



Social Issues Faced by Women in Indian Society

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ABSTRACT

Women's are the wealth of India and they have contributed in almost every field and made country feel proud at every occasion. They are in front, leading the country, making mile stones and source of inspiration for many. At present women's are contributing and participating in every sphere, politics, business, education, science and technology, media, sports, art and culture etc. However this is the one face of coin and on the other side of coin is the hard truth of the Indian society. There is systematic discrimination and neglect from early childhood of women's in India, which could be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labour and domestic violence. The fear of sexual violence has been a powerful factor in restricting women's behavior and sense of freedom. The struggle against violence is actually the struggle against the unequal distribution of power both physical and economic between the sexes. It is important to address the root cause for the subordinate status of women in the Indian society. Men should perceive women not as subservient being but as empowered individuals who are equal partners. The issues need to be seen in the context of a patriarchal social framework and a value system based on 'son preference', such as the son being responsible for the carrying forward of the family name, support in old age and for performing the last rites. Further, the practice of dowry and the tag of 'Parayadhan' translate into daughters being considered an economic liability. Women's are not only entitled for survival but also to a life with dignity, grace and equal opportunities so that they can grow to their full potential. There is an urgent need to pay attention to the issues that concern this section of population. The focus should be on poverty reduction, gender justice, health, nutrition, sustained awareness of rights and redressal, eradication of social evils etc.

KEYWORDS : Domestic violence, Dowry, politics, Discrimination,,, Eradication of social evils.

INTRODUCTION:

Women in independent India are comparatively in a more respectable position. Some of the problems which had been haunting the community of women for centuries are not found now. Problems such as child marriage, practice of 'sati', prohibition on widow remarriage, exploitation of widows, devadasi system, purdah system, etc. have almost disappeared. Development in the field of science and technology, universalisation of education, socio-political movements, modernisation and similar developments have changed the approach of people towards women to a certain extent.. Hillary Clinton, US secretary of State, addressing the Delhi University students on 20 July 2009 said that "women's roles and rights are as important as any issue we can list. Women are the key of economic growth. It's been established through research". These developments boosted the morale and self-confidence of women. As a result, Indian women now feel that they too have their own individuality, personality, self-respect, talent, capacity and efficiency. Many of those women who could grab the opportunities extended to them have proved that they are capable of discharging the responsibilities assigned to them on par with men. The nation which neglected almost 50% of its population for several centuries has now understood the necessity of giving equal rights and opportunities to its womenfolk.

REVIEW LITERATURE:

Many studies have concentrated on the status of women in the society. A review literature was added to this study by referring to different journal and studies conducted by different journal and studies conducted by different individuals. Women faced the problems of men attitude towards women, social structure which is still more dominant, the twin roles of women cause tension and conflict. So, that's why they under estimate women's capability and her skills. Some social problems are negative thoughts towards women, unequal treatment, lack of proper support from their family members and career barriers.

CONCEPTUALISATION:

The Constitution of India provides equal rights and opportunities to women. It does not make any discrimination on the grounds of sex. Indian women are also responding positively to this changed socio-political situation. This does not mean that our women are completely free from problems. On the contrary, the changing situation is causing them new problems. They are now beset with new stresses and strains. Some of the major problems haunting the modern woman may briefly be analysed here.

1. Increasing Violence against Women:

i. Violence is almost universal

Most societies exhibit violence in one way or another. Violence

against men or women is a social problem because; a large number of people are affected by it almost every day. Each of us is affected in countless ways by the climate of violence.

ii. Women as Victims of Violence:

"Women in Indian society have been victims of ill-treatment, humiliation, torture, and exploitation for as long as written records of social organisation and family life are available. These records are replete with incidents of abduction, rape, murder, and torture of women.

iii. Increasing Crimes against Women:

As per the report [1994] of the "Crime Record Bureau" of the Central Home Ministry, crimes against women increased to a great extent in the year 1993-94. As per this report, in India on an average, (i) every day for every 6 minutes one atrocity is committed against woman; (ii) for every 44 minutes a woman is kidnapped; (iii) for every 47 minutes a woman is raped; (iv) every day 17 dowry deaths take place. The same report says that crimes against women increased two times in the last 10 years; instances of rape by 400% in the last two decades; instances of kidnapping and blackmailing women by 30% between 1974 and 1993. In 1993 alone about 82,818 instances of crimes against women were registered. Many cases are not registered. It is said that only 10% of the rape cases are reported.

Violence against Women within and Outside Family:

In a male dominated society like India violence against women are unfortunately increasing at an alarming rate. Such violence can be grouped into two types: (a) violence against women within the family, and (b) violence against women outside the family.

(a) Violence against Women within the Family or Domestic Violence:

Women are often subject to violence within the family, a place which is expected to protect their dignity and assure their safety. This type of violence includes crimes such as - dowry related harassments including death, wife-battering, marital rape, sexual abuse of female children and women of one's own family, deprivation of sufficient food to female members, committing incestuous offences, inducing female members of the family to resort to sex-trade, female genital mutilation, abusing female servants of the family, and so on.

(b) Violence against Women outside the Family or Social Violence:

Kidnapping, raping and murdering women are very serious offences. The society at large itself is to be blamed for many types of violence's that are committed against women especially outside the family.

2. Gender Discrimination:

Gender discrimination refers to "the practice whereby one sex is given preferential treatment over the others.

Different Faces of the Practice of "Gender Discrimination":

In comparison with some other social problems, "gender discrimination" does not "appear" to be a serious problem in India. It "appears" to be so because; it has not been made a very big social issue so far. But in reality, it has weakened the strength of the female community of India. Though constitutionally men and women are equal, socially men are given priority and importance sometimes to the disadvantage of women. There are various areas wherein this discrimination is apparent.

- (i) Discrimination in Socialisation.
- (ii) Discrimination in the Distribution of Power and Work.
- (iii) Women's Health is ignored.

a. Women neglecting their Own Health:

Studies have revealed that our women themselves are neglecting their own health. Normally Indian women consume less food [that is, on an average 100 calories a day] and spend more energy on work.

b. Women have their own reasons to neglect their health:

Not finding free time to go to health centres because of heavy work at home; non-availability of proper medical facility to test the health or ill-health of the mother and the child especially in the primary health centres; inability to walk a long distance to reach a well equipped health centre in the absence of proper transportation facility; non-availability of female doctors in the nearby health centres, etc., are some such excuses.

- (iv) Decline in the Female Population.
- (v) Gender Discrimination in Occupations and Public Life.

3. Problems of Female Education:

Social reformers and social thinkers believe that in a nation like India giving education to women in as large a number as possible can prove to be a panacea for many of the problems of women. Accordingly, much attention is paid to the education of women after independence. The female literacy level is also increasing steadily. It has increased from 18.7% in 1971 to 39.42% in 1991 and to 64% in 2001. In spite of this change in the trend towards literacy, some problem has cropped up. We find glaring differences between the level of education of men and women. For example,

- i. It is found that girls are being discouraged to go for higher education and also for professional and technical education.
- ii. There are regional imbalances also. In states like Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra, female education is encouraged and given almost equal importance. Whereas in states like Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh etc. education of girls is neglected even today.

4. Problems Relating to Employment and Unemployment of Women:

In the economic field the situation is such that majority of women who are ready to work are not finding suitable work to their satisfaction. Those who are in the employment sector are becoming the objects of exploitation and harassment.

i. Large Number of Employed Women is Illiterate:

Of every 100 women employed, 52.59% of them are illiterate and 28.56% of them have studied only up to elementary level. Of every 100 women working in the rural areas, 88.11% are illiterate.

ii. Decreasing economic participation of women:

Technological development seems to have a negative effect on employment opportunities of women. Studies conducted between 1975-85 have revealed this fact..

5. Harassment of Women at Work Place:

Nearly 1/3 of our labour force [32%] consists of women. Working women constitute 16.43% of the female population of the country. As per 1991 Census, the number of working women was around 278.35 million, representing a growth rate of 26.12% over

the previous decade. The percentage increase of working women during the last decade was double that of male workers. The main problem with these female workers is that they are harassed in work place in different ways. "Harassment" refers to the basic violation of an individual's rights. Not only the rights of working women are violated, they are often sexually harassed also.

- i. Economic Exploitation
- ii. Threat of Removal from Job
- iii. Women are given More Work
- iv. Discrimination in Giving Opportunities
- v. Sexual Harassment of Women

6. Exploitation of women in the media

- (i) Journalism as Print Media and Women
- (ii) Visual Media and Women
- (iii) Advertisements and Women
- (iv) Media and Women Movements

7. Divorce and Desertion:

During the recent years, instances of desertion and divorce are increasing making the lives of many women very miserable.

8. The Problem of Dowry:

Dowry is both a practice and a problem associated with the Indian marriage. Though it was more in practice among the Hindus, it has now spread to almost all the religious communities of India. Dowry refers to "...the property, money, ornaments or any other form of wealth which a man or his family receives from his wife or her family at the time of marriage." The age-old practice of dowry has now assumed the form of a social evil because the bride's family is compelled to give some dowry as a price for marriage. It has become a social bane and a kind of bargain.

- ii. Dowry harassments are many. Women are ill-treated, disrespected, man-handled, tortured and subject to all sorts of cruelties in the name of dowry. Very often, our daily papers flash news about the tragic results of the dowry system, in which the newly married girls are always the victims of harassment, violence, murder and suicide. Dowry is demanded as though it is a fundamental right of the bride-groom. Violence against women who give less dowry or no dowry include - wife battering, emotional neglect / torture, verbal abuse, refusal of sufficient food, imposition of heavy physical work, severe physical harassments to the extent of killing the victim, and so on. In spite of the legislation against the practice of dowry, it persists. Demands for dowry have even caused dowry deaths. According to an estimate, as many as 4148 dowry deaths were reported in the year 1990 and it increased to 4366 in the year 1993, and to 6205 in the year 1994, that is, at the rate of one dowry death for every 17 minutes.
- iii. Dowry leads to the degradation of women. Prevalence of the practice of dowry reflects the inferior status of women in society. As early as in 1961 itself, The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in order to prevent the practice of dowry. It was amended in 1986 to make its provisions more severe and stringent. In spite of this Act, the practice continues to be in vogue.

9. Decline in the Political Participation of Women:

Participation of women who constitute 50% of our total population in politics and public life is very much negligible in India. We find only a negligible number of women in prestigious positions like those of Central and State cabinet ministers, governors, secretaries and legal advisers to the governments, ambassadors to other countries, IPS, IAS, IFS officers, judges in courts, mayors of big cities, office bearers of all-India parties, etc. No political party of India has given position to women in accordance with their number in the total population. In some areas seats are reserved for women as we find in Gram Panchayat, Jilla Panchayat, University Senate, etc. Even in these areas women have not constituted themselves into a "pressure group". Hence in our political life, we have caste lobbies, linguistic lobbies, capitalist lobbies, minority lobby, etc. but we do not have "women lobby" to bring pressure on the government.

i. Increasing Violence and Terrorism in Politics:

Political corruption, criminalisation of politics, erosion of political values, disappearance of political decency, instability, lawlessness, terrorism and confusion have been increasing in our public life since 1980s. This state of confused political situation has discouraged women from

taking active role in politics.

ii. Minimum Representation of Women in Lok Sabha:

The representation of women in Lok Sabha has been very poor since 1962 elections. For ex: there were only 33 elected women members in the third Lok Sabha [out of 494 members] after the 1962 elections. In the 6th Lok Sabha out of 544 elected members there were only 19 women members and their percentage was only 3.4. In the 10th Lok Sabha [1991 Elections] there were 39 elected women members and their percentage was 7.4. iii. In the 1996 Elections for the 11th Lok Sabha though the total number of women voters increased to 28.24 crores [47%], only 477 women candidates as against 14,250 men candidates contested for 543 seats. [In the 1991 Elections for the 10th Lok Sabha 325 women candidates contested as against 8,374 men candidates for 521 seats]. iv. In the 1999 General Elections for the 13th Lok Sabha also women's participation was the poorest one. Though political parties were speaking vociferously in terms of 33% reservation for women in legislative bodies including the Parliament, no political party had given tickets to women in more than 10%. In some parties, the percentage of women candidates was not even 2 to 3.

CONCLUSION:

Since ages, women continue to feel to be a weaker section of society. Biologically, it can be said and may be true that woman is not as strong as man, but being physically weak does not mean that she should be sealed within the four walls of home limiting herself to the biological role, resulting in life long dependence on man. In spite of the opportunities thrown open to her in various fields along with some labour-saving gadgets in the house, she still seeks a place as an independent honorable human being. The concept of equality has exercised a powerful emotional appeal in the struggle of women to free them from age-old oppression. The only long-term solution is to change the mindsets of the people they need to view women with respect and as equal partners in building India's society. We need different strategies to protect women's rights – more efficient application of laws, gender sensitization of police and other officials, a strong and working legal system, direct service provision for women who have survived violence and, most importantly, changing behaviours and attitudes towards women,

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