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Complex human psychology and dignity of women within the larger society – A societal perspective

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Abstract--Gender stereotype sexism still continues to prevail even in the 21st century in every nook and corner of the mother earth. Women and girls around the world, both in the developed as well as the developing nation, are affected in some way or the other and their talents are left untapped. WHO states that nearly 1 out of every 3 women experience physical or sexual abuse in various forms like domestic violence, eve-teasing, rape, or subject to violence of the spouse, or any unwanted sexual attention etc,. Even the physiological process of menstruation in women is considered as a thing of despise in various religions. There have been several liberation movements, campaigns and laws enacted from time to time to bring about a radical change in the patriarchal society and a steady progress in the condition of women and the certain discrimination which a female face in varied aspects. This research paper attempts to explore the countless complicated experiences a woman faces in her entire lifetime since time immemorial across the globe.

Keywords--Gender, Patriarchal society, Domestic Violence, Eve-teasing, Menstruation.

Introduction

yatra

nāryastupūjyanteramantetatradevatāḥ |

yatraitāstunapūjyantesarvāstatrāphalāḥkriyāḥ || 56 ||

“Where women are honoured, there the gods rejoice; where, on the other hand, they are not honoured, there all rites are fruitless”.—(56)

Being the oldest civilization of the world, the status of women in the society since Vedic period, they get married and at a matured age are given the opportunity to enter into the institution of marriage, with the full freedom to choose husband. The religious ceremony is being known as Swayam Var. But by the passage of time gradually the status of women started declining and women lost their freedom and began facing discrimination in the later Vedic period. The condition of women can be traced by analyzing Smriti's, with one of the slog which states:

*pitāraṅgātikāumārebhartāraṅgātiyauvane |
raṅgāntisthavireputrānastrīsvātantryamarhati || 3 ||*

“The father guards her during virginity, the husband guards her in youth, the sons guard her in old age; the woman is never fit for independence”.—(iii).

During the medieval period many of the customs affected the freedom of women adversely and worsened her condition and status in the society thereafter. Attempts were made to keep women away from the muslim invaders, which gave birth to practices forcing the women to be in veil (Pardha System), Child marriages and Sati pratha, Devdasi and Jauhar. Due to these kind of social stigma women did not have the opportunity to use their own rights and caliber. During British period certain social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami DayanadSaraswati, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar, etc, fought for the awareness among the public and women at the grassroot level. When India got independence and the British Government transferred the power to the Indian government, through independence Act 1947, the constitution of India was legislated with a new hope to provide equal right to both men and women with the dream of gender equality.

Violence and Violation of Human Rights against Women

Women exploitation is not the phenomenon of the present day, but she is the victim of exploitation from the ancient time in a continuous manner. The society never gave women the status and opportunity as of men. We shall discuss in detail certain practices which was carried out since ancient period.

Female slave of God/ Devadasi tradition

This was a religious practice in Southern part of India, where the female at the age of 5 or 6 years was married to a deity and was sexually exploited by the patrons of the temple. This illegitimate sexual exploitation of the Devadasi's who were called as the female slave of god, became a tradition in the pre-Aryan ancient arena. After independence the national commission of women estimated 48,358 devadasis in India and to abolish this practice, legislation were enacted such as: Madras Devadasi (Prevention of dedication) Act 1947, Bombay Devadasi Protection Act 1934, the Karnataka Devadasi (Prevention of dedication) Act 1982, Andhra Pradesh Devadasi (Prevention of dedication) Act 1988, Maharashtra Devadasi (Abolition of dedication) Act 2006. The Supreme Court also directed the government to take appropriate steps for preventing women from being forced to become devadasi.

Practice of Sati

During Vedic period the sati practice came into existence and appeared as a mass phenomenon supporting a well-developed ideology prevailing in the states of Rajasthan and Bengal as a great social turmoil. Sati prevention Act 1987, was enacted, declaring sati activities as a crime. By this Act the glorification in relation to sati, before or after along with observance of any ceremony in connection with the commission of sati was declared as a punishable offence. Even the Supreme Court has directed the government to rescue and rehabilitation of widow, leading to the implementation of legislated law, enabling the provision of sufficient means of livelihood and socio-economic empowerment, to live a life with human dignity which can prevent such practices.

Practice of Child marriage

Child marriage was being solemnized before maturity and this practice became the tradition prevalent from the medieval era. The girls in most part of India commonly regarded as the burden of the family, so the marriages were settled even before the birth of the child. In southern region of the nation, the marriage between the cousins is a common practice, because the family of that religion have a belief that the girl would be safe in the close knitted relation. The actual reason for child marriage can be analyzed to be illiteracy, social insecurity, poverty, dowry system, and some social evils. However, the condition of the males was far better in the cases of child marriage, being a male dominated society.

Restrictions on Widow marriage

During the medieval period, because of Sati practice many of the widows did not have the right to life after the death of her husband. Those widows who saved themselves from sati practice, were being heavily discriminated with full restrictions by the society. They were forcefully banned from celebrating or participating in any festivals, celebrations, or any auspicious functions at the family. Their mere presence was considered to be a bad omen and widow remarriage was a taboo in the society. The social reformers like Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar, started a movement during the British rule and succeeded in legislating a law 'Hindu Widow's remarriage Act 1856'. Though the law failed to serve its purpose, even today the Indian society does not accept the widow remarriage easily.

Violation of Right to equality and protection against Gender Discrimination

Men are always considered superior to women and get preference being a patriarchal society, which results in discrimination against women from the time at the mother's womb. Sex discrimination still exists leading to feticide and female infanticide. Though the pregnancy kit is being advertised in the market for a good cause, it is being used to prepare the parents for early sex detection of the fetus in the womb. She is being killed in the womb itself and there are many cases when she is being killed after the birth by several cruel methods, irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Eve Teasing

Almost all girls have to face the problem of eve teasing violating her dignity, modesty and self-respect. This act makes the girl feel inferior, afraid and weak. The dirty mind act of male by making attempt to touch any part of her body whispering obscene words, making offensive comments on her outfit, disgraces her dignity. Nowadays no place can be said to be safe for women, while travelling, or even her own home or her neighborhood.

Rape

Rape, an unlawful sexual act is a forced crime against women which breaches the dignity of the women. In India young girls are often the victims of the rape. Even this offence is committed as a Gang. Live-in relationship and refusal of marriage is a new trend emerging these days and is becoming safe space for the male priors to get away from any offence. The research report published in 'Hindustan Times' dated 3rd January 2022 on the police complaints related to rape says that involvement of strangers in rape cases in 2021 came down from 3.57% to 1.17%. The police data reveals that 46% of the total rape cases were committed either by friends or their close family friends, 15.47% were the neighbors and 14.36% were the relatives of the victim and 23% of cases were related to live-in relationship that occurred on the refusal of marriage.

Diagram

Violation of Right to Liberty

The international convention on Universal Declaration of Human Rights provide right to liberty to everyone including women. But the ground level scenario shows that domestic violence and demand of dowry resulting in bride burning is common. Facing the challenges against the spirit of the constitution of India as well as against the women's right to liberty shrine by UDHR.

Dowry is a social virus, with the meaning, the property that the bride brings with her at the time of solemnizing marriage ritually known as '**Streedhan**' the Dowry Prohibition Act legislated by the parliament of India has made dowry offence with the definition "something demanding and agreed to be given", which gives a room to the culprits to run away from the prosecution.

Domestic violence is a kind of gender-based violence recognized as a human right violation in "World Human Right Conference" in Vienna 1993, declared as the "United Nations Declaration". Psychological harm or sufferings incurred to women including threatening, arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life of women in domestic relation. Wife beating, abused by alcoholic husband, when committed within the four walls of the house, were never publicly acknowledged. The common reason for happening of such violence is to treat wife inferior, by husband with the thought of '**Pathi Parameswar**'. Due to the lack of alternate support most of the victimized women do not go to police or court against such violence.

Physiology of women and psychology of society

Female is being worshipped in all forms such as Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth), Durga (Goddess of power), Saraswati (Goddess of knowledge), and there are 10 Goddesses popularly known as Mahavidyas, with the name Dakshin Kali, Bhuvaneshwari, Chinnamasta, Tara, Matangi, Shodashi, Bairavi, Dhumavati, Bagalamuki, and Kamala as mentioned in Durga Kavach and nine goddesses also worshipped during Navaratri festival, named as Shailaputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skanda Mata, Katyayani, Kalaratri, Maha Gowri and Siddhidayini.

The physiology of these incarnations is same as of normal women, but the religious psychology of the society with respect to normal women in today's scientific era is still orthodox in nature. One of the major factors for creation of a new life is the puberty and menstruation in women. Yet many of the religions of the world have placed restrictions on menstruating women, be it Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism or Buddhism. Only Sikhism is the religion where scriptures are condemned this sexism and it does not impose any restriction on menstruating women. Orthodox is so deep that even the topic of menstruation is considered stigmatic and out of discussion in the society of nearly every religion. This taboo is due to traditional beliefs in impurity of menstruating women and even females feel under pressure and unwilling to discuss it normally, considering this process of menstruation as ritually unclean.

Hinduism – the Hindu mythology believes women god 'Rajaswala Dosha'. Literally 'dosham' means ill omen or something inauspicious, which is a wrong concept in today's scientific age. Instead this is a boon of god, the age women starts menstruating every 28-30 days has the ability to give birth, hence it should be revered. Hindu culture doesn't allow the menstruating women to visit temples and at home they are not allowed to enter the kitchen or participate in puja activities. After a period of five days the women immerses her in the ritual bath and wash the head and only after which the women is considered to be ritually clean. In certain parts of India and Nepal menstruating women are not allowed to live in the residence along with other family members and have to stay in an isolated place, with separate entry. In some places 'menstruation huts' are constructed for women in those days. Though this practice was banned by the Nepal Supreme Court in the year 2005, yet it is prevalent not only in Nepal but in many parts of India like north Eastern and Southern parts of India.

Christianity –The history of menstruating women as a taboo has been a major reason to keep women from the position of authority in Christianity. Catholic followers have a belief that women in such condition should be isolated and will not be allowed even to touch the holy bible. Russian orthodox Christians also believe in this taboo, and they are not allowed to attend church prayers and live in secluded huts during this period.

Judaism - The Jewish code of law, Halakha, literally prohibits any physical contact between male and female during the days of menstruation. After seven days the women immerses her in the ritual bath known as 'Niddah period'.

Islam –the Quran 2.222 reads “they ask you about menstruation. Say, it is an impurity, so keep away from women until they are cleansed”. This clearly shows that Quran stipulates prohibition from menstruating women. They are not supposed to touch Quran, enter the mosque, and offer the ritual prayers for seven full days.

Buddhism–in Buddhism menstruation is only a natural, physical excretion that women have to go through on a monthly basis and nothing more or less. But believers are being influenced by Hinduism. In Thailand the believers of Buddhism distance themselves from cooking food with the belief that they attract evil powers like ghosts for themselves and others.

Sikhism – Sikhism founded by Guru Nanak, condemned the practice of treating women as impure or inauspicious while menstruating. They are allowed to visit Gurudwara and offer prayers without any restriction at home or outside. Being a fairly new religion compared to others, no mythological concept or superstitions are present in Sikhism.

Conclusion

A study conducted in the year 2021 reveals that female population in India has increased at a rate of 1.80% (i.e) from 280 million person in 1972 to approximately 669 million persons in the year 2021. Women play a crucial role in the society and family as a mother, sister, wife and companion, yet they face innumerable challenges and harassment both physically and mentally. These challenges are faced by female all over the world irrespective of the status and position in the society. To overcome this discrimination in all forms more opportunity should be availed by women as leaders and in senior positions, which will pave way for progress and equality of women in every realms of society. The patriarchal attitude of the society fuels educational inequality and a host of disparities serving to be the root cause of sexism, racism and other economic inequality. This “glass ceiling” could be set right beginning from the family level where both male and female child should be brought up equally with shared rights and responsibilities.

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