
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN- A SERIOUS THREAT TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: Women empowerment is stated to be the much desired goal of every democracy and this is the reason why women empowerment has been accorded a special interest in most part of the world. It is believed that women empowerment can bring in positive changes in the development of the nation. Most of all, when one section of the society is ignored or ill-treated, the very success of democracy is challenged as it displays the inability to establish an egalitarian form of a society. The concept of women empowerment has become much more important with regard to developing countries which require the contribution of all sections of the society.

It is not an uncommon sight to see women excel in various fields. But to determine the status of women in the country, this small section of empowered women cannot be taken as an example. It is ground reality that every day women face violations of one form or the other in their life. They are oppressed, discriminated and treated badly for no mistake of theirs. Of all the obstacles to women empowerment this is considered very severe. Crimes against women are a great threat to women empowerment.

This theoretical paper tries to define the concept of women empowerment and also its various implications. It attempts to discuss the importance of women empowerment. It tries to examine as to how violations against women can be a great obstacle to women empowerment. It makes a mention of the various kinds of violations and also their nature and causes. Suggestions are also put forth to make conditions better for women and as to how violations can be dealt with seriously.

Thus the paper attempts to emphasize on the importance of women empowerment and as to how nations benefit out of it. As the study is analytical in nature, secondary data has been employed. The basic data are derived from journals, books and websites.

Keywords: Discrimination, Women Education, Women Empowerment.

Introduction: Women in ancient India were respected and appreciated in all aspects of life and then came in oppression and ill-treatment with the strong sanction of cultural beliefs. But today, we believe to live in the era of women empowerment. But the ground reality is that very few women occupying high posts in the country do not change the pitiful state of lakhs of women who face violence almost everyday in their life. This idea is well reflected in the National Crime Record Bureau Statistics which states that crimes against women have increased by 7.1% nationwide since 2010¹. In modern times, women are given independence and liberty. Their position is not as bad as it was earlier. But though considered equal and legal citizens of the country, the male dominant society still fails to acknowledge the rights and liberties that they deserve. Strong patriarchal traditions put them at the mercy of men. They are considered economically and emotionally dependent on men and most of all a liability to the family. So empowerment of women is a long desired goal of every modern democracy.

Women Empowerment: Most people strongly believe that there is great progress in the status of women. Though it is not a fact to be denied, the reality is that there is still one big section of the society which suffers from disgrace and embarrassment. Women empowerment is expected to take the nation on a progressive run apart from letting every woman have dignity and respect in the society. Constitutional provisions which are in fact numerous in number, is expected to give women the necessary confidence to be for their rights and liberties. But the basic question is whether these guarantees have to strength to bring in

radical social changes. More than laws and legislations, it is the culture and mindset of the people that determine the status of women.

Women empowerment would bring in so many positive developments in the nation and women would be given a chance to play a formidable role in the economic and social structure of the country. This is the reason why women empowerment is much sought after. By empowerment they mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant and confident enough to take part in the decision making process². But unfortunately there are so many factors that prove as an obstacle to women empowerment. Of all these, violence against women is one factor that can be act as severe obstacle to women empowerment. It makes women weak both physically and psychologically. It damages the confidence in them and makes them mute spectators to all kinds of violence inflicted against them.

Violence Against Women Obstacle To Women Empowerment: Violence against Women basically refers to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. The history of violence against women is difficult to track due to lack of reliable and continuous data. But however, it is claimed that violence against women has been accepted and even condoned and legally sanctioned throughout history. Violence is gender- based and acts of violence are committed against women expressly because they are women and this can be carried out by individuals and also by states. Examples of violence that can be perpetuated by individuals are honour killings, dowry deaths, forces marriages, female infanticide etc. Those

that can be perpetuated by states are war rape, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, violence by the police and authoritative personnel etc. The World Health Organization has emphasized that there is a chance that women can encounter violence and its devastating effects all through their life. Life cycle was categorized into five stages namely, pre- birth, infancy, girlhood, adolescence and adulthood and elderly³.

Feminist activist organizations all around the globe to enhance the position and status of women, but still violence against women is considered to be one of the most pervasive forms of human rights violations. These different types of violence take a heavy toll on the health and psychology of women. Incidents of rape have become so frequent these days. Victims of rape are severely traumatized and they suffer from severe post traumatic disorder. There can also be violations against victims of rape perpetrated by the rapists or by friends and relatives thereby preventing the victim from reporting the crime. Marital rape which was once condoned or ignored by law is now repudiated by international conventions and is highly criminalized. Domestic violence is also a serious issue of concern, as women stand both psychologically and physically hurt, because this form of violence is perpetrated by not outsiders but members of their own family. It is very difficult to estimate the true magnitude of this problem, as most cases go unreported. Honour killing is also an issue that is frequently heard of wherein, women who are believed to have brought shame and dishonor to the family are killed by their own family members.

The custom of dowry is still very common in South Asia especially in India. Issues like bride burning are related this violence against women. It refers to situation where the women is either killed or pushed into committing suicide. Acid throwing on women is done with the intention of injuring or disfiguring the women. Of all the acid throwing that takes place, women and girls are the victims in 75-80% of the cases⁴. Forced marriage affects the very dignity and independence of the women as she is pushed into a relationship even without her consent. Stalking is also considered violence. It is understood as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear⁵. Sexual harassment at workplace, place of study etc is also viewed very seriously today. Human trafficking is also a major threat wherein there is acquisition of women by improper means such as force or deception with the aim of exploiting them. Because of the nature of this crime the reliable data available is also very limited. Even in this modern era, mistreatment of women is also not very uncommon. Forced sterilization and abortion are also forms of gender based violence. Stoning, female genital mutilation are forms of violence that have serious health concerns.

Nature And Causes: Women face most of these violence due to the basic reason that they find it very difficult to access to justice and limitations of measures. Also, in most places violence against women and any

form of abuse against them is not considered a serious crime. This has made things very comfortable and convenient for the perpetrators of crime. There is also lack of awareness regarding the existing laws for the protection of women. Most women, especially those in rural areas, do not even realize the existence of such laws. And even when they are aware of it and approach the courts for redressal of their grievances, there is never a guarantee that they win the case against the criminals who usually are people of economic and political strength. Most of all, existing laws are insufficient and infact conflicting. Lack of issue is also of concern because even the best policies and programmes are of no use when there is improper legislation. Even those few women whom we call empowered are denied a seat at the negotiation table there by preventing issues concerning women to be pushed forward.

Remedial Measures- The Way Forward: More than half of the world's population is women and yet this is the poor and miserable condition of women. So many national initiatives such as the establishment of the National Commission for Women, reservation for women in local- government, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, 2010 etc have tried to curb violence against women⁶. But still the poor status of women has not changed and this brings down the reputation of the country to a great extent. This situation has to be done away with to realize the ideals such as equality, fraternity, liberty and most of all the establishment of an egalitarian form of society. There can be establishment of special courts to deal with crimes against women and in States where there is already a provision efforts can be taken to enhance the efficiency of these courts. The procedure for the redress of grievances should be simple and not complicated. Unnecessary cost and delay would only deter victims from reporting the case. Preventing delay in administration and severe punishments to the offenders would serve as a deterrent against such crimes. Laws related to sexual harassment of women should be made more stringent and redressal grievance cells should be established to monitor such issues related to women. Police stations throughout the country should devise special mechanisms to deal with cases related to women⁷. Efficient measures should be devised to rescue women and girls from the evil clutches of those involved in immoral trafficking. The media should also consider it their foremost duty to devote their time and energy in creating awareness among women. Women should be encouraged to become economically independent as it prevents them from becoming easy targets. Women should be educated on their rights so that they do not hesitate in reporting cases. Most of all crimes against women that have a cultural sanction have to be dealt with seriously and people should be made to realize that the culture and tradition of a country never prevents the empowerment of women. The judiciary has a special role to play in strongly enforcing fundamental rights through constitutional remedies. Political will and

commitment is required as proper implementation is much necessary to make success any policy or legislation. Non-governmental organizations can also play a very positive role in educating women thereby making them empowered. Most of all, involvement of men in these activities can make more meaningful these reforms.

Conclusion: Therefore, reforms and stringent legislations are the need of the hour, more emphasis should be on the eradication of deep rooted traditions of patriarchy and repressive attitudes. Mere legislation and reform cannot bring in the much desired change and it is only social awakening that can work. It is to be understood that around the world, healthy, educated

and empowered women break poverty cycles, not just for themselves, but for their families, communities and countries too. Moreover, empowerment of just a small section of women will never reflect the trend of the entire nation. It is not to be denied that many initiatives at the national and international level are being taken to empower women, but these are so many reasons as to why these initiatives have not been able to serve their purpose. Women empowerment cannot be labeled the task of the government, but rather non- governmental organizations, international organizations, social movements, media and the civil society together are expected to work towards the achievement of this much desired goal.

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