



Empowering Women by Safeguarding Their Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

Women in India consistently lag behind the men in terms of access to education, health care, jobs etc. Apart from the economic and social inequality, women in India are victims of heinous crimes such as, dowry deaths, rape, molestation and immoral trafficking. As per the latest statistics; • The female child sex ratio (0-6 years) is 914 per 1000 males •

Rural female literacy rate only 58% while rural male 78% • Women employment in urban areas is only 13.9% while in rural areas is 29.9%. With the rise in poverty, many women are forced to work in very low end and low paid jobs. • Employment of women in organized sector is less than 8%. • Women especially in the child bearing age often deficient in nutrition due to poverty. As a result the number of maternal deaths in India is one of the highest in the world and 87% of all pregnant women in India are anemic. • Women are made psychologically weak and thus become incapable of thinking in optimistic way. They ought not disturb themselves and their children. Unless drastic measures are taken to improve female literacy, create skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet and care for themselves and family, it will be difficult for India to prosper as a nation. Many NGOs are working at the grass root level to empower women to attain economic participation in order to overcome poverty and inequality. You can support this effort by contributing to the following causes to help in the empowerment of marginalized women. In our paper we like to bring a very brief note on human rights of women.

KEYWORDS :

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless condition of woman is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly only with one wing"

-SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Human rights are crystallization of values that are the common heritage of human kind and human rights of women are judged in context of the type of society we envision. We envision a society in which we can act on our own behalf with dignity and freedom recognizing that we have both, the right and obligation to develop our full potential and to support the development of others. It has been observed that women are human beings like men and their rights are human rights and feminism cannot be delinked from human rights.

If one wants to know how developed or modern a particular society or nation is one should try to look at the status of women in that particular society or nation as their status is the only true reflection of a country, culture and civilization. Women comprise half the populations of the world but their rights are violated virtually in every society, developed or developing, Eastern or Western and rich and poor. Hence, nowadays greater emphasis is being put on empowering them so that they can develop and realize their full potential and contribute to the society and nation as well.

This cannot happen until and unless their human rights are protected and their effective implementation is ensured. Empowering women basically means to provide them opportunities to live and work "with dignity", the core principle of all human rights.

What is meant by Empowerment?

For us empowerment, means to let woman live their own life in a way they think appropriate on the basis of their own life in a way they think appropriate on the basis of their own life in a way they think appropriate on the basis of their conditions, family circumstances qualities and capabilities of which they themselves are the best judges. Demand for empowering is not a demand for equality or superiority; it is the demand to let them realize their own true self. This shouldn't be denied to them on any basis whatsoever, anywhere, anytime and any place. To realize this ideal an appropriate environment should be created which is not an easy task. For this efforts will have to be made at every level and in every sphere.

Medical:

Medically women should be provided good and easily approachable medical facilities especially during pregnancy [both prenatal and postnatal] and infancy to ensure their life and health. They have a "right to be born" which is being snatched away from them with the

aid of science through sonography which is being used as sex-determination test and check infanticide.

Education:

Educationally, women would be armed with the tool of proper education which awakens them and makes them conscious of their rights and equal status in society. This will be in the greater of the society at large and will have far reaching and lasting impact, because women as mothers are called the first educators of their children. In the word of Radhakrishnan "one girl graduate is equal to five boy graduates".

Society:

Socially, in most of the places, at least in practice, if not formally women have only secondary status to man. Social norms and values will have to be transformed to ensure that women are not discriminated against only on the basis of sex in all walks of life. The status of women empowered in such a way that they are no more dependents than self-reliant with self esteem.

Political:

Women's participation in politics and decision making process has to be ensured, at every level to make them politically strong so that they can facilitate proper legislation for protecting rights of women. This can be done through "progressive Reservation Policy"

Legal:

Women should be given adequate legal education to make them capable of descending their own rights, then, their legislative dues. This is essential as without legal knowledge and activism all the formal constitutional arrangements made by the state become redundant.

Psychological and Cultural Aspect:

In some cultures women are brought up in a way that they accept their "secondary status" automatically as "natural" without raising any questions which is in born and were nurtured so. In such cases they are incapable to fight for their status or rights. It is the duty of the women that they themselves bring up their children in an independent way to voice their discrimination. Their minds have to condition to think and protest against inhuman discrimination. This is the most difficult hurdle in the path of their empowerment and will have to be fought out at grass root level and for a long time to come. Morally women to be hard and tough in their attitude.

Empower:

Efforts in all the above mentioned directions can only help to nurture their nature and potential, their inherent qualities but still significance of these efforts cannot be minimized or underrated. If we really want

to empower women, we will have to ensure that in none of these fields there is any hindrance at any level, which often happens practically in all the societies. By developing these entire aspects one can create acceptable environment where their rights, status and dignity will be ensured and become "empowered".

Human Rights of Women and United Nations

We envision human rights for women as the "collective rights of woman to be seen and accepted as a person with the capacity to decide or act on her own behalf and to have equal access to resources and equitable social, economic and political support to develop her full potential, exercise her right as a human being and to support the development of others."

The United Nations General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and the Secretariat are the three main UN bodies which have been functioning for the protection and advancement of human rights of women. In addition to these organizations there is also a Special Commission on the Status of Women [1946] which has been functioning to achieve this lofty ideal. This Commission has introduced the problem of women's rights into their programmes of activity.

The UN efforts to promote the principle of equal rights of men and women were initially directed towards securing equality of men and women in law. UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensure freedom of women from social, sexual and religious discrimination in a variety of ways. The UN General Assembly has established International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women [INSTRAW] to carry out research, training and international activities worldwide to promote women as key agents of development.

United Nations has had more than 23 conventions that are related to human rights of women. Out of these conventions some of the more important are:

- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discriminations against women, 1979.
- Convention on political rights of women, 1952.
- Convention on the consent of marriage minimum age of marriage and registration of marriages, 1962.
- Convention on the rationality of married women, 1957 and
- Convention on the recovery abroad of maintenance.

In 1960, the General Assembly adopted the convention against discrimination in education which prohibits, any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference on account of sex and affecting thereby the equality of treatment in education, Article[1].

The economic and Social Council of the UN is empowered to make recommendations for promoting a respect and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and the special commission on the status of women [2946] also makes recommendations to the ECOSOC to promote the rights of women.

In 1951, the International Labour Organization [ILO] adopted a convention concerning equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value, of course this has not been worked out and the women laborers' are still given less remuneration than men. ILO adopted two other conventions to improve the working conditions of women i.e., convention concerning night work of women employed in industry, 1948 and the convention concerning maternity protection [revised], 1952.

The 1986, declaration on the right to development also specifies that [lie States shall co-operate in the realization of Human Rights and fundamental freedoms for all without any distinction as to race, sex, language or religion [Article6{1}]. States are further required to take effective measures, "to ensure that women have an active role in the development process"[Article 8].

India is party to all these convention on consent of marriage, minimum age for marriage and registration of marriages, where a lot is still desired to be done at the national level. India has also signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which 10 out of 30 articles specifically endorse equal rights for all human beings irrespective of their sex. India is also a signatory to the two human rights cove-

nants-1966 i.e. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which reinforce the equality concept and forbid discrimination on account of sex (Article 3).

Human Rights of Women in India

When the sages of ancient India prayed, "SarveBhawantuSukhina, SarveSantuNiramaya, sarvebhadranipashyantu ma kashchidukhbhagbhavet", they recognized the rights of all human beings throughout the nook-and corner of the world irrespective of Caste, Colour, Creed, Sex,

Country or Region to have good quality of life free from diseases, want, degradation, tensions and worries. Human rights are not mere ideals or aspirations, they are also not rights granted to us by the existence of particular sets of law. They are claims made by virtue of the fact that, "we are human beings with an inalienable right to human dignity".

In keeping up with the Indian ethos, history and rich cultural heritage [in Rig Veda too three types of civil liberty find place i.e. of Tana(body), of Skridhi (dwelling house) and of Jibasi (life)], Indian leaders, even during the freedom movement and before independence "with vision and foresight had induced human rights in their agenda for post-independence India."

Within a year of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the Constituent Assembly of India incorporated the substance of most of these rights, in the Constitution of India. Inclusion of a Bill of Rights in the constitution of India accorded with the contemporary democratic and humanitarian temper and constitutional practice in other nations of the world.

The Fundamental Rights incorporated in Part III, the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV and the subsequently added Fundamental Duties in Part IV A actually constitute one organic unit which itself flows and follows from the Preamble-the very conscience of the Constitution of India. To give a few examples, "Equality of sexes and non-discrimination on the basis of sex" has been assured in articles 14,15 and of fundamental rights and article 39(d) assures women equal pay for equal work along with men. Good and congenial working conditions for women have been assured under article 39© and article 42 spells out social security for women.

In addition to constitutional arrangements some institutions have been established which are specifically devoted to protection and promotion of human rights norms under the Constitution of India and fulfillment of commitments under the international human rights law. Some of their institutions specifically working for protection and promotion of human rights of women are:

1. The National Commission for Women,
2. The National Human Rights Commission, and
3. Human Rights and Women's Commissions in various states.

Human rights are crystallization of values that are the common heritage of humankind and human rights of women are judged in context of the type of society we envision. We envision a society in which we can act on our own behalf with dignity and freedom recognizing that we have both, the right and obligation to develop our full potential and to support the development of others. It has been observed time and again that women are human beings like men and their rights are human rights and feminism cannot be delinked from human rights.

The uphill task and long drawn out battle of protecting human rights of women and empowering them can be only won when sincere efforts are constantly made at every level i.e. individual, family, society, national and international.

Let us take a pledge to work to attain this noble goal with commitment through concerned efforts and strive to excel while chanting the hymns of Vedas with Swami Vivekananda, "ARISE, AWAKE AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS ACHIEVED."

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