

Women's Lives and Challenges

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Here in India and across the world, we cannot achieve our dreams of peace and economic development without full and equal participation of women. Investing in women pays multiple dividends: empowered women make better choices for themselves and their families, they have fewer and healthier children, they live longer, and they contribute more substantially to their communities. When women move forward, they bring the rest of society with them. There can be no sustainable progress unless women can prosper along with men.

In Rajasthan, women are moving forward. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) program has helped to measure how far we have come and to map the course ahead. More women are using family planning, fewer women are dying in pregnancy and childbirth, and more women are participating in household decisions.

Women progress is encouraging, but like so many other countries, women here still face daunting challenges in their journey towards equality. This report, *Women's Lives and Challenges: Equality and Empowerment since 2000*, highlights the improving status of women throughout the last decade but also underscores how many women still cannot go to school, do not have access to health care, and who still suffer from gender discrimination and violence. All of this not only holds back these women, it holds back the families they are part of, and it holds back our entire nation. Let us affirm our commitment to improving women's lives, to ensuring their equal access to education and resources, and to empowering them to choose their own futures. Truly, there has never been a better time to be a woman, and there has never been a better time to advance women's rights.

It is our privilege to endorse this important topic and to encourage everyone to read it and be empowered to support the women in their lives – your mothers, your sisters, your nieces, your

aunts, your wives, and most of all, your daughters. If each of you supports just one woman in your life, then you will transform their life, your family's well being, your country, and the world. The facts are clear to see.

Throughout our lives, women are faced with the challenge of discerning messages we receive through our parents, peers, media and society in general. These messages are filled with standards for ways in which we are expected to look, speak and act as women. Over the course of several years, their influence often results in a denial of our authentic self, in favor of becoming the person everyone else wants and needs us to be. This denial of self creates a 'void' and is often experienced as a deep sadness, a sense of longing for something more, a lack of self-love and a sense of disconnection from or perpetual dissatisfaction with one's body, just to name a few.

1. Woman in the past:-

Women rather than slaves were the first to experience subordination and domination. The subservience of women from primitive times and the consequent differentiation made between men and women is rooted in the unique sexual functions women performed as child bearers. In course of time women's responsibilities got narrowly confined to bearing and rearing children, and managing their homes. As a result, women were educated primarily to perform these tasks thereby stunting their development and growth.

This was used as a reason to exclude them from political participation and duties of citizenship and thus was reduced to a status of second rate beings. Women were denied property and inheritance rights, making them economically dependent on men. Socially politically and economically women were made to accept an inferior and secondary status which was justified and defended with the help of scriptures, customs and traditions. A woman was a slave before the slave existed. A man is always ruled on women, he feels herself as a servant of the family. The position of woman in the ancient world was one of extreme oppression. She was physically retrained and repressed, and mentally even more so. In the house hold she was only one degree better than the servants; her own sons were her masters, to whom she owed obedience.

2. Women in the present: -

Marriage is necessary for the proper and wholesome development of both men and women. However it is only those marriages based on love, affection, mutual respect and sense of

emotional and material security that can secure a good, meaningful and an equal relationship to both men and women. Women in the process continue to be educated with the view to becoming good mothers and wives thereby ensuring that their mental development enabled them to undertake household chores rather than participate in the political process as free and equal beings. Man devotes himself more seriously to the business for procreation than to any other. In the achievement of nothing else. Traditional societies prevented women from entering the public domain were given a subordinate position in the society. The life of an Indian woman was like a well-defined predictable master plan.

When the women liberalization movement started the scenario of women's work changed. Since the mid-1970s sociological interest in women's employment issues has expanded rapidly. Women's status has undergone profound changes. As a result a significant change has been noticed in the attitude of men and women towards women's education and employment.

The traditional picture of women is very different than what it is today. Women have played a key and largely unrecognized role in the rapid economic and social development worldwide. Women have been entering workforce in record numbers, over the last four decades. Although women are not a minority, in the world of work they have faced many handicaps. In fact, majority of women who wish to pursue a career face the problem. Domestic and outside work often caused imbalances. Gender discrimination is a common phenomenon.

Women make up 50 percent of the workplace but account for less than 4 percent of nations top executives. Women managers are clustered into administrative and support functions. HRM helps working women have a support system and a gender just culture. The proverb seems true that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world".

Although a significant number of women has entered management positions for sufficient number of years. They are still noticeably absent at the top level of organizations. Women are not newcomers to the working world, as some may believe, but their role is changing, as are the social values. Most women have always worked.

Though the traditional picture of a woman is very different, the organizations are beginning to recognize that equal opportunity for women is 'smart businesses. This status of today's woman also has more to tell us. Henceforth, there is a need to monitor closely the issues of women while at work or in the workplace.

Majority of women who wish to pursue a career face the problem:-

Women are expected to fulfill their biological role but at the same time if they choose to follow a career they are expected to accept the same terms as their male colleagues. Women are still thought of in their family roles and men in their work and business roles.

The 1970s was a time of unprecedented interest in women's opportunities, expressed in two major acts of parliament and supported by widespread changes in social attitudes, by the influx of women in the labor market and by a rising tide of women with high qualifications and aspirations. On the negative side, women's jobs are endangered and women, particularly women working part-time, are in danger of being selected first for redundancy. The positive side is that there has been increase in the number of designations for positive training for one sex only under section 47 of the sex discrimination act. With equalizing the opportunities and the responsibilities between men and women, changes must also be accompanied in personnel practices and procedures within companies, positively designed to ensure that women are not overlooked in informal/formal networks.

3. Domestic and outside work often caused imbalances:-

The need for gaining employment by women has arisen for better management of the family and fulfilling its need. More and more women are entering the working class to satisfy these needs. Though the employment of women outside family is accepted by our society there is no clarity about their role within family circumstances. Working wives face a crisis of adjustment. As they have to perform a dual role-one at home, the traditional mother-wife role and the other outside to achieve-gainful employment. Thus, they face a conflicting situation. It is not surprising that the development of women in India has been the center stage of its development planning since independence, though the concept has been evolving from plan to plan in most south Asian countries, the status of women is low and their socio-economic conditions are much weaker than that of men in all respects, the reality is that they still suffer in all spheres of social and economic life.

4. Although women are not a minority in the world of work they have faced many handicaps:

Women are not newcomers to the working world, as some may believe, but their role is changing as are the social values. We need to look at some of the limitations that have inhibited

their participation and how these limitations are changing. We also need to explore the contributions of explicit and explicit management policies in reducing discrimination.

Most women have always worked. The exceptions were women born with a very high status and who spent their time in leisure, whereas the vast majority of women were required to help the family obtain adequate food, clothing and shelter. In our society of the 21st century, however, the idea of the non-working lady appeared as someone too fragile or unworldly for business or the professions successful husband or father provided subsistence for his daughter or wife who did not have to work. What had been the privilege of the elite was held up as an ideal for all women. In recent years, an increasing number of women have rejected the ideal of the 'lady' in favor of active, responsible occupational roles.

5. The traditional picture of woman is very different from what it is today:-

Traditionally, a woman has been given a role where she just has to be obedient and look after her husband, children and home and in laws at cost of her own life. But, slowly and gradually, the society realized the importance of a woman in educating her children, even herself and helping her husband in earning money as well. Traditional societies structured their cultural institutions based on the mythical religious conception.

Educated women then started getting jobs in many a government offices and schools but still women were prevented from entering the public domain and were given a subordinate position in society. In the modern era mythical conceptions were rejected in favor of scientific world views. However the prejudices of the mythical world survived in the subconscious of the modern societies. Some women were allowed to enter the public sphere, but those who participated were low in density. Those who were successful in entering the public sphere encountered an invisible 'glass roof' over stopping them from arriving there. Women were somehow viewed as threatening and therefore to be restrained.

Through educational reforms, women have demonstrated immense talent in academics and professions and now seek to fulfill their potential in the public sphere. In the case of women, the opportunity to work has too often created a double burden of work within and outside home. Recently, the international centre for research and women attributed the reason for increased domestic violence to the 'gender specific responsibilities' such as preparing meals, caring for

children and managing the household. And, if any women is holding an executive position she has to take care of the office meeting, special seminars etc.

6. Challenges

The women are facing various types of challenges at present scenario:-

“Glass ceiling” was adopted to describe invisible, institutional barriers that have historically held women back from advancing up the corporate ladder. Whether overt (i.e. business deals conducted at the men’s clubs, pay inequality etc) or covert (i.e. seasoned female executives losing promotions to men they trained, sexual harassment, etc).collectively these barriers have resulted in a real death of women at the highest levels in business.

Gender discrimination is a common phenomenon:-

- Gender discrimination is a common and universal phenomenon. Sometimes, it is intentionally weaved into the designs of daily existence and at other times, it is the outcome of the prevailing cultural patterns. Gender discrimination is not biologically determined but it is determined rather socially. Denial of equality, rights and opportunity and supplement in any form on the basis of gender is gender discrimination.
- Centuries have come, and centuries have gone, but the plight of women is not likely to change. Time has helplessly watched women suffering in the form of discrimination, oppression, exploitation, degradation, aggression, humiliation.
- Gender is a common term where as gender discrimination is meant only for women, because females are the only victims of gender discrimination.
- Women in India are given equal legal and cultural protection in principle only. But in their day to day life they are the victims of multilayered discrimination and injustice. This reveals a male chauvinistic face of gender biased society wherein all the rights and privileges have been usurped by the males and most of the duties and sufferings are enforced upon women.
- Besides this, they face several types of physical exploitation and mental harassment.

Abortion: The pregnancy is removed from the womb, either by taking pills (medical abortion) which involves taking medicines to cause a miscarriage or by surgery (surgical abortion) where the pregnancy is removed from the womb. Most abortions can be provided on a day care basis which means you do not need to stay at a clinic overnight. Sometimes it is called termination of pregnancy.

Female infanticide and feticide: - In India, some women choose to terminate their pregnancies when expecting daughters but carry their pregnancies to term when expecting sons. Infanticide is the unlawful killing of very young children.

Child labour: - A 9-year old girl toils under the hot sun. Making bricks from morning to night, seven days a week. She was trafficked with her entire family from Bihar, one of the poorest and most underdeveloped states. Children like this young girl are prized in the carpet industry for their small, fast fingers. Defenseless, they do what they're told, toiling in cramped, dark, and airless village huts from sunrise until well into the night.

Trafficking: - The women and girls used in prostitution may be exploited 10 to 40 times a night, sometimes keeping as little as 20 rupees (less than 50 cents) per encounter. However many cases of trafficking of young girls and women have been reported. These women are either forced into prostitution, domestic work or child labour. Many women are forced into prostitution either by their parents, husbands or boyfriends -- or as a result of the difficult economic and social conditions in which they find themselves. Most women initially victimized by sexual traffickers have little inkling of what awaits them. They generally get a very small percentage of what the customer pays to the pimp or the brothel owner. Once they are caught up in the system there is practically no way out, and they find themselves in a very vulnerable situation.

Child marriage: - Earlier, child marriages were highly prevalent in India. The young girls would live with their parents till they reached puberty. They were married to the person much elder to them.... In case of any problem in performing religious rites, males between the age of 24 and 30 should marry a female between the age of 8 and 12.

Dowry system: - Dowry is the money given in the form of shelter to bride at the time of marriage so that she is well maintained by the bride groom... And those who fail to pay dowry either daughter are ill treated and they finally commit suicide.

Domestic violence: - Domestic violence, or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as it is sometimes called, is a worldwide problem. Cultural and household stress factors contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence.

Purdha system: - Purdah is the practice of requiring women to cover their bodies so as to cover their form. It signifies, apart from wearing a veil, restrictions on mobility of women, curtailment

of their right to interact freely and it is a symbol of subordination of women. Now, it is a declining tradition in India, practiced mostly by Muslims.

Widow Exploitation: - Widows are still ill treated. They are condemned to a life of great agony shaving their heads, living in isolation they are forced to live pitiful lives in dingy guest houses, ashrams, or a servant quarter of the house. And over that it's a shame that younger widows are sexually exploited, stating that life is just burdening them with the cruelties of the society.

7. Conclusion

Females of our country have faced the discrimination for ages now and still continue to exist in various forms. Any denial of equality, gender and opportunity on the basis of gender is gender discrimination. Nature doesn't discriminate men from women. But women worldwide have been the victim of inequality not only in terms of social and political rights but also on grounds of employment opportunities. The male dominant society of India makes its women habitual of this discrimination. As a result, most women fail to understand their own rights and freedom.

There are many spheres of life where women are denied opportunities. Discrimination against females starts with their birth and continues through their lives. An unborn girl child is aborted with the help of sex determination techniques. A girl child who is born is seen as a burden on her parents or family and not given equal treatment as boys of the same family ever since birth. She is not given proper nutritious food in some cases. As she grows, she is either denied of right to education and in some cases it is limited to elementary level. Her health and well being is not given due attention and concern. She is married at an early age and this puts an end to any possibilities of growth and a good life in most cases. The discrimination doesn't end here but continues with the expectations of giving birth to a boy. The vicious cycle of female discrimination starts here. Almost all women face some incidents of eve teasing, some are unfortunate to be assaulted sexually and raped. Marriage of a woman becomes more perplexed if she faces dowry threats, which sometimes cause deaths also. With such a deprived living, how can we expect the standard of living of women to rise and their presence be felt at international level?

Women, both illiterate and partially literate have limited access to health care and job opportunities and remain confined to the bounds of their household chores, raising children and

looking after families. A good education or qualification does not bring women at par with the men. They are still deprived of many work opportunities as men are believed to be more capable than their female counterparts with similar qualifications. The notion that women do not have caliber and intelligence to take up managerial positions or high profile jobs is another proof of the discrimination against women in our society. According to 2011 census, the female literacy rate was 65.46% compared to 82.14% for males. The underlying thought that educating women is of no value as they will only serve their husbands and family in future makes the parents unwilling to spend on girl's education. Women are not able to enjoy equal status in society as men and have very little say or authority. The grant of equal rights by the Constitution does not bring any significant change in their position and respect in the society.

Law and property rights are also enforced inefficiently and inheritance is usually the sole right of sons and not the daughters. Even though laws are now enforced for the rights of women on parental property, not many people are aware of it and the social structure is such that daughters do not usually insist on their property rights.

Society favors men and gives them higher authority and this makes women vulnerable to crimes like rapes, eve teasing, sexual abuse etc. Though the number of women officers is growing, yet the number is not comparable with men holding higher ranks. The discrimination against women is not only hampering the growth of women at social, economic and personal level but also significantly lower female-to-male ratios impact the growth in both agriculture and industrial sectors. Thus, gender discrimination also impedes the country's growth.

While women are the most common sufferers and remain suppressed due to social pressure, there are some disadvantages that men have over women as laws favor women in certain cases. For instance, in case of adultery husband can be jailed for his unfaithfulness towards wife. However, there is no law which jails and no court that punishes women for adultery. Sexual molestation of men is rarely taken into procedure or FIR filed in the regard. It is men who are blamed for this crime even if the woman is the culprit. Some women also misuse the anti-dowry law to get their husbands jailed for dowry demand. The law does not favor men until there is solid evidence provided against the allegations.