

TOUGH ROAD FOR INDIAN WOMEN AND POSITIVE THRUST AHEAD

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ABSTRACT

Normally from birth girls do not receive adequate care, attention and respect in comparison to their male counterparts. Ancient Hindu scriptures mention that religious rites are imperfect without woman participation as "Ardhangani". Later due to Mughal invasions and feeling of insecurity women were expected to cover themselves with veil to hide from evil eyes and mostly confined to four walls of house. In modern history as an effort of some social reformers women started becoming visible and raise voices in favour of issues which benefit them. In Independent India many constitutional provisions to safeguard interests and rights of women guaranteeing all professions open to them as selection on basis of merit rather gender biases. As a result many women have distinguished themselves in various fields as politicians, orators, lawyers, academicians, doctors, administrators, diplomats etc. As a challenge they are putting their heart and soul in work undertaken and competing successfully with men. Despite progress they have to struggle against male dominated mindset. Women are also considered as carriers of tradition, moral fervor and spiritual discourse. India can progress faster if women are educated, financially independent, have freedom, and move safely. This will provide atmosphere for her to blossom, flourish and uncover her inner beauty. Still many problems of domestic violence, sex selective abortion, dowry, sexual harassment, rapes exist and are blot to the society. Working women are facing double work burden and trying to manage home and profession, it is the responsibility of their male counterparts and women to help each other for their fast progress and upliftment. At the same time women should realize that freely intoxicating, using abusive words, breaking relationships on small pretexts, harassing males, obscenity is not true empowerment. They should act sensibly, smartly, intelligently, constructively to make themselves, their children, society and nation strong

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Constitution has given women equal rights to men but the patriarchal structure still remains thereby affecting attitude towards women. Men are considered assets and women liability for family as men carry forward patrilineal lineage,

regarded as insurance for parents in old age, bring wife who will take care of domestic chores therefore they are more promoted to earn money. Whereas women are liability as they will go with their husband after marriage thereby undermining their contribution in the family of their birth. They are normally not considered as earners and thought to depend economically and emotionally on men.

Because of these factors the birth of son is considered blissful and celebrated. Dowry being used to climb social ladder, improve economic security and enhance wealth is another reason for women's plight. Though in modern India the degree of discrimination is decreasing and women are being given opportunity and voice in social, economic and political field then also in most sections of society the features related to discrimination still persist. Women are portraying and placing themselves as achievers which most men are not able to digest and it is being exhibited in increased violence against women which can be categorized as heinous crime. Right from birth to death women no matter how much well educated and economically well off face discrimination at some stage. Sex selective abortions, abandonment of females, poor nutrition imparted and health ignored, not given equal educational opportunities, lower status in marital relationships are different forms of discrimination.

Women are deprived from having equal access to social services as well as to physical and social capital. Women face various constraints related to social norms and values that govern the gender division of labour in production and reproduction. The care work burdens and responsibilities are reinforced by strong gender norms. Even if economic opportunities might exist, restrictive social norms will prevent women from taking advantage of them. Investments in gender equality can accelerate both economic growth and poverty reduction. Gender equality can benefit the economy through efficiency gains. Less gender inequality in resources such as education and access to employment can reduce the likelihood of a household being poor. Gender budgeting used to target government expenditures on women will impact gender inequality. Microfinance can reduce gender inequality and poverty. Gender equality will act as a cushion for the households to bear the shocks of calamities, economic crisis, deaths, and separation.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Spiritually men and women are equal as they both have been created by Supreme Father. No one is superior to other but they have different attributes in accordance make their contribution to the society through their respective roles. There should be balance in society no one should try to dominate other but should respect and cooperate with each other for progressive society. The level of civility, moral and spiritual standards of society is reflected through how much respect it imparts to its women and opportunity to reach their real potential in life. In Vedic literature of Bharat women have been given high regard traditionally shown in the respect it gives to its Goddesses with exclusive qualities and portrayed as embodiment of Shakti or power. In Manu Samhita it is stated that "Women must be honored and adorned by their father, brothers, husband and brothers-in-law who want their self welfare. Where women are honored, there the God is pleased, but where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes and where they are happy ever prospers. Hence men who seek their own welfare should always honor women on festivals with gifts of ornaments, clothes and food."(Manu Smriti III 55-59) Pitamah Bhisma explained "O ruler of the Earth (Yuddhisthira) the lineage in which daughters and daughters-in-law are saddened by ill treatment, that lineage is destroyed. When out of their grief those women curse these households they lose their charm, prosperity and happiness."(Mahabharata Anushasanparva 12-14)

Bharat history includes many women who have risen to great heights in spirituality, government, writing, education, science or even warriors in battlefield. There were women Rishis also to impart Vedic Knowledge to others. The 126th hymn of the first book of Rigveda was revealed by Vedic women Romasha, 179th hymn by Lopamudra and others such as Gargi, Maitreyi, Apala, Ghosha, Aditi instructed Indra in the higher knowledge of Brahman. They lived ideal life of spirituality and called Sanskrit Brahmadanis. In Rig Vedic society

though preference was for male child to female but females were as free as their male counterparts. Relation between husband and wife was based on reciprocity and autonomy in their respective spheres of activity. They were part of folk assembly and participated in its deliberations. She was initiated into Vedic studies after her Upanayan Initiation ceremony and could perform Sandhya. At the beginning of 500 B.C. Upanayan came to be discouraged for girls and it was declared that marriage was substitute had disastrous consequences on the general status and dignity of women. (Apte Prabha 1996) They did not have to follow Purdah system and were given equal opportunity for education, had freedom in choosing their groom through Swayambar but divorce was not allowed. Women had equal rights in social and religious fields but had limited rights in economic field. In economic status husband used to consult his wife on financial matters and she helped in agricultural pursuits. In domestic life they were Supreme and enjoyed freedom. In Buddhist period economic status remained unchanged but improved in social and religious terms. They had their own Sangha called Bhikshuni Sangha providing cultural and social opportunities and exposure to public life. Their position declined in post Vedic age and deteriorated further in Mughal Period. During first Muslim invasion in eighth century to check expanding Buddhism Shankaracharya's were emphasizing the supremacy of Vedas which has given respectable position to women. But India experienced second Muslim invasion in eleventh century when Mohammad Ghazni conquered India till British Rule social life especially of women declined considerably. From protective viewpoint purdah system introduced, education denied, child marriage started, Sati Pratha for personal dignity practiced. Bhakti movement tried to give new life to women but was not able to change economic status of women. The deterioration of the status of women did not begin from any specific point of time. The traces of such determination can be found in all periods of Indian history though, in later ages degradation is much more marked and rapid. Even in Vedic times there are references which indicate that

there was another school of thought which believed that women should not be held in such high ideals being weak minded and unworthy of being trusted.

The socio economic status of the woman's family and community also determine her vulnerability in larger society. Violence against women knows no geographical, cultural or linguistic boundaries and affects all women without regard to their level of income. However; poverty limits choices and access to means of protecting and freeing oneself from violence. Women's responsibilities for care fundamentally affect their ability to participate in social programmes, in labor markets, and to derive benefits from household resources. For poor women, time is often the most valuable resource, and poor women's time is so much taken up by caring work that they remain caught in a vicious circle of poverty. Women who specialize in providing unpaid care work face enormous economic risks. Such specialization not only lowers their earnings potential and reinforces dependencies on a male 'breadwinner'. Often women do not have the same access to social protections, such as pensions for old age, thereby increasing their risk of falling into poverty. Investments in gender equality can accelerate economic growth and poverty reduction. Holistic approach towards women's health should be adopted keeping in view health infrastructure, allocations towards health, fulfilling need of health personnel, gender sensitivity and gender budgeting in all government departments should be focused along with addressing social determinants of health. It is girls, and marginalised groups such as the very poor and the disabled, who are often left behind. While girls attend primary school in roughly equal numbers to boys, the gap widens as they get older and more are forced to drop out to help with work at home or get married. The Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a coalition of 26 NGOs and teaching unions, wants all nations to allocate at least 6% of GDP to education. India has been promising that since 1968, Taneja says, but the figure has never topped 4%, and it is currently 3.7%. It is an issue of political will, rather than a lack of cash. In terms of

education of the whole population, 44% of women have no education at all compared to 29% of men. If we look at the years of schooling completed then we note that 9% of women and 15% of men have more than 10 years of education. The average age of marriage for women is 17 years in rural areas, 18.6 in urban, and 16.8 in urban slums. 50% of the women across the country get married between the ages of 15-18 years. We don't observe the age of marriage of the men, but we note that on average husbands are 5 years older than their wives. With majority of women getting married below or around the legal marriage age of 18 years, education is often not a priority for the women. For a variety of reasons education remains high on the agenda of many governments, so education will continue to be a key factor in equalising relationships between men and women and in giving women access to income earning opportunities. As educating females makes good economic sense, growth policy can continue to support efforts towards equal educational opportunities, particularly in terms of post-primary education for girls where the highest returns to investment are found. (Ruth Alsop and Paul Healey)

The poverty scenario in India is reflective of gender inequalities .The effect of poverty on women is worse as Indian women continue to be denied access to productive assets in the form of financial credits ,markets ,land ownership and human capital such as education and skill training which could enhance their abilities as economic agents .In informal economy compared to men average earnings of women are lower and the risk of poverty is higher among all women workers .The current world food prices is having a severe impact on women as many of them are denying themselves even one meal to ensure that their children are fed .The vast majority of the world's poor are women .Intra household inequalities and discrimination determine the status of women and the 'extent of poverty' in which women live .

The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) is a nationally representative survey that allows us to paint a picture of the average Indian woman over her lifetime. The survey is

administered to 41,554 households (64% rural) with the section on gender issues administered to a married woman between ages 15 to 49. The health status of a woman is a reflection of the socio-economic development of the country and is shaped by a variety of factors-the level of income and standard of living, housing, sanitation, education, employment, health consciousness, personal hygiene and by the coverage, availability, accessibility and affordability of health care. Gender disparity in health outcomes is particularly prominent in India. From the moment of conception to the end of life, the challenges to the female are enormous, especially poor women who have limited access to health care. Women's low participation in decision making adversely affects her health status. Discrimination against women/girls impinges upon their right to health and manifests itself in the form of worsening health and nutrition indices. If we measure status of women in relation to development indicators such as real per capita income, literacy level, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate women are lagging behind men. The mortality rates of girl is affected by region, religion, caste and poverty. The lower the status of women the lower the life expectancy. Boys are given more timely medical care which is reflected in higher survival among males compared with females. The health of women depends on their emotional, social and physical well being, which are determined by different social, political and economic linkages in their lives. Women are subjected to selective malnourishment from birth. In Indian society where women's rights are repressed the health of women and children suffers significantly. The delivery of health care system for masses especially in rural areas is below standard and its coverage and accessibility to women is more challenging because in family she has secondary status though in terms of family responsibility she has primary role in nurturing and feeding the whole family. Biological, socio-cultural and economic factors make women and young girls more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. The factors responsible for this are low status of women, poverty, early marriage, trafficking, sex worker, migration, lack of education and gender

discrimination. Early marriage burdens women with a lot of responsibilities, deprive opportunities for development. This expands girl's fertility span, early pregnancy along with malnutrition adds to her physical health deterioration. In most marital relationship women has lesser say in adopting contraceptive means for family planning even if she wants a limited family size, she has to get full consent of her husband and even family members. Though number of pregnancies, deliveries, abortions creates wreck to her physical and mental situation. Apart from this many girls face sexual harassment at level of family, profession and outside environment, this is very degrading and lowers the confidence level of the girl apart from physical and mental trauma. Ratio of girls to boys is reflective of how widespread and entrenched sex selective abortions are. The parents of a male child are more likely to stop having children than those where girls are conceived. Though law prohibits but some doctors or quacks charging huge fees are ready for parents willing to determine sex and make choice for sex selective abortions. Advancement in technology is more exploited by well off in their favour.

For any progressive economy women have to keep asserting for their rights with hope that one day the results will better the lives of generations to come. Their participation will ensure that those issues affecting women are addressed. Gender equality according to World Bank imply "Women and men can enjoy the same status and conditions and have equal opportunity for realizing their potential abilities to contribute to the political, economic, social and cultural development of their societies and they should also benefit equally from the results of such development." (World Bank (2011) The discourse on women's empowerment has been gradually evolving over the last few decades wherein paradigm shift have occurred from seeing women as mere recipients of welfare benefits to mainstreaming gender concerns and engaging them in the development process of the country. For higher level of growth and development full potentials of women need to be utilized by ensuring equal rights and opportunities. (GOI MWCD). Social,

economic and political empowerment will make positive impact on their lives but in the process they need to be cautious that they are expected to be progressive rather revengeful. Their views will be heard and decisions considered only when put forward it with positive attitude. Financial stability imparted to women will allow them to initiate development projects that are in their favor. Representation of women from every caste, class, religion, profession is needed so that issues are not left behind and sensitivity and solutions to problems of every female is addressed. They need to be equally healthy, educated and skilled to be at the same or even better status with men and taught to discover their passions. Men and women should act not as competitors but need to be complementary. India due to high preference for sons and male heir has an excess of 37 million males as couples take advantage of sex selective technology in the last 30 years which now banned but still in widespread practice. When people try to restrict family size they opt for such technique otherwise if couple have girls continue to have children till have one son and sometimes more. But this gender discrimination due to sex selection process will create imbalance between males and females numbers and will have many socio-economic consequences as surplus of bachelors, increase in human trafficking, prostitution, depression of not getting married at right age etc. Thus, gender balance is must for good society obsession for male child has to be given up to control population as well as impart respectful position to females. Scenario may be improving but it's exemplary rather seen generally. At household levels discrimination on basis of health including food and nutrition, education, poverty, visibility, employment, skills development, violence, social security need to be addressed to provide them healthy environment for unleashing their full potentials and their growth. Due to constitutional provisions and government schemes some improvement is seen but it is marginal when looking at the whole population. Girls if for free meals and scholarships are sent to schools and colleges have to share household responsibilities with their mother in comparison to their brothers, studying under

pressure that if some eve teasing reported will be forced to drop class.

CONCLUSION

India is developing at fast pace but women in India are facing discrimination at several levels. The violent behavior being exhibited in the society in form of rape, acid attack ,heights of cruelty and murder is showing that men are not able to digest the progress and mobility of women their appearance in society. In the Constitution women have been guaranteed social, economic and political equality with men, yet there is a difference between constitutional rights and rights enjoyed by women in reality. Attitudinal changes need to be brought about through awareness in society. Action can also be taken to better target government expenditures to maximize their impact on gender inequality. Gender budgeting integrates gender analysis into economic policy, offering the opportunity to reduce gender inequality and improve expenditures that target growth promoting initiatives.

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