

Domestic Violence and Women's Empowerment

Author: Mr. Madan Singh

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Govt. College Dhaneta (H.P.)

Abstract

Domestic violence is one of the most common crimes against women which are inextricably linked to the perpetuation of patriarchy. Domestic violence refers to violence against women not only in matrimonial homes but also in live-in relationship. Violence against women can be physical, sexual, psychological, emotional abuse or threat of physical and sexual violence. Physical violence includes acts of physical aggression such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating. The common sexual abuses women endure are- forced intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion. Psychological abuse includes acts like intimidation, constant belittling, humiliating, nagging and various controlling behaviors such as- isolating a person from their family and friends, monitoring their movements, and restricting their access to information or assistance. When abuse occurs repeatedly in the same relationship, it reduces into an act of "battering" There is no one single factor to account for violence perpetrated against women. Increasingly, researches have focused on the inter-relatedness of various factors like numbers of family members, type of marriage, husband's education, menstrual problems etc. Many have pointed out that the marriage at a younger age makes women vulnerable to domestic violence. Domestic violence is recognized as the significant barrier in the path of women empowerment. India has specifically legislated Domestic Violence Act in 2005 to reduce the violence against women but the same has bore mixed result as of now. The paper examines the domestic violence against women and how it hampers the women empowerment.

Introduction

In ancient India, women enjoyed a significant role not only at home but in society as whole. The kings and the priests always held and propagated that the prosperity depends upon the respect that a household shows towards the women. It was believed that the Kingdom would be visited by inauspicious events in case the woman was harassed by the subject. In the Vedic times the role of a woman was considered important in social order but was reduced to utter subordination and a dismal state during later periods mainly because of a long history of invasions. In the past, efforts to improve the status of women in India had been made by many social reformers and religious leaders. Guru Nanak, in the early 1500s, had observed: "From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come. When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all." In India we have a large number of goddesses who have trounced evil by the use of force like goddess Kali or Durga.

Objectives of Study

This study has conducted with the following objectives;

1. To examine the major reasons which perpetuate the domestic violence
2. To examine the major obstructions that hamper women empowerment

3. To examine factors, crucial to women's growth
4. To study the role of the State and society toward the domestic violence and women's empowerment

Result and Discussion

The main result and discussion have been shown on the basis of the objectives are as under:

Major Reasons

In a country where wife-beating enjoys a perverse social sanction, here is yet another proof of how widespread it is. According to a study by the United Nation World Population Fund and the Washington-based International Centre for Research on Women, six out of 10 Indian men admit to domestic violence. If this is not startling enough, here is a more abysmally shocking revelation that 50 per cent men believe, it's no big deal and women must endure the same to keep the family together. Equally telling is the finding that it's not men alone but women too feel that it's well within a man's right to punish her. In fact, many women not only tend to condone the despicable acts of their intimate partners but also often go to ridiculous extents to hide it. Not surprisingly, fewer women report the crime as compared to men, who seem to have no qualms in admitting that they are the perpetrators of violence against their partners. Since domestic violence in India is entrenched in patriarchal values and convoluted notions of male superiority, concerted social and media campaigns must find new progressive paradigms of masculinity. Domestic violence is not a trivial domestic issue but a serious crime which can have disastrous consequences. While in extreme cases, physical violence can lead to murder, verbal and emotional abuses have many psychological and damaging ramifications.

Meaning of women empowerment

Women's empowerment happens to be the most discussed and yet least understood of major issues. Basically, a woman is empowered when she is able to take decisions regarding herself, her family, community and society at large. The fact is that even after 70 years of independence, women's empowerment still appears to be a mirage.

Major Obstructions in Women's Empowerment

Numerous structural barriers keep women away from powerful positions; so much so that even when they are in powerful positions, they are not able to exercise power, primarily because the centres of power continue to be patriarchal. Even when women reach the top positions, they are always seen as women first and professional later, because of men at the helm of affairs. In fact, when choices are made to put women in positions of decision making, generally submissive women are selected, the ones who can toe the patriarchal line, while the assertive and independent women are sidelined. The few women, who do get to taste empowerment, get so obsessed with their accomplishments that they become totally oblivious of their sisters who need their support. Women are also blamed for prioritising family and children more than their work. This is exactly the 'blaming the victim' approach. Society continues to hold her responsible for the failure of the child, who happens to be a joint responsibility of both parents. She has to struggle hard to meet the domestic and work expectations, which happen to be contradictory. More women are entering as professionals, but they are unable to reach positions, where decisions are being made due to bias against them. How many universities in India, barring the women universities, have women vice chancellors, or registrars? Why is it that while it is the women who put in days of hard work and labour in organising the prestigious academic functions, they are missing on the dais except in seminars on the women's issues? If we have failed to make our higher educational institutions 'inclusive' in terms of gender, what can be expected of other social and political institutions? It is an irony that while we are harping on inclusive growth all the time, we have failed to introduce the long pending Bill on Reservation for Women in Parliament and State Assemblies.

The premium of honour

Another major obstruction to women's empowerment is the huge premium attached to the honour of a woman. Right from a poor unskilled illiterate woman to a highly placed and successful woman, she can be easily violated. For a woman whose honour is once violated, the damage becomes irreparable. The burden she thus has to carry is enormous which often stops her from reaching at the helm of affairs. While struggling to work with men in construction work, in factories, in bureaucracy, in politics, in universities and so on, she has to continuously struggle, maintaining that honour, for which only she is held responsible by society and the State's interventions in such cases have been nil. Ditto has been the case with the honour killings, where the State has chosen to be a mute spectator. Whenever a woman is violated, she is blamed to have 'invited' it.

The slow pace of women's empowerment, which is reflected through increased incidents of honour killings; domestic violence; rape and molestation; trafficking in women; is often blamed on the mindset that refuses to change. It is strange that we could so easily fight our religious beliefs for adopting abortion, at least easier than it was in the West, we throw away joint families to enjoy the independence of conjugal families, we prefer working daughters-in-law because they bring money, we rush to send our daughters to beauty pageants and film industry the moment they get an offer, why is it then the mindset refuses to see women as decision makers? Is it sufficient for the State to frame statutes, policies and then wait for the patriarchal mindset to change? Does the State care enough that the thoughtfully drafted policies get implemented with firmness and sincerity?

According to some estimates, women constitute only 3 per cent of the police force in India and a small number in the Indian Army. Only recently the Indian Air force opened the doors for women as fighter pilots. In contrast, female soldiers account for nearly 16 per cent of the US army and military service is mandatory for females in Israel. Similarly, women play an important role in armies of many countries, including China, Russia, Sri Lanka etc.

Crucial to growth

Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations has asserted that gender equality is a "pre-requisite" for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Amartya Sen has referred to the phenomenon of 'missing women' to capture the point that the proportion of women is much lower than what it should have been, had girls been allowed to take birth just like boys, and then to survive thereafter. World Development Report of 2012 says that around 6 million women are missing every year, out of which 23 per cent are never born, 10 per cent go missing in early childhood, 21 per cent in the reproductive years and 38 per cent above the age of 60 years. These figures however do not include lakhs of women who are never able to access the resources, jobs and opportunities. In short, even in the 21st century, it matters a lot whether one is born a man or a woman.

Moving ahead

No doubt, females are not only performing academically better but they are outwitting their male counterparts in other fields which were once considered only for males. In the last year's Olympic Games, held in Rio de Janeiro, in a contingent of 117 sportsmen, in which 63 were men, only girls- PV Sindhu and Sakshi Malik, brought honour to this nation by winning one silver and one bronze medal. Thus the bastions which were once considered only for men, have been successfully trounced by women. We have travelled a long way in empowering women with legal rights, public policies and incentives. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts were great steps towards an inclusive development, but in most of the cases, reservation of women has been usurped by men for retaining political power within their hold. Politics and Panchayats have continued to be male spaces, completely excluding women.

Let the political parties ensure 50 per cent representation for women as their office bearers and the candidates they field for elections. That will be the first test of political parties towards the issue of women's empowerment, which every party has been abusing. Let us ensure that women, who get elected as members of panchayats, exercise their decision making role without the interference of their husbands. It is an absolute lie that these women are not capable of taking decisions. There are numerous cases where completely illiterate and extremely poor women sarpanches have done wonders for their community, while educated women have been rubber stamps. Why measure the competence of women with such tough yardsticks when we have hundreds of men as members of panchayats, State Legislatures and even Parliament, who are dumb spectators, but are never criticised for being worthless and irresponsible?

State intervention a must

The very first indicator of women's empowerment is an equal representation of women with men in every walk of life and at all levels, I mean at top positions too, in governments, in ministries, in universities and in the corporate sector. The State cannot absolve itself of the responsibility of dealing with the situation with a heavy hand. Whenever a woman sarpanch is removed from office by a no-confidence motion, whenever an assertive woman panchayat member refuses to appease the male patriarchy, whenever a woman construction worker resists the sexual advances of her employer, whenever a woman victim of domestic violence fails to get an FIR lodged at the police station, whenever a woman employee fails to get justice from authorities against sexual harassment at workplace, does the State react with the same force as it does for other offences? So very clearly by now we understand that the culprit is the 'mindset'. But not only mindset of people; it is a question of the mindset of the State also, especially in a democratic state. But have we, as a State, done anything to change this mindset?

Conclusion

To embolden women, similar to Bhartiya Mahila Bank, the government could consider more women in the Indian Army, and more women battalions in the state police and para military forces. Interestingly, there was the all-women Rani Jhansi Regiment in Azad Hind Fauj. Sainik and military schools/colleges could be opened to female students and women encouraged to join the National Cadet Corps. It would not be erroneous to see these reprehensible crimes against women as a social malaise. Yet that does not absolve the law-enforcing agencies of their responsibility. Efforts must be initiated to make more women aware of the far-reaching provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. Mercifully, some movement in this direction has begun. Yet for well-meaning campaigns to have any meaning, women too must shed their squeamishness over the issue and come out in the open against it.

There could be a provision for a large number of all-women police stations. Women, who are seeking justice under the Domestic violence act, must be provided protection within 60 days as stipulated under the law. Their demands such as one-stop crisis centre need to be looked into. Both society and law have to work in tandem to ensure that women get due regard and status within the social structure in which home is the starting point.

If India is aspiring to be a superpower in the world, then it is necessary to ensure a secure environment at the workplace for half of its potential workforce, the women. As Nirbhaya fought back the perpetrators of the heinous crime and still her memories are alive, the women of today probably have to continue the same struggle. In an increased work participation of women, will be found the seed of India's high economic growth. The hype created around women's empowerment notwithstanding, it is women who shall have to break through the glass ceiling and claim the space where decisions are made. Women in decision making positions shall have to remember millions of other women who are invisible and voiceless. If women are not prepared to stand for themselves, no one else would, neither the State, nor men, nor the civic society. Merely being in the decision-making positions shall not make women empowered so long as their decisions reinforce the patriarchal mindset. State shall have to ensure that women's empowerment is not treated as hype but gets translated through its

institutions. The seriousness of the State and society on the issue shall have to get reflected through the grassroots reality, which at the moment seems stuck.

References

Bhatt, R. V. 1998. Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse. *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*. 63(Suppl.1): S25-31.

Duvvury, N and M. B. Nayak. 2003. The Role of Men in Addressing Domestic Violence: Insights from India'. *Development*. 46(2): 45-50.

Fatima, I. & Ahmad, N. 2015. Consequences of violence against women on their health and well being: An overview, *Journal of Kolkata Centre for Contemporary Studies (KCCS) – ISSN2278-9758*.

Gerstein, L. 2000. In India, Poverty and Lack of Education are Associated with Men's Physical and Sexual abuse of their Wives. *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 26(1): 44-5.

International Clinical Epidemiologists Network (INCLIN). 2000. Domestic Violence in India 3: A Summary Report of a Multi-Site Household Survey. Washington, DC: International

Centre for Development and Population Activities.

Khan, M E., J.W. Townsend; R. Sinha and S Lakhanpal. 1996. Sexual Violence within Marriage. In: Seminar. New Delhi, Population Council. Pp 32-35.

Ozesmi, Y. (2006). Fuzzy cognitive maps of local people by dam construction, their demands regarding resettlement. Department of environment engineering. *Ozesmi.org*.

Sahoo, H., & Pradhan, M.R. (2006). Domestic Violence in India: An Empirical Analysis. Department of Social Sciences, Research Journal of Population Council. Pp 1-19. New Delhi.

Sahu, B. 2003. Contextualizing Domestic Violence from Women's Perspective: A Study in a Slum Community in Orissa. IIPS, M. Phil dissertation (Unpublished).

Swain, Suvkant. 2002. Understanding The linkage of Employment, Autonomy and Domestic Violence among Married Women: A comparative study of Uttar Pradesh and TamilNadu. IIPS, Seminar Paper (Unpublished).