

AN ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN INDIA AND SUGGESTIVE REMEDIES FOR THEIR EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: This article dwells on the hurdles women face in India. Before shedding light on their hindrances and obstacles, it illustrates how well they are treated too. In comparison with other countries India has been a land where women are considered to be sacred and holy. India accords divinity to motherhood. In the households of Indian society, without consulting women, no decision on any matter, be it education of children, or purchase or sale of a property, or shifting of residence or change of profession, will be taken. Here in India, parallels can be drawn between the wise minister of a king and the wife of a man in Indian household. At times, man may err in judging things but women will never. Traditionally women have either been trained informally or have acquired the ability instinctly to weigh the pros and cons of an issue and arrive at a no nonsense decision. Notwithstanding this positive side of women's life, when the other side of their life is looked at, only a dismal picture prevails. In the bygone days, Women had to suffer SATI (the burning of a wife alive in the pyre of her dead husband) denial of education and equality, discrimination, humiliation, harassment, child marriage. The nineteenth century India saw the tireless services of great social reformers of India such as Raja Ram Mohanroy, Founder of Arya Samajam and Saint Dhyananth Swamigal, Founder of Brahma Samajam, in the eradication of social evils against women such as Sati, Child Marriage, Denial of education. Even at present, at homes women are respected and heeded but the final decision will always be taken by only men. Consultation with women will happen but conclusion will be arrived at only by men. "When women are the advisor, the Lords of creation don't take the advice till they have persuaded themselves that it is just what they intended to do; then they act upon it and if it succeeds, they give the weaker vessel half the credit of it; if fails, they generously give herself the whole".- Louisa May Alcott. This paper deals with the current plight of women in India and measures for the empowerment of women. How education, employment, self business small, medium and large scales and, agriculture, will bring about transformation in their lives is discussed in this article.

Key Words: Early Marriages, Denial of Education, Harassment, Discrimination

Problems of Women

1) Early marriages: Even if the Governments both at the centre and the state have implemented large number of schemes for women like single female child scholarship for higher education, cash assistance for marriage, reservation in education and employment for destitute widows, their condition does not seem to be better. Only a marginal section of women have benefited from these schemes. Tens of hundreds of women across the country are not even aware of government welfare schemes for them. Further, if they belong to backward environment economically, educationally and socially, their condition will be far worse. And the role of higher education institutions in creating and spreading awareness among womenfolk about these schemes should be more than what is now. In many Indian villages, the practice of conducting child marriage is in force. The parents who think that by completing the marriage of their girl children's marriage before marriageable age, their duty gets over so. They consider their daughters' wedding as a burden rather than a responsibility and so at the earliest they want to get relief from this burden without giving any serious thought to the plight of their girl children after their marriage. When marriages happen to girls

before their right age fixed by the government, they have no mental or physical maturity to face the challenges of the world. Consequently, their marriage life will turn out to be disastrous. When a tragedy strikes a married woman, actually this will be the tragedy of the family because a woman is the lifeblood of a family. Those parents who have no awareness on these issues have to be educated and sensitized about the ills of early marriage.

2) Denial of education: Another common practice seen particularly in rural India is not to provide education for women. More than half of India lives in villages where the evil of denial of education to women has a strong presence. When parents bend over backwards to educate their male children, they do not show any enthusiasm in educating their daughters. They discriminate the daughters against their sons. The discrimination which starts at home that too at an early age haunts them throughout their life. It needs to be realized that the empowerment of village women will be the empowerment of the country because by ignoring half of the population of the country growth is not possible. Development should be there in the country but it should be inclusive. It is unfortunate that the parliament is still unable to pass women's reservation bill. Whenever

efforts are made to pass this bill, there is hue and cry from traditionalists. Another worrisome trend is that women are not considered fit for some positions in Army, Police and aeronautics. Though time and again, they have proved their mettle in these fields, they are still discouraged from pursuing these careers. What is achieved by man can be achieved by women too is a well proved fact.

3) Consideration of women as objects of enjoyment: This is an undeniable and irrefutable fact that the status of women has improved considerably compared to previous times. The days which treated women like puppets, ornaments and used women only for the satisfaction of carnal pleasures are gone but only to a certain extent. A lot more has to happen in this regard. Polygamy has been prohibited legally which is really a boon for them. The change and transformation in this connection has to come from the minds of the people. Whatever attempts the governments make in relation to this, unless people's mindset changes, nothing fruitful or worthwhile can happen. One should treat women on a par with men and one should also realize that causing disturbance, trouble and inconvenience to women is the reflection of their sick mind. The obvious quality of a healthy society is that it should treat its women with honour and dignity.

4) Menace of eve-teasing: Most worrisome phenomenon in these days is women being targeted by anti-social elements. What is painful is it happens in all places-workspot, bus stations, railway stations even at homes. The working women are harassed by either their co workers or by their superior authorities. In public places, anti social elements subject them to assault irrespective of the age of the victims. The children, middle aged women and old women fall victims to such sexual attack. The incident of gang rape on Jothi Jyoti singh which took place in Delhi on December 12, 2012 is a gruesome reflection of the attitude of the perpetrators. Sometimes, the threat comes from home from close relatives. It is not acceptable to say that women in order to defend themselves from these attacks should not come out of home at odd hours, dress attractively and be seen with their friends in parks and beaches. Instead of trying to initiate stringent action against the culprits, this kind of statement will only clip the wings of women who have put in enormous pains to come this far in life.

5) Status of women in politics: In the domain of politics, Many women politicians like Ms Jayalalitha, Ms Mamta Bannerjee, Ms Mayawathi and so many others have stamped their individuality in a big way. If it is said that the lady politicians like them have attained iconic status in their respective states, it is not exaggeration. Besides them, at national level,

Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, Mrs Sushma Suvaraj, Mrs Meera Kumar, former Lok Sabha speaker, Sumithra Mahajan, present Loksabha speaker have shined well to a great extent. Mrs Prathiba Patil created history by becoming the first woman president of India. But they are very handful. A country of 45 crore women has produced only these few political leaders. When light is thrown on the functions of Women MLA s, and office bearers of local bodies, the picture looks dismal and dark. What happens is that the position of these women is occupied by their spouses. The ladies who hold key positions in local bodies remain only De Jure office bearers and the real powers will be vested with De Facto office bearers, their spouses. In majority of the cases, it is happening. Though the women are competent and efficient to execute their duties conferred upon them under legislative and local body acts, they are not allowed to function independently. They end up as mere puppets at the hands of their husbands. The husbands go to the extent of participating in government functions on behalf of their wives who hold positions in Local Bodies. Women are elected to various key positions of local bodies by the people; nevertheless the interference of their husbands in their functioning proves to be a huge hindrance to them. Two reasons may be attributed to this trend-one, the inefficiency on the part of women functionaries and the other, the upper hand taken by their husbands. In many cases, they may not like their spouses' interference inwardly but outwardly they cannot express their dissatisfaction or opposition to their husbands fearing that it will end in friction in their family life. This picture prevailing in the career of many women leaders has to be eradicated.

6) Dowry harassment: In the Beginning, the practice of giving dowry to the bridegroom was to support and assist them economically to come up in life. In due course of time, people began to use this practice to showcase their wealth, richness and affluence. The magnitude of dowry became proportionate to the affluence of the family of the bride. At a stage, it became compulsory and obligatory for the parents of the bride to give enormous sum, vessels, vehicles and sometimes lands as dowry to the groom. Dowry when it emerged as a compulsory practice in Indian weddings became a bane. The families which are unable to afford huge sums as dowry for their daughter are not in a position to marry off their daughter at the right age. It leads to the psychological problems of the entire family. In some cases, when parents are not financially strong to arrange the marriage of their daughters they decide on extreme steps. Though obtaining dowry is a punishable offence, the law pertaining to this has not been implemented in letter and spirit. And, law on the prevention of dowry harassment has to be made

sharper and stronger than now by the incorporation of much needed provisions in to it such as unbiased action on the part of law enforcing officials, speedy trial, air investigation. When the judiciary ensures that the law will take its own course, this social menace can surely be eliminated.

7) Casteism and women: The tendency to look down upon women, in spite of their attainments in every walk of life is still there, though the degree varies. Especially when women belong to the so called lower caste, their problems get doubled. As a woman and as low caste woman they are suppressed. Worse than Gender discrimination, male chauvinism is segregation on the ground of caste. When they achieve something great, like becoming a civil service officer, a successful business woman people with unhealthy minds attribute the elevation and growth of these women to their community background. They are given to saying that only because of Government reservation scheme and financial assistance, these successful ladies are able to come up this far. They lower the spirit of women this way and underestimate all their accomplishments. This kind of act is nothing but the manifestation of sick mindedness. But nowadays women have begun to fight valiantly against these social evils. The more they are suppressed, the stronger they arise. They have emerged as a force to reckon with.

8) Domestic violence against women: Besides facing physical or oral or mental attack outside home, sometimes they are subjected to physical attack at home too by their spouses who may be drunkards or people of inferiority complex. Drunkards treat their wives as sub human beings but live on their income. They are not ready to go to work either wantonly or lazily, expecting their life partners to shoulder the burden of the family. In some cases, the husbands think that they are inferior to their working wives and

unable to bear the fact that their wives earn and solidify the financial condition of the family, they may level baseless allegations against them. They become suspicious of the behavior of their wives though there is not even iota of fact in their suspicion. They do such things with the intention of lowering the dignity of women.

9) Measures for the elimination of hurdles of women and their elevation: A society cannot boast of its accomplishments and achievements when its women lag behind. The fine sign of a healthy society is that its women should have recognition, equality and honour. In order to weed out all the hindrance against women, it should be ensured that women become adequately educated. As the right to education act has been enacted, the right to compulsory education to women at least up to under graduation should be enacted. Education alone will be their panacea and it will bring them out of their crises, by guaranteeing them self dependence. Further, women entrepreneurs should be helped in all ways possible by the governments to start small, medium and large scale businesses. The cumbersome processes for obtaining loan from banks need to be simplified so as to enable women to start businesses. The government of India should strive to legislate this legislation. Also, it should toughen laws on harassment against women. When the perpetrators are taught a tough lesson, it will serve as a deterrent to others. Above all, the society in general has to take steps and measures for ensuring that no act of crime is committed against women. In educational institutions syllabuses should be formulated in such a way that students are sensitized about the preciousness, safety and security of Women. The much needed change has to come from homes Change in India and educational institutions.

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