

Rights of Women in Contemporary Society of India

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Abstract: *Women from different sections of the society are placed in very different situations in modern India. Some women are entering new fields and achieving the same feats as men, while some girls are being killed even before they are born. In earlier times women were seen only in the household, but this expectation is changing slowly, as they are coming to the fore and challenging traditional mindsets. The modern Indian society, impacted by globalization and influenced by values of equality and liberty, seems to have accepted a more elevated position of women. Main theme of the essay: The position of women in our society is determined by contradictory values, concerns, and forces. While there is great improvement in their position, when we compare it to that of men, there is a long way to go before equality is achieved.*

Keywords: position, women, modern Indian society

1. Introduction

Women empowerment has always been in news and will continue to be. Much has been discussed and debated and written about 'women issues.' So why another book? For the simple reason that not much has been implemented. Notwithstanding the plethora of showcasing of the plights of women and their state of existence in the global society, we are yet to witness a phenomenal success. However, the positive changes that took place from the ancient age to the modern age are impressive but certainly not enough. When will we embrace the culture of respecting a woman? Women's education is crucial for empowerment and empowered women is a success marker of a country's advancement.

Education is a foundation stone for the empowerment of women and is the dominant tool to change women's position in the world. Women education in India has been a necessity for years and now has become the supreme need of the hour.

An authority on employment law for decades, Dr. Amitava Ghosh and Swati Saksena Jha, a woman entrepreneur in her own right, have penned down the plight of women right from the Vedic age to the Modern age to the present Pandemic age in their new book *Women In Contemporary India*.

The book progresses very logically and throws light on all aspects of a woman's journey. There are some great data which provides a fantastic insight on women's state of existence in the societal scheme of things.

Let us look at some statistics on the women of the Indian as well as global society from the book:

- Of the 1.3 billion population in the poverty bracket, 70% are women. Women earn three-fourths that of men in the non-agricultural sector.
- Women occupy only 10% of the parliamentary seats and only 6% of cabinet positions in 55 countries around the world.
- Of the total burden of work, women carry an average of 53% in developing countries and 51% in industrial countries.

- Of the world's 900 million non-literate persons, 65% are women due to the lack of educational opportunities.
- Worldwide, 76 million more boys are enrolled in primary and secondary school than girls.

The outlook of the male dominated society is that empowered and educated women will develop wings and have their own way. Women play a domineering role in making a nation enlightened and guide it towards development. This thought has been acknowledged a number of times but there has been no execution witnessed. It seems to be more of a lip-service by the society. Encouraging women's education also brings a reduction in inequalities and dilution of gender bias and functions as a means of improving their professional and personal role.

Rights for women

We live in a world where goddesses are worshiped and women get tamed, harassed, abused, raped, and kidnapped every single day. Keeping a check on a number of women-related cases, the government of India provides crucial rights to Indian women. "Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights, once and for all." - Hillary Clinton

Unfortunately, many of the women do not know their rights. On the grounds of gender equality, here are 12 rights an Indian woman holds in India

- 1) **Women have the right to equal pay**
According to the provisions listed under the Equal Remuneration Act, one cannot be discriminated on the basis of sex when it comes to salary, pay or wages. Working women have the right to draw an equal salary, as compared to men.
- 2) **Women have the right to dignity and decency**
In an event that the accused is a woman, any medical examination procedure on her must be performed by -- or in the presence of -- another woman.
- 3) **Women have the right against workplace harassment**
The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act gives a female the right to file a complaint against any kind of sexual harassment at her place of work. Under this act, she can submit a written complaint to an

Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) at a branch office within a period of 3 months.

- 4) **Women have a right against domestic violence**
Section 498 of the Indian Constitution looks to protect a wife, female live-in partner or a woman living in a household like a mother or a sister from domestic violence (including verbal, economic, emotional and sexual) by the hands of a husband, male live-in partner or relatives. The accused shall be punished with a non-bailable imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.
- 5) **Female sexual assault victims have the right to keep their identity anonymous**
To ensure that her privacy is protected, a woman who has been sexually assaulted may record her statement alone before the district magistrate when the case is under trial, or in the presence of a female police officer.
- 6) **Women have the right to get free legal aid**
Under the Legal Services Authorities Act, female rape victims have the right to get free legal aid or help from the Legal Services Authority who has to arrange a lawyer for her.
- 7) **Women have right not to be arrested at night**
Unless there is an exceptional case on the orders of a first class magistrate, a woman cannot be arrested after sunset and before sunrise. In addition, the law also states that the police can interrogate a woman at her residence only in the presence of a woman constable and family members or friends.
- 8) **Women have the right to register virtual complaints**
The law gives women the provision for filing virtual complaints via e-mail, or writing her complaint and sending it to a police station from a registered postal address. Further, the SHO sends a police constable to her place to record her complaint. This is in case a woman is not in a position to physically go to a police station and file a complaint.
- 9) **Women have the right against indecent representation**
Depiction of a woman's figure (her form or any body part) in any manner that is indecent, derogatory, or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals, is a punishable offence.
- 10) **Women have the right against being stalked**
Section 354D of the IPC makes way for legal action to be taken against an offender if he/she follows a woman, tries to contact her to foster personal interaction repeatedly despite a clear indication of disinterest; or monitor the use by a woman of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication.
- 11) **Women have a right to Zero FIR**
An FIR that can be filed at any police station irrespective of the location where the incident occurred or a specific jurisdiction it comes under, the Zero FIR can later be moved to the Police Station in whose jurisdiction the case falls under. This ruling was passed by the Supreme Court to save the victim's time and prevent an offender from getting away scot-free.

Redefining the status of women in India

Fast forward to 2016, 70 years since independence – the situation stands such that reports indicate a dwindling tendency in participation rates of women in the formal labour force and political participation of women being no more than 10%.

The National Crime Records Bureau has further recorded an alarming rise in the rate of crimes against women which serve to only complicate any chance of improving the participation rates of women in various areas of society.

This unexpected turn of events despite a promising start to a national narrative of development demands a close look at gender roles in the context of the society it is born of. Only in assessing gender roles and social attitudes to such gender roles despite progressive laws can one possibly understand what has worked for India and what hasn't. And most importantly for that which hasn't worked, "gender roles" can tell us "why" the situation has turned out that way. To begin the discussion, let's first start by defining what "gender" is:

"Gender" is a socio-cultural construct which provides the implicit framework that charts out the general relationships between the sexes in a society.

Culture Defining the Priorities and Status of Women in India

The Human Development Report 2015, published by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) recorded that women across the world undertake most of the unpaid housework and care giving work in their homes and communities.

Due to a disproportionate workload in terms of care giving duties, women most often have less time for other activities such as paid work and education. In a sample of 62 countries, it is interesting to note that on an average 4.5 hours a day were devoted by men to social life and leisure while for women, the number of hours was reduced to 3.9 in India.

Besides the lack of time faced by women after care giving activities to pursue income generating skills and active careers, they also find themselves often subjected to a family imposed ideal of priority skill sets to work on which in turn shapes them to cater to the requirements of a chauvinistic marriage market rather than a job market.

Cultural indoctrination and social pressure

Interestingly, educated married women in urban areas have been found to be socially "wired" to bend to the pressures of their in-laws and drop out of the labour force after marriage to give priority to their care giving duties at home. There are also instances of women willingly leaving their jobs as they are conditioned to believe that housekeeping, child bearing are their primary duties and roles.

This issue is as much a matter of cultural indoctrination as it is of cultural pressure. There is also a noted differentiation in establishing culturally accepted priorities for men and women. For women, the disproportionate pressure to sustain the marriage, manage the household, bear and bring up

children alongside careers naturally push them to often compromise with their work life aspirations.

Given that society is hostile to women who break the mould and rewrite their priorities on their own, conforming to the code becomes the easier and thus the more frequently opted choice. It's often vital for those who want to maintain a relationship with their own parents and family.

Work culture in India also adopts the same attitude and would rather fire young mothers or women with conservative social norms than invest in arrangements such as:

- Assisting them with more flexible work hours
- Allowances for travelling or facilities for pick up and drop off
- Building crèches or day care facilities for their employees' children

The role of women in Indian society is too often viewed as a kind of liability. They are seen as people who have to be maintained and taken care of at different phases of their life.

This is reinforced by women surrendering to such disempowering notions and beliefs that govern what they are capable of and are "meant" to do.

For families that are not really well-off, this dangerous idea sometimes translates to women being subjected to neglect and other poor treatment, e.g. girls getting inadequate nutrition because they are taken as candidates meant to ultimately settle with the groom's family. After all, those who "deserve" the best food are the boys who will have to go to school and work later on, isn't it?

Women are taught to "not own" themselves and grow as mandated by generations of patriarchs. Denial of the self more often leads to denial of one's true potential and this affects the state of the entire country.

Lack of awareness and exposure causes this regressive mindset to further thrive. To suggest hope brings us to the question of not just taking a closer look at the education system for youngsters but also a much needed awareness drive and peer education system for the elder generations.

With family units being a fundamental aspect of every Indian's life, every member of the Indian household, of variable age groups has to undergo an awareness journey to break out of the long standing legacy of "socially" treating women as second class citizens in a country which promises them empowerment by law.

2. Conclusion

Women in modern Indian society enjoy equal position as men in many areas such as politics, economics, and legal rights, although in many areas they are still not treated equal to men. Patriarchal society, cultural preference for sons, and systemic bias against women have undermined their position in the society for a long time. The future looks bright for women in modern Indian society as government initiatives are helping them overcome prejudice and society attitudes

are changing. Women are proving to be capable of being equal to men, as they get more opportunities.

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