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Violence against Women: A Global Epidemic

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Abstract:

The creation of woman has added beauty to the fabric of human existence. But they have been subjected to discrimination, endured different forms of abuse, violation of their human rights on a day to day basis. The existing cultural and traditional practices, gender – based violence, conflict, discrimination, subordination and trafficking have become the lives of women and girls. Violence against women is a global problem, astonishingly high rates of sexual assault, stalking, trafficking, violation of intimate relationship and other forms of violence against women still continue. The power and dominance resulted in inequalities and discrimination. It hampers the progress and prosperity of the society and the family. It makes more difficult for women to realize their full potential so as to serve the country and humanity at large. Although the position of women in society today has improved, women have been subjected to many forms of violence and abuse which affects them in all walks of life. Sexual harassment; dowry-related violence, female infanticide; sexual abuse of female children and traditional practices harmful to women; early marriage and other forms of exploitation which torture them and have their human rights violated daily.

Keywords: awareness, freedom, transition, violence, harassment, infanticide, exploitation.

“Social science affirms that a woman’s place in society marks the level of civilization”

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Introduction

Mankind is created from a single male and female, and placed natural love and affection for one another in order that they cooperate to build families and relationships of families. Nature has bestowed upon the male of each species with superior power and endurance in order that he may dominate in certain spheres and seek provisions and protection for the species, while the female of each species is equipped to reproduce and multiply to maintain the continuity of that species. Only the female is equipped with the necessary apparatus to bear, deliver, nurse and care for the young. The female human has been endowed with love, kindness, sympathy,

care and affection in order to carry out her duties to her children with dignity. Based on this natural predisposition and delegation of responsibilities, and based on the unique qualities of the male and the female, it is only natural for man to work outside the house and earn for the sustenance of the family and for the woman to work inside the house and take care of the children and the family in general.

Motherhood

Motherhood was worshipped and it still happens to be a milestone in respect of the elevated position of women. Women once venerated as the mother and the perpetuating angel of mankind has come to be looked upon as “the unblessed creature” in India. The degenerated morality of the people and their voluptuary go a long way in dismantling the fabric of the society based on the respect of the female gender. Throughout the history all over the world women have been held to different standards than men. From pastoral society to contemporary well-advanced society, the role of women has changed significantly. The change in socio-economic and psycho cultural aspect of human living has influenced the role of women. In today’s world, the responsibilities of women have attained new definitions and standpoints as they now share the financial responsibilities also. Women have come outside the four walls of the house, but they are constantly oppressed in all aspects of life, from political to personal and public to private life.

The creation of woman has added beauty to the fabric of human existence. But they have been subjected to discrimination, endured different forms of abuse, violation of their human rights on a day to day basis. The existing cultural and traditional practices, gender – based violence, conflict, discrimination, subordination and trafficking have become the lives of women and girls. Women and girls need to be cherished and their human rights recognised and not violated. There has been a rise in the percentage of women joining service sector especially banking, teaching and IT. But they encounter many difficulties.

“....humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.... She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute.... She is the other”

(Simon de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1953, pp.xviii)

There is always a false assumption that women are fundamentally different from men, and this is the reason for her sub-ordination. This difference is the chief reason of women being oppressed, denied, exploited and dehumanized. It is the tendency to hurt and insult the female because of the biological inferiority. The history of patriarchy presents a variety of cruelties and barbarities, the sati executions in India, the crippling deformity of foot binding in China, the ignoring of the veil in Islam. Women suffer at the hands of their chauvinistic husbands. They have to confront the harsh actualities posed by men and struggle with them and suffer. Their sufferings begin from their childhood. They suffer as a result of the indifferent and self-centered attitudes and approaches of men.

The 20th century witnessed great strides that have taken place to end all the social evils and level all spheres of life equal to men. But in India the deep rooted traditional and cultural barrier made this effort very difficult. India needs a revolutionary change that is mentally, socially, culturally, traditionally and spiritually. Financial, economical and physical development alone would not help or change the people rather it destroys love, affection, empathy and human relationship. Every day women are facing different form of suffering from humiliation, psychological torture, denials, deprivations, the stresses and strains, the tensions and anxieties, the pains and miseries, sufferings and struggles, mental conflicts and exploitation. Women confront several hardships and their life is one of endless suffering.

The constitution of India pledges to secure to all the people equality of status and opportunity. Many laws are made by Government to protect the decency of women but it is

appalling that the reverse has happened. It is outrageous to mention that we all have proudly entered the 21st century and claim that ours is an excellent and sophisticated modern civilization. But the ground reality is that we experience the same evils as our ancestors. A daughter is the most unwelcome addition to a traditional family and our social customs also perpetuate the suffering of women. The history of women's subjugation, domination and oppression is a long and painful one, involving all forms of discrimination and exclusionary practices used by men.

Violence against women

Violence against women in India isn't just a current issue, but rather has deep seated traditional roots in the culture. In order to combat the problem, we must understand its causes. In India, the problem of violence against women is a result of a long standing power imbalance between men and women. Men have control over access to property and resources. The results are the female is exploited—physically, mentally, and commercially. Violence against women is an international problem. Women are friends, partners, lovers, family, and human beings. They have a right to life and to freedom from persecution based on their gender. The fatal forms of violence against women, such as the burning of women, are serious issues that cannot be ignored by the global community. It must be recognized that the reason the violence continues to occur because men dominate, control, and oppress women. Violence against women in India are of many types and from birth to death, women are prone to violence from men and society.

Violence against women is a form of discrimination and a violation of human rights. It causes untold misery, cutting short lives and leaving countless women living in pain and fear in every country in the world. Violence against women is not a new phenomenon. Women have to bear the burns of domestic, public, physical as well as emotional and mental violence against them, which affects her status in the society at the larger extent. The statistics of increasing crimes against women is shocking, where women are subjected to violence attacks i.e. foeticide, infanticide, medical neglect, child marriages, bride burning, sexual abuse of girl child, forced marriages, rapes, prostitution, sexual harassment at home as well as work places. Woman is considered as aggrieved person.

Violence against women, whether physical, mental or emotional, is an issue that crosses all borders and all classes of women. Women have been the silent sufferers for years together. Violence against women is a global problem, astonishingly high rates of sexual assault, stalking, trafficking, violation of intimate relationship and other forms of violence against women still continue. The power and dominance resulted in inequalities and discrimination. Gender inequalities and the unequal power relationship manifest into various forms of abuse against women and children.

According to John Stuart Mill believes that unequal treatment between genders is a huge hindrance to the advancement of society. He claims, "...the legal subordination of one sex to the other- is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (Mill 199). Mill's belief that the situation viewing women as inferior and subordinate to men ought to be replaced with a one that gives equality to the sexes corresponds with his belief in a utilitarian society

It is an irony of fate that women in India, who have been widely acclaimed as an object of worship in the scriptures, are relegated to a secondary position in comparison to their male counterparts in all walks of life. They lag far behind the males in terms of economic, social and political attainments. Establishing equality has become the part of the global movement

emphasised in all the four World Conferences on women including the last one at Beijing in 1995. The women's movement in India has been addressing various social issues and has gained the momentum through years. Several mechanisms have been created in the country to work for the enhancement of women and generate social awareness on gender issues.

A common denominator in the lives of women is that they are generally confined to home, with restricted mobility, and in seclusion. Other, unwritten, hierarchical practices place further constraints on women. Throughout history, women have generally been restricted to the role of a home-maker; that of a mother and wife. Despite major changes that have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in India.

Violence against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for women's dignity and also an obstacle for the growth of women on equal status with men in the political, social, economic and cultural life. It hampers the progress and prosperity of the society and the family. It makes more difficult for women to realize their full potential so as to serve the country and humanity at large. So there is an urge for a change is required from the traditional role of women in the society and in the family for achieving complete equality among men and women.

“Just because I don't mourn like you,
O' Untamed World,
You think I have no sorrow and have no grief?
Just because I am a Woman,
Hiding my tears and keeping a smile on my face;
A smile so serene, a smile so quite
A smile so full of pain, a smile so awfully white,
A smile which is raped
Why, just because I am a Woman?”
By Sadhogopal Ram.

Patriarchal, cultural and religious traditions are invoked to control women's lives systematically, their free will and even their bodies, and hamper the full realization of their potential. In India, discrimination rooted in gender prejudices that foster stereotypical roles for the girl child and woman is one of the reasons for the poor state of affairs of women. The concept of purity and submission superimposed upon women by cultural and religious practices restrict their access to education and limits their freedom to choose their employment. Violence against women is sometimes justified through tradition and religion, and occurs by exploiting the weak rule of law framework of numerous Asian countries to the advantage of the male-dominated society. It is used to control the behaviour of women and prevent them from freely taking part in public debate, and it continuously undermines their expression for the region's potential change.

Fear of violence is a cause of women's lack of participation in activities beyond the home, as well as inside it. Within the home, women and girls may be subjected to physical and sexual abuse as punishment or as culturally justified assaults. These acts shape their attitude to life, and their expectations of themselves. There are various forms of crime against women. Sometimes, it begins even before their birth, sometimes in the adulthood and other phases of life. In the Indian society, the position of women is always perceived in relation to the man, from birth onwards and at every stage of life, she is dependent on him. The old English proverb which said, “A spaniel, a woman and a walnut tree, the more they're beaten, the better they be” might be more consonant with their patriarchal privilege. Though, much

attention is given to the needs and security of women, they are subjected to discrimination and fall into the trap of their male counterparts in many ways.

No doubt, the subjugations against women are not only committed by the illiterate or the uneducated mass but also by educated men. Here one can't blame or point out that illiteracy amongst the mass is responsible for the discrimination or harassment against women in the society. It can be said that the psyche of the Indian society is responsible for this. It is a long practice in which women are looked down upon by men in society. However, with modernisation coming into the Indian society, the practice of social evils against women is being eliminated. But the superiority complex that men have over women still exists in the society. It is a matter of power that the male dominates the female. Even educated males tend to harass women. It can be said that education or being educated has little binding over the matter. It can be said that it is the psychology of the Indian traditions with the notion that women are of inferior sex that have prevailed in the society for a long period of time that is responsible for the alienated treatment against women in the society.

With the advent of feminism and the continual push for equal rights, women have been advancing in the society in all facets – increasing education results in higher employment and influence of women in the workforce, economic independence allows for equal autonomy of both spouses in household decisions, etc. Although legally and theoretically women are now recognized as socially equal to men but why still hearing about dowry, women harassment and girl infanticide. Why does the prevailing value system still surcharge on women due to the spirit of male dominance. It is very clear that we are still at the same place as 200 years before. Bride burning is other major prevailing issue though it is not that well prominent but still exists! The bride burning very well conjures up images of a cruel husband and his family members dousing a young woman in kerosene, flinging a lighted matchstick on her and gloating as the hapless bride goes up in flames. Are we so cruel that we do not understand the humanity?

A society runs on two wheels. For any society to run efficiently both of these two wheels must be equally strong for a smooth run. So should we be on the weaker and the inefficient side of that wheel which still runs for girl infanticides, harassment of women and other extreme social taboos which life of woman no less than hell? It is depressing to acknowledge the fact that even after 62 years of independence and advancement in all fields of life we are still fighting with social taboos from where our great leaders had started.

In the taboo and superstition ridden Indian Society many social reformers tried their best to abolish anarchic and blind beliefs. Since the advent of the British rule women's social status began to improve due to the Reform Movements started by the Social Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Thanthai Periyar, Mahathma Gandhi, Bharathi, Bharathidasan, Dr.B.R. Ambedkar and Sri Narayana Guru did their best to reshape and rejuvenate the Indian Society. In due course of time, striking changes have taken place in the position of women. Today women have been given bigger role to play in the society. They are entrusted with more responsibility than their male counterparts. The need of the hour is to work relentlessly towards a concerted and sustained group effort to address the problems that women are still facing today. If women unite, they have nothing to lose sans subjugation. The positive step will lead to a direction that will see the dawn of real freedom.

As Rabindranath Tagore has said, "Woman is a builder and moulders of nations' destiny. Though delicate and soft as lily, she has a heart far strong and bolder than that of a man. She is the supreme inspiration of any man's onward march"

"O Lord Why has you not given woman the right to conquer her destiny?

Why does she have to wait head bow?

By the roadside, waiting with tired patience.
Hoping for a miracle in the morrow?"

(The great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore on the misery of Indian women)

The truth is that, peace, integrity and prosperity of a society depend to a large extent upon the respect for the women folk. Violence against women in India isn't just a current issue, but rather has deep seated traditional roots in the culture. In order to combat the problem, we must understand its causes. In India, the problem of violence against women is a result of a long standing power imbalance between men and women. Men have control over access to property and resources. There is also a sexual division of labour in India that results in female exploitation—physically, mentally, and commercially. Women in India are subject to all forms of violence. Female infanticide is quite common because there is a preference for sons because male children carry on the family lineage.

Domestic Violence

From the earliest civilizations on, the subjugation of women, in the form of violence, were facts of life. For around two centuries social reformers have endeavoured to bring women out of confines in which the century old tradition, culture and religion had kept them. In the past, most women were able to demonstrate the leadership traits only on their home front and the men acted as masters and as deciding authorities. Within the household, there exists gender discrimination which determines intra-household distribution of food. Because women and girls are given less food than men, malnutrition among adolescent girls and women is quite prevalent in India. Male violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon. Although not every woman has experienced it, and many expect not to, fear of violence is an important factor in the lives of most women. It determines what they do, when they do it, where they do it, and with whom. Domestic violence is not limited to physical forms only. Violence against women is a form of discrimination and a violation of human rights. It causes untold misery, cutting short lives and leaving countless women living in pain and fear in every country in the world.

The most harmless domestic animal



I

When I breathed for the first time
You told my father
“Start saving, it’s a girl”
At 5, you told me
“Learn to read and write so that
A boy will come for you.”
At 10, you told me
“Save yourself, you are a girl.”
At 15, you told me
“Stay at home, learn to cook, wash and
To remain silent and obedient.”
At 20, you told me
“Now it’s your own life,
Don’t come back to us.”
Years went on and
I kept my promise,
Nobody ever had a complaint.
I was the most harmless

And faithful domestic animal
Man ever had in his history.

Open Page THE HINDU March 24, 2013

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A woman often plays multi-faceted role. Her soft and susceptible nature makes her a subject for criticism for the slips that take place at work and home. Women are mocked, ridiculed and criticised for small issues and labelled as not capable.

The sense of insecurity, humiliation and helplessness always keep a women mum. Our whole socialisation is such that for any unsuccessful marriage which results in such violence or divorce, it is always the woman, who is held responsible. Cultural beliefs and traditions that discriminate against women may be officially discredited but they continue to flourish at the grass root levels. Family relations in India are governed by personal laws. The realities of women especially in rural India are difficult to comprehend. Women, most of the time are even deprived of some of the fundamental human rights and this denial is justified often in the name of tradition. In rural areas women are generally relegated mainly to household duties and cheap labour. They are not perceived as substantial income generating source. Without the power to work and earn a good income, their voices are silenced, as they are economically dependent and have no capacity to work and earn a living for them. The question that needs to be answered is that in a society where men control the destiny of women how it is possible to protect the human rights of women and make the women empowerment a reality. The year 2001 was declared as *Women Empowerment* year by the Central government. 24th of January has been decided to be observed as *National Girl Child Day*.

Conclusion

Hence, the prime need of the hour is, Liberation of Women from all sorts of violence and subjugation. Campaigns need to be organized particularly in the villages highlighting the threat to the life of the girl child and creating awareness in the villages about the dangerous consequences which the society as a whole will have to face without the girl children. The issue has to be discussed on religious, cultural, economic, political and social level. Computer literacy and enhancement of technical skills among girls must be ensured. Added to this, self-defence trainings, as KARATE, must be introduced and made compulsory for girl children to make them self reliant and cope with unforeseen circumstances. The need of the hour is the realization of the change towards societal growth by all who are involved in the task of Nation building activity. The new society which will emerge, in a few years, will be a grown society where nobody suppresses anybody.

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