



Feminism and change in social values of Japan in 20th century

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Abstract

In countries like Japan, where the values are rooted in the heart and minds of the citizens, change and keeping pace with the changing society is crucial. Women play an important role in shaping society and raising the young mindset. Having such a great role in society women not only influences society but are also influenced by the prevailing social norms and values. In this article, the various stages of feminism that provided a better stage to raise the concerns of women are discussed. Also the role of a few feminists and social workers who worked hard for the betterment of women in Japanese society.

Keywords: feminism and change, changing society, social workers

Introduction

Feminism in Japan started in the early decade of the 20th century. The change in social values also started in the 20th century, but these changes were boosted after the war. In this article, I am going to discuss feminism and change in social values and their relation. This means it is feminism that changed the social values of Japan. Our discussion will begin with feminism and some noted feminists.

Hiratsuka was a famous feminist of Japan's 1st decade of the 20th century. She launched *seito* (Bluestocking) and expressed her view in the manifesto of its first volume that, 'women were once like son, they were shining of their light, but now they have become a moon, shining from the lights of others'. *Seito's* focus during 1911-1916 was on chastity, abortion, and prostitution. It was a time when Modern Girls were engaged as factory workers, employees, retail workers, bus conductors and telephone operators, cafe waitresses, teachers and nurses.

Hiratsuka along with Yosono Akiko, Yamakawa Kikue and Yamada Waka started the "motherhood protection debate". Yosono's view was to make girls independent. She also said that without being independent no one should marry or have a baby. The liberation of females is possible if they can support themselves without depending on others. Hiratsuka did not agree with her view, because she felt that there are so many poor women who are unable to support themselves without depending on others, but still they need to be empowered and still have rights. Hiratsuka suggested the role of the state in such a situation. It is the responsibility of the state to take care of these women and protect them and the state should fulfil its duties. These women produce children, they will be the wealth of the state and will contribute to making Japan a great nation, which is why they need protection from the state. Yamada supported the philosophy of the "good wife, wise mother". She also claimed that it is the sacred mission of women to be good wives and wise mothers so they can support their husbands in doing office work and they can also support their kids in their education. These three feminists dominated the early debate on feminism. Their debate was a result of 115 articles published in various magazines and journals.

Many Japanese women were associated with global Christian Organisations. These organisations were playing an

important role in improving the lives of women globally. Relation with these organisations gave a clear idea to the Japanese women about the theory of citizenship and movements for labour and social justice, consumer rights and reproductive rights.

In 1918, Ichikawa Fusae, a school teacher and journalist, became a student of Yamada

Kakichi (husband of Yamada Waka). Ichikawa met with Yamada Kakichi and another student of

Yamada Kakichi and famous feminist of the time Hiratsuka.

In 1919, Ichikawa, Hiratsuka and Oku Mumeo founded *Shin Fujin Kyokai* (新婦人協会, New Women's Association, NWA). These three leaders of NWA with the help of other activists and journalists decided to file a petition in the diet to amend Article 5 of the Police Law of 1900 and make changes in Japanese Family Law. Article 5 prohibited women from attending any type of political gathering and it also prohibited them to involve in any kind of political activity as well as the right to vote. There was a provision in the Revised Civil Code of 1989, that if a woman is involved in adultery, her husband can divorce her and she can be jailed for up to 2 years. While there was no such provision if the husband is involved in adultery. So the petition was against these two laws. In 1921, NWA started raising its voice for the voting rights of women. At the same time, differences of opinion between Hiratsuka and Ichikawa arose. Hiratsuka was in favour of *bokenshugi* (Principle of Mother's Rights) while Ichikawa was in favour of *jokenshugi* (Principle of Women's Rights) in the context of citizenship of women. This led to tension in NWA, and finally, both of them left the NWA in 1921. After leaving NWA Ichikawa went to the USA and met Jane Addams and Alice Paul. She was inspired by Alice Paul on the issue of complete political equality for women.

In 1922, article-5 was amended and it gave permission to women to attend political meetings but prohibited them from joining a political party and voting rights. After the amendment of Article 5, Oku Mumeo focused on motherhood and labour issues. To solve the motherhood issues she worked with the suffragists and to solve the labour issues she worked with the socialists. At the same time, some other feminists were also working for the voting rights of women. For this purpose, Yamakawa Kikue with other socialist women formed *Sekirankai* (赤瀾会, Red Wave Society).

Another group that was formed to make demands for women's voting rights was *Nihon Fujin Sanseiken Kyokai* (Japan Women's Suffrage Association) which was founded by Kubushiro Ochimi and Gauntlett Tsune. Ichikawa returned to Japan after the Tokyo earthquake of September 1923 and joined Tokyo Rengo Fujinkai (Tokyo Federation of Women's Organisation). This organisation was the biggest organisation of the time and its purpose was to provide relief work to the people affected by the earthquake. In this organisation there was a 'government section' and its work was to focus on women's rights. Kubushiro Ochimi was the head of this 'government section'. Kubushiro invited Ichikawa to join her *Fusen Kakutoku Domei* (Women's Suffrage League). In the mid-1920, a new type of modern girl emerged, they were known as the 'Modern Girl' (*modan garu* – *Moga*). Few magazines of the time criticised the New Women and Modern Girl for denying their true womanly nature.

Few feminists were also raising their voices for body-related issues. Yamada Kikue was the first to demand rights related to the protection of women's bodies. Her demand was the formation of a women's division, paid maternity leave, eight-hour work days and equal pay for equal work. Although her demand was not accepted maternity leave was improved during the late 1920s. Another important demand was raised by the female bus conductor of Japan in the late 1930s. It was for menstruation leave. At that time women working as bus conductors were expected to stand the whole day, even during their menstrual period. They could not stop the bus to find the toilets. So they demanded leave of several days a month. In Fujin Koron magazine an article has also been published on this issue and was titled "Let's have menstruation leave". About 20% of women feel unbearable pain during their menstruation period, so they need rest during their menstruation period. Finally, a law was passed in 1947 that granted menstruation leaves to women.

Margret Sanger, who advocated birth control in America, visited Japan in 1922. She tried to convince the feminist of Japan that birth control will improve the lives of poor women and will ultimately affect society. Kato Ishimato Shidzue and Yamakawa Kikue with the help of medical doctors and university professors founded a clinic for birth control. In 1932, the Birth control league was formed by Ishimato, but in 1937 she was jailed and in January 1938, her clinic was closed. In 1934, 20 different women's organisations demanded the 'Mother-Child Protection Law' and the demand was "passed in 1937, giving financial assistance to the single and widowed mother".

After the Manchurian incident, most feminists were not satisfied with the foreign policy of Japan. They were criticised by the government for not supporting their nation and to work against the government. So most of them came under the surveillance of the government. Their work for the voting right of women was brought down. Some of them were jailed and some of them cooperated with the government because of fear. It was a time when feminists were trying hard to survive. It was a time when the government intervened in the affairs of women's organisations. "The largest women's organisations during the long prewar and after the war period were those run by the Ministry of Education, the Army and the Home Ministry"^[4]. The purpose of these organisations was criticised by the feminists, who were dissatisfied with the structure of these organisations. These government-affiliated organisations "were run by men, they took potential members

away from the group dedicated to women's rights and they dealt with the women with the perspective of mobilizing them to serve the state through stereotyped women's role"^[2]. In 1937, WSL, YWCA and WCTU organised as a Federation of Japanese Women's Organisation. This made the government suspicious, so it was dis-banned after 3 years. The government also dis-banned many independent women's organisations and the remaining organisations were merged into a single organisation by the government, named Dai Nippon Fujinkai (Greater Japan Women's Association).

After the War, the homes of 9 million people were destroyed. It was a moment when everyone was suffering, but in many cases, women suffered more than men. Many women were widows and they were struggling for their survival. This became more painful because of the presence of Allied forces in Japan. Many sex stations (comfort stations) were opened for the military forces. For this purpose, 1300 young women signed up for Recreation and Amusement Association (it was an organised prostitution facility for military forces to prevent rapes and sexual violence by the troops. Many of them thought of working for RAA temporarily, till they are not getting other jobs, but others accepted it as the only way to survive. RAA lived for a very short time because it brought sexually transmitted diseases and it was thought by the Americans as a violation of human rights. Even after the closing of the RAA, many women worked in a licenced brothel and many of them worked as *pan-pan* (sex workers not affiliated with brothels). These days were painful, even for those who were not involved in any kind of sexual activity. "Women were pulled out from streets and public transport for gynaecological examination and were publicly humiliated. Some were jailed and others were sprayed with toxic disinfectant."^[5]

Ichikawa Fusae, WSL members and some other feminists established the Women's Committee on Post-War Policy in August 1945. In September they held a meeting in which they decided on the action of women to survive and demanded full civil rights including voting rights. In October, the Cabinet decided to grant voting right to women. Before the government could make any announcement, the Supreme Commander for the Allied forces, Gen. Douglas MacArthur presented a list of demands from the USA. In this list voting right for women were on the top. Finally, in 1946, two third of the eligible women voter participated in voting and 39 were elected as a member of the Diet. After voting right, Feminists turned their attention towards giving education to women about their voting rights and also focused on social and political reforms. They formed *Fujin Giin Kurabu* (Women Diet Representative Club) to work on the issues related to mothers, policies for food distribution, milk prices and supplies, and the repatriation of soldiers.

After the war, there were so many changes in Japanese Society, and most of them were the result of the new Constitution, reformed Civil Code, and new Labour Standard Law. The Civil Code of 1947, gave the same grounds for divorce to women which were earlier exclusively for men (grounds like adultery). Birth control and abortion were legalised. Another change was the creation of *Fujin Shyonen Kyoku* (Women's and Minor's Bureau) under the Ministry of Labour for the protection of women and children. This bureau was responsible for the working condition of women and also for the implementation of the laws related to child labour. Yamakawa Kikue was appointed as the first director of this bureau.

The second wave of feminism in Japan was advocated by mostly middle-class married women.

Their purpose was to make Japan a clean, safe and better country. They opposed Japan's role in the Vietnam War. The members of the New feminist organisations were young and they redefined feminism in new terms. They questioned sexuality, motherhood and the oppression of women. They started seeing motherhood as an inequality. They started wearing a pink helmets to legalise contraceptives and sexual double standards. All these ideas of these new feminists were spread through mimeographed magazines. Mainstream media mainly criticised their actions. There was only negative coverage of all these developments until 1975 when United Nations celebrated International Women's Year.

Ichikawa Fusae and Tanaka Sumiko with the other feminist organisations planned to participate in United Nations' meeting in Mexico City. In 1975 they created the International Women's Year Action Group. For this purpose, progressive agenda for the group was adopted. They worked for Equal Employment Opportunity Law and Women's condition. They protested against sexist television commercials. This group with the help of other groups, protested against sex tourism by Japanese men in South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. Another debate of the 1980s was for workplace equality for women. All these efforts led to the enactment of the rules related to the condition of women in the workplace in the form of Article-14 of the Constitution of 1947, the Labour Standard Law of 1947, and the Working Women's Welfare Law of 1972. Article 14 of the Constitution prohibited discrimination based on sex, the Labour Standard Law mandated equal pay for equal work and maternity leave for women and the last one stood for counselling and training of women workers. All these development took place during the 20th century in Japan.

All the above developments not only changed the situation of women in Japan but also granted a crucial role to them. Half of the population, which was ignored for a long time, were now considered a citizen. The workforce of Japan also increased dramatically due to the involvement of women in the workforce. This ultimately led to the transformation of Japanese society and a change in social values. The change in women's condition led to a change of mindset of the people. Because society is a collection of people, and so social behaviour also changed. Change in social behaviour ultimately led to a change in social values. Now we are going to discuss the changes that occurred in the 20th century in terms of social values in Japan.

Most of the basic rights of the women of Japan were granted by the Constitution of 1947. So our analysis of the change in the value will begin after that. The first thing that changed after it, was the fall in the total fertility rate. The total fertility rate in 1950 was 3.65 birth per woman which came to be 2.04, 1.50 and 1.46 in 1957, 1992 and 1993 respectively. This happened because of two things, first delayed marriage and second delayed first birth after marriage. It means the marriage was taking place when people were older than the age at which the marriage was taking place earlier. The average marriage age which was 26.2 for men and 23.6 for women became 30.3 years for men and 26.9 years for women. The delayed age of marriage was the result of the lifestyle of the people and also their efforts to be wealthy before marriage. This changed the economic condition of the people of Japan. The real income per head became eight-fold in

1990, what it was in 1955. The lifestyle of Japanese people also changed dramatically. In 1950, Japan was an agrarian country and most of the people were living in villages. But till 1990 Japan saw massive industrialisation. In the year 1955, only 30 per cent people of in Japan were living in the urban area, while in 1990 this percentage became 70. Lifestyle change ultimately destroyed old institutions of marriage. Since most people started living in urban areas, family ties became less strong than it was in previous days. Everyone was busy with their own life, so the relatives were meeting only occasionally. These meetings of relatives and friends were crucial for old marriage institutions. Most of the Japanese were busy earning money so that they can fulfil their dreams and desires, but in doing so they were working hard, spending more time in offices, and most of them tried to not involve in those things which were irrelevant to them (those things that were taking their precious time, including relatives).

Life expectancy in the same period increased from 50 years to 74 years for men and 54 years to 82 years for women. It means everyone has to spend 24 more years with their father and 28 more years with their mother. Although it was a good thing, not for everyone, especially for the wife of the son.

Although in early Japanese society (during the 19th century), the parents, at a certain point in time, were expected to hand over the responsibility of the household to the eldest son, and they were expected to live in another house built for this purpose. But since most of them were living in urban areas and most of them were unable to manage this thing, they were forced to live with their parents. This also led to a delayed marriage.

The proportion of attending junior college or university increased from 15 per cent in 1950 to 39 per cent in 1990 for men and 5 per cent in 1950 to 43 per cent in 1990 for women. This ratio is important because it played an important role in the process of the change in social values. The education imparted skills and made men and women eligible to work in offices, rather than working in their fields or their households. So education imparted skills and skill gave them jobs. It was a time when industrialisation was taking place in Japan. So there was a huge requirement for a skilled labour force. Japanese people used this chance and participated in the development of the Japanese economy. Although most of them participated in the field of economy, doing so they were detached from the social field. Participation of women in economic activity was against those thoughts which advocated that women should manage the household affairs only. So there was an ideological clash between conservatives and those who supported women's participation. Despite these debates and ideological clashes, women's participation increased. A total of 49 per cent of women worked before marriage in 1950, while this percentage became 98 in 1990. The percentage of women who left their job after marriage also decreased dramatically. Massive development, urbanisation and industrialisation led to a change in the occupational pattern of society. Change in occupational structure eroded old network that was tied based on economic, kinship, and interpersonal relationships in local communities and neighbouring communities. These interpersonal relations and bonds formed the basis for an arranged marriage. After this, the rate of arranged marriage decreased while the rate of love marriage increased. Those values and norms of society also eroded that supported the system of arranged marriage. In 1994, NSFP (a survey

conducting agency) asked the women about their preference for love marriage and arranged marriage. Only seven per cent preferred arranged marriage, while 66 per cent of them preferred arranged marriage. The remaining 27 per cent of them were not sure about their preference. This data shows the desire of women, who did not want to be married according to the old rules of society. Instead, they wanted to choose their future partner themselves. Arranged marriages were efforts of parents, in which parents played a very important role. That is why, after marriage, they were credited for the marriage and lived with the couple. But in love marriage, the parent has nothing to do except their acceptance. Their role in love marriage is very limited, which is why they are not considered very important after marriage. Due to this reason, the ideological gap (most of the time result of the generation gap) can be seen clearly in a love marriage. In arranged marriage life partner is chosen according to the ideology of the parents, while in a love marriage life partner is chosen according to the ideology of his or her partner. Due to this reason, there can be seen as a clear ideological difference between the new member of the family and the old

members. That is why, the percentage of coresidence with parents goes down when the percentage of love marriages goes up. The percentage of coresidence with parents, which was 64 per cent in 1955, became 31 per cent in 1991. The 'new single' concept also played important role in changing social values. It stands for enjoying life as a single person, without the pressure of marriage. In countries like Japan and India, there is a lot of family pressure to marry. Under such pressure, the concept of a 'new single' is directly related to social values. In 1988 National Family Survey conducted a survey in Japan about the concept of a 'new single'. According to this survey the concept of 'new single' was supported by the majority of singles. A total of 59 per cent of single men supported this concept while this concept was supported by 78 per cent of single women. In 1993 a similar survey was conducted by the National Survey on Female Labour, Rearing of Infants, and Care for Elderly. In this survey, the concept of 'new single' was supported by 76 per cent of single women, while it was supported by 62 per cent of single men.

Response	Women					Men				
	1972*	1979	1984	1987	1993	1972*	1979	1984	1987	1993
Women should marry because a woman's happiness lies in marriage	40	32	30	28	14	36	33	33	32	15
Women should marry because marriage provides them with psychic and economic security	21	21	22	24	25	22	23	21	23	26
Marriage is a natural thing for human beings	20	18	18	17	19	26	22	22	24	23
If women can be on their own, they don't have to marry	13	23	24	24	33	7	13	15	16	24
It is better for women not to marry, because marriage places constraints on women's freedom	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.3
Do not know	6	6	6	6	8	9	9	9	6	12
Number of respondents	16,645	4,590	4,431	2,144	1,366	2,413	3,649	3,600	1,635	1,056

* In the 1972 survey, results were tabulated for persons aged 18 and over, instead of 20 and over. The difference of two years makes hardly any difference to the results.
 Source: Prime Minister's Office, *Report on the National Survey on Women* (Tokyo: Government Printing Office, various years). Results for 1993 were calculated from the National Survey on Female Labour; some results were published in Mainichi Newspaper, 'Results from the National Opinion Survey on Female Labour, Rearing of Infants, and the Care for the Elderly' (Morning edition, 4 January 1994).

Table 1

The above data shows that people's behaviour regarding marriage and women's duties changed over time. In 1972 there were 38 per cent (40% women and 36% men) supporters of the old ideology regarding women's role in society. They believed that women's role in society is limited to the household only, and their happiness lies in marriage. While in 1992 the percentage of such people declined to 14.5

per cent (14% women and 15% men). It means during the same period ideology of 58.3 per cent of men changed, while 65% of women's ideology changed. So this ideology changed mainly because of the change in women's ideology. There is another hidden thing in the given table that needs to be pointed out. 'If a woman is on her own, she needs not marry', this statement believes that an independent woman needs not

to marry, she can live alone. But dependent women have to marry. This means marriage makes a women's life easy and gives her life a purpose and dignity in society. This cannot be said that a woman needs to marry just because of psychic and economic security. That is why the percentage of those who believed that marriage provides psychic and economic security to women remained the same. While the percentage of those who believed that if a woman is on her own, she needs not to marry increased from 10 per cent (13 per cent of women and 7 per cent of men) to 28.5 per cent (33 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men). There is a change in this data because of a change in men's perception of marriage. This means most of the men were convinced by the fact that women can live on their own if she wants.

All these changes that were taking place in society, increased pre-marital sexual intercourse. NSFP (National Survey on Family Planning) conducted a survey in 1990 about pre-marital sexual intercourse, in which only women were selected as a sample. In this survey, 35 per cent of women accepted that they had pre-marital sexual intercourse. In 1994 NSFP again did the same survey, but this time the percentage went to 42 per cent. NSFP in this survey also found that the change in sexual behaviour is faster in rural areas than the urban areas, in those who live alone (for education or work) than in those who live with parents. During the same period, the number of single women (of the age group between 20-24) who were using contraceptives also increased. The proportion of such women was 45 per cent in 1990 and it became 68 per cent in 1994. Women's behaviour about abortion also changed. The proportion of women who supported abortion was 33 per cent in 1990 and it became 42 per cent in 1994. There is old but relevant data about the sexual behaviour of youth. In 1974 only 17 per cent (23% of boys and 11% of girls) of students of Junior colleges and Universities had sexual intercourse. In 1987, their number increased and a total of 36.5 per cent (47% of boys and 26% of girls) had sexual intercourse. This data shows that the new generation was attracted towards sexual intercourse. Their behaviour was changing and they were more open to doing it, which ultimately led to a change in social values.

The behaviour of the men and women also changed about the ideal age of marriage. In 1992, a survey was conducted about the ideal age of marriage, according to this survey ideal age of marriage for women was 25.4 years while for men it was 28 years. Not only the ideal age of marriage increase but also the interval between marriage and first birth increased. This interval was 16.4 months in 1955 which increased to 27.1 months in 1992. The major factor responsible for this interval was the declining proportion of those women who left their job after marriage. The proportion of those women who left their job after their marriage was 78 per cent, which declined and became 56 per cent in 1992. This happened partly because of the concept of 'new marriage' and partly because of women's empowerment. The concept of 'new marriage' stands for enjoying married life without having children. This concept changed the source of emotional satisfaction for a woman. Earlier to this the source of emotional satisfaction for women was her child, now it has become her husband. This thing also helped in changing social values in Japan.

All of the above changes that we have discussed, had their impact on the social values of Japan.

Directly or indirectly feminism in Japan played an important role in these changes in social values. Hiratsuka's call for women to become independent (without which she suggested

not marrying) led to women's education because without education there was very limited scope for jobs. Although in starting women were working only before their marriage, it slowly led to the confidence that they can work even after the marriage, if there is a need. This thought was also supported by the demand of feminists for equal pay and equal citizenship. Educationally they were equal because they were getting an equal chance of education (although their field of education was limited to home science in the early decades, there was no restriction and over time most of them opted for the same field of study). Over time, they got the right to participate in political meetings which led them to openly talk and understand the political affairs of the country (they were prohibited from joining any political party in starting). This led to open debate among men and women which ultimately led to a change in the behaviour of society towards women. Now society was at least ready to hear their voices and demands.

When the new Constitution was introduced, women got equal political rights in the country. Although at that time, they were not socially equal. The right, to vote and the selection of a few women as a member of the Diet made them believe that they are getting a respected place in society. It also changed social behaviour towards women. Since feminism started in the early decade of the 20th century, during mid 20th century most of the supporters of feminism were now parents of a new generation. They gave freedom to them, for what they had fought. Although such children were few in number but modernisation and industrialisation gave them a prestigious place not only among their friends but also in society.

Urbanisation was already taking place in Japan, and the proportion of agrarian society was declining, people were now living a lifestyle in urban areas. This lifestyle of the urban area was more expensive than the lifestyle of the rural area. So there was more demand for money, in such a situation their educated wife (they were educated because of the concept of 'good wife, wise mother' which educated women's education, but its purpose was to help children in education) helped them. Women got a chance to work outside of the home to meet the expenses of the home. Although in stating they were not getting equal pay as their male counterpart was getting, they raised their voices (which was now heard by the whole society) against this discrimination. So we can say that feminism has directly or indirectly changed the values of society. Sometimes change in the values were not intended but there is no doubt that ultimately this change was boosted by feminism. Whether it was higher education or it was love marriage, change was not possible without feminism. Even if it was possible then certainly it was going to take some more decades. Higher education of women led the competition and opened their minds to modern thoughts. This led them to believe that the social values of Japan have become older and needed reform. This concept is supported by the emergence of the concept of 'new single' and 'new marriage'.

Now the question is, 'Was it only feminism that changed the social values of Japan?'. The answer is 'no'. Because society is made up of interrelated norms and values. These values are multidimensional in nature. As in the puppet game, even just for one step of the puppet, many strings are pulled, just like that in society, even for a single change so many values and norms are pulled. So we cannot say that it was only feminism that led to change in the social values of Japan. But

undoubtedly feminism played an important role in changing social values. There were impacts of global changes, changes in ideologies of the people, industrialisation, modernisation, and urbanisation, all these things led to the change in the social values of Japan. Feminism boosted all these factors and made it possible for half of the population to participate in these changes.

Keywords

Feminism, Japanese Society, Japan, Feminism in Japan, Japanese social norms, Japanese modern women, Japanese values, Moden Garu, *Seito*, Yosono Akiko, Ichikawa, Hiratsuka, Oku Mumeo, *Shin Fujin Kyokai*, *bokenshugi*, *jokenshugi*, *Sekirankai*, *Nihon Fujin Sanseiken Kyokai*, *Fusen Kakutoku Domei*

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