Women: Their Rise Over Time Essay, Research Paper

Women: Their Rise Over Time

Dating back to ancient times, the role of women has never reached true equality with men. We can trace this inequality back to as early as the great Athenian society, where life as we know it today started taking form. On the other side of the inequality, throughout the ancient history of the world, the roles and positions that women have had have improved over time. We can see this tracing time from Athens, to Sparta, the Roman Republic, it’s Empire and the rise of Christianity. Although some of theses societies lived parallel in time, each one shows a difference in the way they treat women. Each one did not treat women the same, but the end result compared to the beginning is positive for women.

According to Xenophon’s “Household Management” in Athenian society the women were looked at as possessions. The Athenian woman would be given to the man by their parents. It was like a business deal and the bride to be had no say in it at all. She was typically much younger than the man. Often times, half their age if the man had a previous wife but was now divorced. To a man, a skilled woman was a valuable tool. The major skills of the woman included cooking, sewing and weaving. The wife simply stayed at home and took care of the house duties. She watched over anything that came in and out of the house. If a woman could tend to the household chores and master sewing or weaving she would be considered valuable. It was her responsibility to manage the house while the men were at work or at war. Once the woman became the property of the man he had the opportunity to control her in any way he liked. She would be kept under

strict restraint so that she would see as little, hear as little and ask as few questions as possible. The relationship between the husband and wife saw little romance, it appeared like more of a business relationship than anything else. The woman should feel lucky to have the man as a husband. They consulted together on the potential birth of a child and their main goal was to produce good offspring. All of the power lied within the hands of the husband. (Xenephon)

In the exerpt from “Antigone”, Creon the king represented human law and Haemon, his son represented divine law. Creon was the new King of Thebes and was a strict ruler of the state. On the other hand, Haemon, his son was influenced more by the divine law of gods. They clashed because of their difference in views of women. They disagreed with each other in the treatment of women. Antigone was grieving for her dead brother who broke the law by accidentally marrying his mother and Creon had no sympathy for her what so ever. As punishment, Antigone’s brother was left unburied so that his corpse would be further ruined by the weather and animals. If the body was mangled, then it could not be worshipped. Antigone didn’t want to leave his side because she felt that she owed allegiance to her family instead of the state. So she tried to bury him in the dirt which made Creon angry. Creon was looked at as a bully by the rest of the community but he refused to be beaten by a woman because he could never be weaker than woman kind. He refused to give in to a woman because he believed that women were inferior to men and therefor not be listened to. Haemon felt deep sympathy for Antigone and argued against his father’s opinion. Haemon did not believe that Antigone was sick with disease like his father believed. In the end, Antigone committed suicide. Haemon saw this and he took his own life too. As soon as Creon heard of this happening, he is left in despair. Creon also admitted that his fate had brought him down and his life was permanently warped because he tried to rule above the gods. This showed that while Haemon respected Antigone, the King did not, so there were no laws giving women rights or political power. (Sophocles)

In Sparta, women for the most part had equality to men. Women were promoted to take good care of their bodies. According to Lycurgus, founder of the Spartan constitution, women were ordered to take part in sporting events. These sporting events included wrestling, running, throwing, and dart casting. This was vital to the success to the Spartans society. This was so important so that they might conceive a strong, healthy child. It was common for a woman to have multiple children with more than one man in hopes to produce healthy offspring. While men were off to war most of the time women assumed the responsibilities that the men did. They displayed great superiority throughout all daily tasks. They were treated with great respect, even called queen as a measure of respect. (Plutarch)

From the excerpt of “The Republic”, Plato gave his vision of his ideal society. This society however did not coincide with the real Athenian society. Plato made the women in the society look more equal to men than they actually were in Athens. He said that woman had the same duties as the man, be it music, gymnastic and even war. This did not reflect the state of Athens. Plato also said that women had the same nurture and education as men. In Athens, the woman stayed within the confines of the home and was only educated for home duties. Plato also recognized women as philosophers. This also was not evident in the Athenian society. In fact, the true light of woman in Athens at the time was really quiet different. Women were not treated equal as men and were treated more like slaves than anytime else. Women were the property of men without choice. Women did not have the choice to be free thinkers and to be philosophers. (Plato)

With Julius Caesar the newly self declared Emperor of Rome, big change developed for women. The basics were still intact but an extraordinary change occurred. Perhaps the biggest and most important of these changes was the fact that women could freely marry who they wanted. Instead of being given to a man like property. Their guardian or father still remained the sole authorizer over them, but these new orders made happiness evident in couples. Married couples were looked at as loving for each other, which is the opposite of a marriage in Athens. Of course, the only draw back to this new freedom was that the woman had to be part of the honestior class, the more honorable class. This was the trend for others freedoms for women in the Empire. Some women were allowed to attend literary readings, and take part in philosophical readings outside the home. And just as easy as it was to get married, it was to become divorced. This choice was common, but the importance of this is not the divorce, but the choice.

With the rise of Christianity, the Roman Empire was falling apart. The ideal society with women was still without equal rights and men on top with power. One man changed the rights of woman forever, and perhaps the most important time in the ancient history of women. That man was sent from heaven as the son of God, his name was Jesus. Jesus, was true advocate for women and believed in their rights. He believed that the duties of a woman should not be restricted to within just the confines of the home. In one instance Jesus visited a home of two sisters. One sister chose to sit with Jesus and listen to his teachings, while the other sister attended to household chores. Jesus said to the sister that it is more valuable and proper to listen to his teachings, and worship than to attend to chores. Chores only distract people from worshipping their religion. Jesus also believed that when a man and woman were married they became one. So they endured the same responsibilities as each other. They were supposed to be faithful to each other mentally and more importantly at the time, physically. It was just as bad to want thy neighbor as to actually commit adultery. In any case that the wife did commit adultery, she had a chance to live, and not die like if she were a member of the Roman Republic or Empire. Instead, they would just be punished without death as a

consequence. The Christian community respected women like anyone else, they were treated the same as others. (Jesus) (Christian)

As we can see, not all women were treated equal to each other, and certainly not to men. But over time it is obvious that the end result is better off. Like any minority, it takes time to eventually find level ground. The struggle that women have faced is thousands of years old and still to this day perfect equality between men and women is absent. The issued that were important to women in ancient history are still important today. For instance, women still find that they want to have political power, and good paying jobs. They want to be liberal and speak their minds. But like today, women are better off now than they were 200 years ago.