a world and it is a fact that image represents 80% in politics. Taking all these into consideration, women could benefit in an open-minded community from all the conditions necessary to succeed. However, how many communities of this kind are there? Unfortunately, not so many.

Still, not all women are fit to be sovereigns. Some remain in the shadow and rule from there. Jackie Kennedy was this type of leader. She managed to fulfill that perfect portrait of the ideal presidential family. Without her, Kennedy might have found it difficult to become president. Joan of Arc was another leader. She influenced as much as she could the king, managing in changing decisions establishing a true dialogue with sovereign.

2.4. Women between Slaves and Leaders

There is not only one society, there are many types, each of them having their own culture and habits. Therefore, the idea of the female symbol is a subject that raises a lot of discussions. In some parts of the world, women are not even close to leaders, not in their own family; they are still perceived as objects. They have no rights, no freedom, no power of choice and what is even more serious they have lost their identity. Women are the product of men. Their entire existence revolves around their fathers, their husbands, their children.

The best known example in this sense is represented by the Muslim communities. Women are put in their place with the use of

violence. Their prohibition to decide even the smallest thing is legendary. The justification for these actions is once again religion and this is why any change in this matter seems to be almost impossible to realize.

Indian communities are similar in some way to the Islamic situations. There, women have not gained the power to choose their husbands. Wanting a career is almost a tragedy for a religious family.

The feminist movement has a lot to change in those dark corners of the world for the result to be noticeable and permanent.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Women have fought a great deal so that the present times would treat the new female generation differently. And in some parts of the world the effects were visible, but in others there is still a long way to go in order to reach that desired equality.

The changes are obvious, they are also a necessity in this process of evolution. The world cannot stand still, because humans change, their needs change and so do the opportunities.

Still, a question remains: Is this truly what we want? Do we really want real equality between men and women?

According to Donatella Versace, a woman can make it in a world ruled by men only if she relies on her femininity [4].

Differences exist between the two parts so when they meet the whole is completed.

Women can do anything men can do, as men can do everything that women do, but there should be something that could differentiate us. Women must hold on to their femininity.

The importance of an equal society is a must and it should be our goal but with certain limits.

Women have represented all the possible roles throughout history: from mothers to wives, slaves or goddesses. One thing is certain: a woman is the heart of a family, of a society. Important pieces of literature had as muse one particular woman or the idea of the eternal feminine; wars were held in the name of a woman. There is no domain, which does not have at least one female representative.



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There are women pilots, women doctors, women politicians, women journalists and so on. The participation of women in wars was a huge event, quite similar, according to some sociologists, to the participation of women in the election process. It is worth to mention that nowadays in the army women have found it possible to rise to certain important positions, becoming more than just soldiers.

The perspective from which women are perceived is still in a changing process and it will not be long from now on that they will be seen truly in all parts of the world in a different way, in some even higher positions than men. In the Muslim societies, it is very likely that the difference in view, concerning the role of men and women, will not change much, but if the harsh ways of punishment disappear, then the important part of the evolution process will be fulfilled.

Women belong to the same level as men, they are intellectually equipped and some are even physically endowed, just like men and women have proven to be capable of any

social duty that community would require. If this happening is a regrettable one, time will definitely tell, but it is without doubt a necessary one.

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