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PROBLEMS Of WOMEN IN INDIA

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KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

As of March 2001, the female population stands at 495.4 million out of total 1,028 million Indian population. Thus, in the present population of 1.03 billion, there ought to be 528 million women. Instead, estimates show only 496 million women in the population today. This implies that there are some 32 million "missing" women in India. Some are never born, and the rest die because they do not have the opportunity to survive. Sex-ratio (number of female per 1,000 male) is an important indicator of women's status in the society. In 1901 there were 972 females per 1,000 males, while by 1971; the ratio has come down to 930 females per 1,000 males. In 1981 there has been only a nominal increase in the female sex ratio within 934 females to 1,000 males. There were only 926 females per 1000 males in India according to 1991 census. The 2001 census indicate that the trend has been slightly arrested with the sex ratio at 933 females per 1000 males, with Kerala at 1058 females. The sex ratio of the 0-6 age group has declined sharply from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. According to UNFPA State of world population 2005, Punjab (793), Haryana (820), Delhi (865), Gujarat (878) and Himachal Pradesh (897) have worst child sex ratio. Scheduled Tribes have fairly respectable CSR of 973 but that falls for Scheduled Castes it falls at 938.For non SC/ST population it stands at 917.Rural India has 934 per 1000 and for urban India it stands at 908.In most states least literate districts have superior CSR compared to their most literate counterparts. One reason for the adverse juvenile sex ratio is the increasing reluctance to have female children. For women the literacy rate stands at 54.16 per cent. Still, 245 million Indian women cannot read or write, comprising the world's largest number of unlettered women. National averages in literacy conceal wide disparities. For instance, while 95 per cent of women in Mizoram are literate, only 34 per cent of women in Bihar can read and write. The average Indian female has only 1.2 years of schooling, while the Indian male spends 3.5 years in school. More than 50 per cent girls drop out by the time they are in middle school. Similarly, life expectancy has increased for both the sexes; it has increased to 64.9 years for women and 63 years for men according to UN Statistic Division (2000). The Working women population has risen from 13% in 1987 to 25% in 2001.

However the UNFPA State of World Population 2005 states that about70% of graduate Indian women are unemployed. Women constitute 90 per cent of the total marginal workers of the country. Rural women engaged in agriculture form 78 per cent of all women in regular work. They are a third of all workers on the land. The traditional gender division of labour ensures that these women get on average 30 per cent lower wages than men. The total employment of women in organized sector is only 4 per cent. Although industrial production increased in the 1980s; jobs in factories and establishments -- or non-household jobs -- stagnated at eight per cent of the workforce. Increasingly, companies tend to rely on outsourcing, using cheap labour. It is well known that women and children work in huge numbers in bidi-rolling, agarbatti-rolling, bangle making, weaving, brassware, leather, crafts and other industries. Yet, only 3 per cent of these women are recorded as labourers. They are forced to work for pitiable wages and are denied all social security benefits. A study by SEWA of 14 trades found that 85 per cent of women earned only 50 per cent of the official poverty level income.

Review of Literature

Marther (1991) insisted on the identification of specific target groups poor women in many case-if development efforts are to be effective. The main focus is women, as they are at disadvantageous position than men. The agreed objective of this study is growth with equity and participation, policies and initiatives to be taken for helping women among poor. The analysis is based on many case studies and throws light on a few important implications. One of the most stubborn obstacles to poor women's participation is the misconceptions held by most men and many women about appropriate roles for women. Increase in women's employment opportunities and incomes do not automatically work to their advantage, the vital question is who exercised control over their labour and income. It is clear that in some cases increased payment for women's labour lead to greater control over it by others status is considered to be one of the behavioral indicators.

Parkasa Rao and Nandini Rao (1991) feel that in modernized families in India. Women have greater autonomy and greater share in family decision making and authority. Working mother's participation in decision making process increases by the fact that they contribute their resources to the functioning of the family. She has more privilege and more voice with regard to money matters at home.

Rekhadevi Raju (1991) agrees with the above and says that educational level of a women and type of the household influence her "decision role" while discussing the economic status of Rajgoad tribe and rural women. She says that castes affect their role and rural and tribe women do not have economic freedom to spend what they earn. Wage of such women are collected by their husbands. Alva Myrdar et al's (1992) work on "Women's two roles home and work sought to present that would amid that would enable women for combine their

traditional family obligations with paid work in the employment market. Interestingly these authors have gone further to capture multi-faceted dimensional role of women in the name of sequencing solutions besides the dual role mentioned continues to hold as a strong base for further research in this area.

Indra Chauhan (1992) conducted a study on women sanitary workers. According to her, for 45 percent of respondents, decisions are mostly by taken husband, 29 percent of respondents are taking own decision, 26 percent of the respondents are taking joint decision by having discussion with husband. Fox and Richey (1993) in their study about sanitary workers on majority (89%) of the respondents health affected due to the job. Suffering from skin diseases, Tuberculosis. Asthama,etc.,

Gupta and borkal (1994) degree with khan and Singh when they admit that women's power to control her own sexuality , fertility as well as major decisions regarding up bringing of her children is shamefully low.

Indradevi (1994) defines decision making as an activity process by which a course of action is consciously chosen from available alternatives. She has classified decisions into recurring and non- recurring. Recurring includes decision in expenditure on food, entertainment, children's education, clothing, and rent. None recurring includes decisions on expenditure in house, gas store case, etc. Allocation of food, clothing entertainment, visiting, friends, spending leisure also is the areas of decision making. She feels that education of women world enhance their competence and promote equalitarian ethics.

Khan and Singh (1994) have taken into account different spheres of decision making namely deciding family size. Even though a woman plays several roles through out her life –as daughters, sister, wife, daughter –in- law sister in law and mother, she seldom does have the power to make decisions which concern her own life vitally. Taking into account women in reproductive age in Uttar Pradesh (India) they conclude that the husband has the final in the number of children. They should have in the case of 33 percent of rural women of Uttar Pradesh, both take decision on family size and in 53% cases husbands alone take the decision. In the case of 4.3 percent of urban women, the husbands take the decision in 9.3 percent cases elder members and in 1.9 percent cases women she takes decisions.

Seta Vaidayalingam (1994) discussed the problem and concerns of Indian women. According to working women are subject to more explanative problems and pressures then their nonworking sisters. Finding a suitable occupation in the first problem right and proceeds it and of course fighting for the right amount of education to secure a decent job, tops it all, after having completed her education when a women steps the field of vocation are not quite correct, we find to be women's staying capacity and the usual remarks is adequate. This kind of attitude spoils a women's changes at all levels and particularly in the field of self – employment with a job come other problematic situations, kinds of people at work especially men. Number of lawyers do not encourage women simply because the later to level the office at about 6 p.m. in order to reach home early despite the fact that a busy lawyer's office is at its best after 6 p.m. Single working women have the accommodation problem, if working in a city their families do not live with them. One has heard and read in the newspaper of the unfavorable conditions prevailing in hostels which in any case among to meet encouraged to need. My own mother has never done a day's work despite having secured a medical education from the Madras Medical College.

Giriappe (1995) her found out that female headed households have reported a better decision role in respect of all types of decision variables and females in male headed households also have reported to participate substantially. Women in agriculture, fisher women and maid servant groups in female headed households and beedi rollers, fisher women small business women and maid servants in male headed households have a better decision making role later Giriappa and Mahtha assessed that 60.6 percent of decisions taken by females in female headed households are major decisions. Thirty three percent take joint decisions. They have used working condition, family maintenance, recreation and they have concluded their rural households have a better decision making role for women then male. The sociological research on the status of women has generally suggested that the Indian women enjoy a low status in their households because family decisions relating to finances, kinship relations, selection of life partner are made by the male members and women are rarely consulted. Although there has been an expansion in health facilities maternal mortality rate continue to be high at 407 per 1, 00,000 live births (1998).WHO estimates show that out of the 529,000 maternal deaths globally each year ,136,000 (25.7%) are contributed by India. A factor that contributes to India's high maternal mortality rate is the reluctance to seek medical care for pregnancy - it is viewed as a temporary condition that will disappear. The estimates nationwide are that only 40-50 percent of women receive any antenatal care. Evidence from the states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat find registration for maternal and child health services to be as low as 5-22 percent in rural areas and 21-51 percent in urban areas. Even a woman who has had difficulties with previous pregnancies is usually treated with home remedies only for three reasons: the decision that pregnant women seek help rests with the mother-in-law and husband; financial considerations; and fear that the treatment may be more harmful than the malady.

Social Problems faced by Women

Dowry

Max Radin has defined dowry as the property, which a man receives from his wife or her family at the time of his marriage. Dowry may be broadly defined as gifts and valuables received in marriage by the bride, the bridegroom and his relatives. The amount of dowry is regulated by factors like boy's service and salary, social and economic status of the girl's father, the social prestige of the boy's family, educational qualifications of the girl and the boy, girl's working and her salary, girl's and boy's beauty and features, future prospects of economic security, size and the composition of the girl's and boy's family and factors like that. What is significant is that girl's parents give her money and gifts not only at the time of her wedding but they continue to give gifts to her husband's family throughout the life. McKim Marriott holds that the feeling behind this is that one's daughter and sister at marriage become the helpless possession of an alien kinship group and to secure her good treatment, lavish hospitality must be offered to her in-laws from time to time. One of the causes of dowry is the desire and aspiration of every parent to marry his daughter in a higher and a rich family to keep up or to add to his prestige and also to prove comforts and security to the daughter. The high marriage- market values of the boys belonging to rich and high social status families have swelled the amount of dowry. Other cause of the existence of dowry is that giving dowry is a social custom and it is very difficult to change customs all of a sudden. The feeling is that practicing customs generates and strengthens solidarity and cohesiveness among people. Many people give and take dowry only because their parents and ancestors had been practicing it. Custom has stereotyped the old dowry system and till some rebellious youth muster courage to abolish it and girls resist social pressures to give it, people will stick to it.

Amongst Hindus, marriage in the same caste and sub-caste has been prescribed by the social and religious practices with the result that choice of selecting a mate is always restricted. This results in the paucity of young boys who have high salaried jobs or promising careers in the profession. They become scarce commodities and their parents demand huge amount of money from the girl's parents to accept her as their daughter-in-law, as if girls and chattel for which the bargain has to be made. Nevertheless, their scarcity is exacerbated and aggravated by the custom of marriage in the same caste. A few

people give more dowries just to exhibit their high social and economic status. Jains and Rajputs, for example, spend lakhs of rupees in the marriage of their daughters just to show their high status or keep their prestige in the society even if they have to borrow money. The most important cause of accepting dowry by the grooms' parents is that they have to give dowry to their daughters and sisters. Naturally, they look to the dowry of their sons to meet their obligations in finding husbands for their daughters. For instance, an individual who may be against the dowry system is compelled to accept fifty to sixty thousand rupees in cash in dowry only because he has to spend an equal amount in his sister's or daughter's marriage. The vicious circle starts and the amount of dowry goes on increasing till it assumes a scandalous proportion. Many people marry their daughters in childhood to escape from dowry, and pre-puberty marriage is an evil in itself. On maturity, the boys may or may not be able to adjust with their wives. This crisis situation is by no means left behind after the child marriage is consummated on attaining maturity. If by chance a husband becomes educated or professionally trained and his wife remains uneducated, both partners face crises.

Neglect during Early Childhood

The neglect of the girl child starts very early in life. The extent of neglect varies from family to family depending on their economic position. But in comparison to her male counterpart a female child is relatively neglected in most of the socioeconomic strata. Throughout the country it has been noticed that when the girl child depends on breast-feeding the chances of her survival are relatively more. Data from various sources shows that from infancy till the age of 15 the death rate for female child far exceeds the mortality rate for male child. There are several causes underlying this. Firstly, the female children are breast fed for a far shorter period than their male counterparts. Secondly, during illness parents show a greater concern towards male children. This neglect is quite often enforced by poor economic condition. Finally, in addition to the intake of insufficient and non-nutritious food the female child is exposed to a greater workload very early in life. Often in families of weaker economic strength the girl child is found attending the household chores as well as taking care of her younger brothers and

Female Infanticide and Fetal Killing

This refers to killing the infant soon after its birth or at the fetus stage. Fetal killing has been a crucial problem is some urban areas. A medical diagnostic process called Amniocentesis is used in the U.S.A. to check possible deformities of the unborn child. However, this is fast being used by parents to select the sex of their child. Misuse of the sex determination test has been a crucial issue in some urban places in India. This has resulted in a new type female infanticide i.e. abortion of female foetuses.

Early Marriage

Early marriage affects women's health status adversely. A vast number of girls are married at the teenage. It leads to teenage pregnancy and various physiological problems. In rural India almost 60 per cent of girls are married before they are 18. Nearly 60 per cent of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one third of all babies are born with low birth weight. Thus, young girls are introduced to the sexual life and to the reproduction processes at the teenage. Because of malnutrition, over burden of work illiteracy, ignorance of the sex-behaviour these pregnant girls take high risk of life. Around 10 to 15% of the annual births are from these adolescent mothers. However, most of their babies suffer from malnutrition, under weight and risk of mortality. In India, women have on an average 8-9 pregnancy and they spend around 80% of their reproductive years in pregnancy and lactation. Study shows that in the low income group pregnant women have deficiency of 1,100 calories and lactating women 1,000 calories. Women of the lower socio-economic groups gain only around 3-5 kgs during pregnancy, which is far less than the required weight. Anemia in pregnancy accounts directly 15 to 20% of all material deaths in India. The maternal-mortality according to official report, is 400 to 500 per 1, 00,000 births. However, this figure is as high as 1,000 to 1,200 to 1,200 in some rural areas. Again, more than 71% and 29% of the deliveries in the rural and urban areas took place without trained personnel (NPPW, 1988). In most of the rural areas, Medical Termination of pregnancy services is not available. Besides, women are not aware about the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 that has made abortion legal. Hence, illegal abortions by incompetent persons continue, resulting in abortion-related mortality and morbidity as serious problems.

Conclusion

The worth of a civilization can be judged by the place given to women in the society. One of several factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture is the honourable place granted to women. The Muslim influence on India caused considerable deterioration in the status of women. They were deprived of their rights of equality with men. Raja Ram Mohan Roy started a movement against this inequality and subjugation. The contact of Indian culture with that of the British also brought improvement in the status of women. The third factor in the revival of women's position was the influence of Mahatma Gandhi who induced women to participate in the Freedom Movement. As a result of this retrieval of freedom, women in Indian have distinguished themselves as teachers, nurses, air-hostesses, booking clerks, receptionists, and doctors. They are also participating in politics and administration. But in spite of this amelioration in the status of women, the evils of illiteracy, dowry, ignorance, and economic slavery would have to be fully removed in order to give them their rightful place in Indian society.

The worth of a civilization can be judged from the position that it gives to women. Of the several factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture, one of the greatest is the honoured place ascribed to women. Manu, the great law-giver, said long ago, 'where women are honoured there reside the gods'. According to ancient Hindu scriptures no religious rite can be performed with perfection by a man without the participation of his wife. Wife's participation is essential to any religious rite. Married men along with their wives are allowed to perform sacred rites on the occasion of various important festivals. Wives are thus befittingly called 'Ardhangani' (better-half). They are given not only important but equal position with men. But in the later period the position of women went on deteriorating due to Muslim influence. During the Muslim period of history they were deprived of their rights of equality with men. They were compelled to keep themselves within the four walls of their houses with a long veil on their faces. This was definitely due to Islamic influence. Even today in some Islamic countries women are not allowed to go out freely. The conservative regimes of Iran and Pakistan, for example, have withdrawn the liberties given to women folk by the previous liberal governments. Even in India the Muslim women are far more backward than their Hindu, Christian and Sikh counterparts. The sight of Muslim women walking with long 'Burkas' (veils) on their person is not very rare. The women are, as a matter of fact, regarded as captive and saleable commodities in Muslim families. One man is allowed to have so many wives with the easiest provision of divorce. The husband can divorce a wife just by saying 'I divorce you' under the provision of Muslim laws. This is what the emperors did hundred years back and the men are doing it even now in almost all Islamic countries. Even in this last phase of the twentieth century rich and prosperous men of Islamic countries keep scores of wives in their harems. It was natural outcome of the Muslim subjugation of India that woman was relegated to a plaything of man, an ornament to decorate the drawing room. Serving, knitting, painting and music were her pastimes and cooking and cleaning her business. In the wake of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's movement against women's subjugation to men and British influence on Indian culture and civilization the position of women had once again undergone a change. However, it was only under the enlightened leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that they re-asserted their equality with men. In response to the call of Gandhi they discarded their veil and

came out of the four walls of their houses to fight the battle of freedom shoulder to shoulder with their brothers. The result is that the Indian Constitution today has given to women the equal status with men. There is no discrimination between men and women. All professions are open to both of them with merit as the only criterion of selection. As a result of their newly gained freedom Indian woman have distinguished themselves in various spheres of life as politicians, orators, lawyers, doctors, administrators and diplomats. They are not only entrusted with work of responsibility but also they perform their duties very honestly and sincerely. There is hardly any sphere of life in which Indian women have not taken part and shown their worth. Women exercise their right to vote, contest for Parliament and Assembly, seek appointment in public office and compete in other spheres of life with men. This shows that women in India enjoy today more liberty and equality than before. They have acquired more liberty to participate in the affairs of the country. They have been given equality with men in shaping their future and sharing responsibilities for themselves, their family and their country. It is a fact that women are intelligent, hard-working and efficient in work. They put heart and soul together in whatever they undertake. As typists and clerks they are now competing successfully with men. There are many women working in the Central Secretariat. They are striving very hard to reach highest efficiency and perfection in the administrative work. Their integrity of character is probably better than men. Generally it was found that women are less susceptible to corruption in form of bribery and favouritism. They are not only sweet tongued but also honest, efficient and punctual in their jobs as receptionists, air-hostesses and booking clerks at railway reservation counters. As a matter of fact they are gradually monopolising the jobs of receptionists and air-hostesses. Another job in which Indian women are doing so well is that of teachers. In country like India where millions are groping in the darkness of illiteracy and ignorance efficient teaching to the children is most urgently needed. By virtue of their love and affection for the children the women have proved the best teachers in the primary and kindergarten schools. They can better understand the psychology of a child than the male teachers. Small children in the kindergarten schools get motherly affection from the lady teachers. It is probably significant that the Montessori system of education is being conducted mostly by the women in this country. Women have been serving India admirably as doctors and nurses. Lady doctors have been found to perform efficient surgery by virtue of their soft and accurate fingers. They have monopolised as nurses in the hospitals and nursing homes. Very few men have been able to compete with them in this sphere because the women have natural tendency to serve and clean. It is thus natural tendency found in women which motivated Florence Nightingale to make nursing popular among the women of the upper classes in England and in Europe. She showed the way to women kind how nobly they can serve humanity in the hours of sufferings and agonies. Women's contributions in politics and social services have also been quite significant. We cannot fail to mention the name of Indira Gandhi who shone so brilliantly and radiantly in the firmament of India's politics. She ruled this country for more than a decade and took India victorious out of Pakistan-war which resulted in the historic creation of a new country, Bangladesh. In the field of social service Indian women have also done some excellent jobs. They have not only served the cause of the suffering humanity but have also brought highest laurels for the country. The name of Mother Teressa cannot but be mentioned. She brought the Nobel Prize for India by her selfless services to the poor, destitute and suffering people of our country in particular and the needy and handicapped people of the world in general. Today, we need the services of the educated women who can tour throughout the country and help in removing human sufferings. The Government is alarmed at the rapid growth of population in the rural areas in particular. Women volunteers can more easily take up the task of canvassing the advantages of family planning among the rural womenfolk. They can, more easily than men, carry on propaganda against hazards of unhygienic conditions under which the villagers live. In urban areas they can efficiently take up the task of visiting and teaching the orphans and the helpless widows in the orphanages and the widow welfare centres. They can train them in sewing, knitting, embroidery and nursing in which women by nature excel. They can also train them in the art of music and dancing. But all this should not lead us to conclude that the women should look down upon domestic life. The main sphere of action for them who have not taken up jobs outside should be essentially a happy home which is their real kingdom and where their sweet manners and mature advices as wife, mother, sister and daughter make tremendous effects on the male members of the family. The progress of a nation depends upon the care and skill with which mothers rear up their children. The first and foremost duty of Indian women should, therefore, be to bring forth noble generations of patriots, warriors, scholars and statesmen. Since child's education starts even in the womb and the impressions are formed in the mind of a child while in mothers arms women have to play a role of vital importance. They have to feel and realise at every step of their life that they are builders of the fate of our nation since children grow mainly in mothers arms. They should also discourage their husbands and sons from indulging in bribery and other corrupt practices. This they can do only when they learn the art of simple living by discarding their natural desires for ornaments and a living of pomp and show. In many cases families have been running in deficit due to the extravagance of the housewives in maintaining a high standard of living. The result is that the earning male members of the family are forced to fill up the gap in the budget by corrupt practices. Corruption has been so far the greatest impediment in way to India's progress. Minus corruption India would have been one of the most developed nations of the world. There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in the last fifty years but yet they have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male dominated society. The Hindu Code Bill has given the daughter and the son equal share of the property. The Marriage Act no longer regards woman as the property of man. Marriage is now considered to be a personal affair and if a partner feels dissatisfied she or he has the right of divorce. But passing of law is one thing and its absorption in the collective thinking of society is quite a different matter. In order to prove themselves equal to the dignity and status given to them in the Indian Constitution they have to shake off the shackles of slavery and superstitions. They should help the government and the society in eradicating the evils of dowry, illiteracy and ignorance among the eves. The dowry problem has assumed a dangerous form in this country. The parents of the girls have to pay thousands and lacs to the bridegrooms and their greedy fathers and mothers. If promised articles are not given by the parents of brides, the cruel and greedy members of the bridegrooms' family take recourse to afflicting tortures on the married women. Some women are murdered in such cases. The dowry deaths are really heinous and barbarous crimes committed by the cruel and inhumane persons. The young girls should be bold enough in not marrying the boys who demand dowry through their parents. The boys should also refuse to marry if their parents demand dowry. But unfortunately the number of such bold and conscientious boys is very few. Even the doctors, engineers, teachers and the administrative officers do not hesitate in allowing themselves to be sold to the wealthy fathers of shy and timid girls. Such persons have really brought disgrace to their cadres in particular and society in general. The government should enact stringent laws to afflict rigorous punishment on dowry seekers, women's murderers and rapers.

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