

INDIA OF MY DREAMS – SWASTH, SAMPANN, RESILIENT WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

In this 75th year of independence, while we are celebrating, “Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsv”, and envisaging -A Swasth, Sampann and Resilient Bharat- I strongly believe that we cannot build a strong India on the backs of weak, morbid, illiterate and subservient daughters, sisters, mothers and wives. We all grew up reading or listening to the old saying

- Yatr naryastu pujoyante, ramante tatr devta’.

But, I do not think that women in any age would have ever aspired that they were worshipped. All that they would have wanted is an equal respectable place in society. They would have wished that they should be heard and understood. Even today the concept of ‘Gender Equality’ may seem very happening in rich urban, elite, educated circles, clubs, seminars, conferences, meetings etc. but reality is that in most pockets of BHARAT, this is only a dream that can be seen in your sleep, which disappears as you wake up to harsh realities of the society around you. This paper tries to bring forth various mental and physical issues being faced by women constituting almost half of India’s population. This paper will attempt to identify the individual and social consequences of the neglect that this half has been subject to. This paper reinforces the need to look beyond data compilation jugglery and take corrective steps at ground level that will for sure bring a quantitative and qualitative change in the lives of women around us and make this world a more beautiful place to live.

KEYWORDS: *Women, Equality, Respectable, Society, Education, Health, Returns.*

INTRODUCTION

There are basically two types of societies Matriarchal and Patriarchal. The term matriarchal denotes a form of social organization in which a woman is the head and holds the main power positions in roles of political leadership, social prestige, moral authority, and control of the property. In other words, in a matriarchal society, the power lies with women. The word matriarchy comes from the Greek words matēr (mother) and archein (to rule). Matriarchy is the opposite of patriarchy, where men hold all the powerful positions in society. Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power, and dominate in their roles as political, moral, religious superiors, enjoying special privilege and control of the property. They also hold power in the domain of the family, as fatherly figures. Patriarchy is far more common in societies than the matriarchy. Sadly, the norms of patriarchy have been normalised through social institutions.¹ To achieve gender equality, we need to break gender-based mindsets as every child deserves to reach her or his full potential.

It is also important to know that non-patriarchies are not essentially matriarchies. Absolute matriarchies were and are extremely rare. The concept of matriarchy is seen in the legends of the Amazonian women, the Cham of central Vietnam, the Germanic tribe of the Sitonians, and stories of the queen-priestess of Minoan Crete. But there is no conclusive evidence to prove their existence. Examples of absolute matriarchal societies are almost non-existent. Many anthropologists classify the Mosuo tribe of China as a matriarchal society. But this is a matrilineal society that does have some characteristics of a matriarchal society. The main difference between matrilineal and matriarchal is that matrilineal denotes a society where, women act as the head of the household, they make business decisions, and the property is passed down through the female line kinship. Furthermore, matrilineality is more common in societies than the matriarchy.² Historically the place of women in Indian society can be understood from the fact that, the ancient culture along Indus River in northwest India was based on matriarchy until it was invaded by, patriarchal ,Indo European Aryans. Even today Matrilineal societies are found in some parts of India. Khasi, Garo etc. are found in, Southern coast of Brahmaputra. Nair caste is prominent in the state of Kerala. In Southern India Region, Irula, Pulayana, Kadar etc. societies are seen.³

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the historical as well as present perspective of the place of women in society.
2. To restate the exemplary contribution of some selective representatives of their clanof womenhood
3. To through a light on the issues being faced by women.
4. To highlight the benefits of investing in women capital.

Research Methodology

The study is mainly descriptive in nature. The data is mainly collected from secondary sources like research papers, book of references, case studies, magazines, internet websites, journals etc. This study is a reflection of experiences and happenings as observed by the author. It is a work of subjective and objective evaluation of the realities preset in the socio economic setup around us.

In a male dominated Indian society, condition of women had remained miserable but there have been examples of great male thinkers, social reformers like Swami Vivekanand, Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who have raised their voice against gender discrimination and stood in support of the rights of the women. Great Saint Kabir wrote

Nari ninda na karo, nari rattan ki khaan,

Nari se nar hot hai, Dhruv Prahlad saman.

A women is creator of LIFE. Indian women have always been an epitome of beauty, strength, and intelligence. Today, the success of Indian women across various walks of life has proven that they have earned this reputation very deservingly .One of their major contribution to the Indian society has been the active participation of some very dedicated and focussed women.The women activists have played a remarkable role in fighting many social evils and have been looked upon with hope. As we are closing near 8th March, the International Women's Day, I

would like to mention the names of eight such women who have shown exemplary courage and gone beyond the limits to prove that nothing is impossible for them.

Lakshmi Sehgal took active participation in Rani Jhansi Regiment and became a member of Azad Hind Fauz. She worked for the victims of Bhopal Gas Tragedy. She was also active in Swadeshi Movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Durgabai Deshmukh of Andhra Pradesh worked for the education and upliftment of women in society. She was the founder of family courts which are still proving a big support to the women in distress. Sarojini Naidu played a very important role in educating women about their rights and thought them to raise their voice against the bad practices of society. She worked with Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. She was very active in freedom movement and was appointed as chairperson of Indian National Congress Convention at Kanpur. She became first woman to have this pride.⁴ Kadambini Ganguli was the first women in South Asia to have a degree in Medicine. She was the first women who was invited to address the Indian National Congress Convention. She worked for the upliftment of women workers working in coal mines. Bhikha Ji Kama, is known for her love and devotion for country. She was the symbol of inspiration. She invoked people to fight for freedom and swaraj. She died serving victims of plague. Sucheta Kriplani was first women Chief Minister in India. She was imprisoned for her participation in freedom movement. Rani Chennama of Belgam in Karnataka was unparalleled in her horse riding, archery and fencing skills. She died bravely fighting against British Army. This list is endless but will remain incomplete without mentioning the name of Savitri Bai Phule, known as the first woman educationist and social reformer. She was mocked and thrashed for raising her voice against the orthodox mindset of the so called patrons of society. Her contribution in the field of education of girls and Dalit women, widow remarriage, untouchability etc. will be remembered forever.⁵

Today women have left their mark in every field they are working closely with their male co workers be it land, air or water. Women play an important role in all stages of life of their family and society. Despite fulfilling all their roles proficiently, they seem to be standing far behind men. In a male dominated society they are always judged for their abilities.. Despite the government running many awareness programs, the life of a woman has become much more complicated than that of a man. If we compare the condition of women today with the condition of mythological society, then it is clearly visible that there has been some improvement in the situation. Women have started working. Contributing towards household expenses. In many areas, women have overtaken men. Day by day girls are making such records on which not only the family or society but the whole country is feeling proud.

The women work for the betterment of others by tying themselves in different relationships all their lives. we have seen women in different forms like sister, mother, wife, daughter etc A woman gives birth to a child and fulfils all her responsibilities towards that child for the rest of her life. She does not ask for anything in return and fulfils her role with patience and without reasoning. In urban areas, the situation is not so bad, but in rural areas, the condition of women is worrisome. The condition of women has become pathetic due to lack of proper education system.

The hurdles on the way

Discrimination: women everywhere are faced with discrimination. Be it their parents house, in laws house, society or male co-workers, they are the first ones to looked upto if it is the question of duties ,but when it comes to rights they are pushed to the farthest corners of their habitat. Their natural instinctive and physical tenderness is used to adjudge them as weaker sex.

Fragmented opportunities: women are either denied or given fragmented opportunities when it comes to decision making in household matters especially economic matters. Even today, in most parts of the country ,crucial decisions of their life like, when to get married, to bear or not to bear children, no of children they should give birth to, going for outings, opting for jobs, pursuing their passion etc are all taken by males of the house, ironically sometimes younger than them.

Access to complete education is denied: though Gross Enrolment Ratio has improved in the last years from 19% (2015-16) to 24.1%(2019-20), yet the school dropout rate in past years has been higher than the boys. The reason is simple, boys are always preferred over girls so when it comes to saving on education expenses , girls are made to sit at home and learn the household chores .according to NFHS -5(2019-21), marriages and chores at home are the key factors for girls drop out of school. Out of 21,800 girlswho dropped out of school before 2019-20 school year,almost 13 % did so as they were required for household chores 7% were married off even though child marriage is illegal in India.⁶

Good and balanced diet is not a necessity: when it comes to food and nutrition girls and women in the house are again the last choice. It is always the boys and men of the house who are served fresh food, fruits and milk. Even in 21st century women are not allowed or perhaps are not tuned to sit and eat along with men, not to talk of eating ahead of them. They feed on the residue. The result is malnutrition and morbidity.

Insufficient and veiled political representation: on political front a lot is said and done to protect the reserved rights/seats for women but in maximum cases their reservation is actually enjoyed by their male family members and they become puppets in their hands. They are denied any decision making and use their abilities

Gender pay gaps: Imputed value of hundreds of activities of women, which otherwise have a market value remains out of calculation of domestic and hence State income, so the question of any payment is out of consideration. The women are not paid equally even for equal amount of work especially in unorganised sectors. Not only this they face workplace harassment and exploitation.

Role of women against women: It is ironically sad that role of women in dragging down women cannot be ignored. It is women in the house that instill or develop an understanding in younger girls of the house that unequal treatment is the norm and most of the time they themselves are instrumental in giving unfair and unequal treatment to the younger women in family.

Physical abuse and violence: Any verbal or physical abuse by men is an accepted reality in our society. If women retaliate they are labelled as outspoken or even outcast. If they try to report they are blamed for tarnishing the image of family.

Repercussions

Lamhon ki khataon se, sadiyon ne saza payi.

We may try to list backwash effects of neglect and discrimination being faced by women, but can hardly estimate the real and subjective outcomes of this. Poor health indicators and increasing morbidity, anxiety, suicidal tendencies, forced failures, lack of confidence, broken family system are some of the repercussions that have taken a toll on lives, carriers and dignity

of many deserving and talented women who were denied equal level playing and were pushed to dark failures.

Path to Gender inclusiveness

Gender inclusiveness and improvement in the political, social, economic and health status of women is very important to achieve the target of sustainable development and long term success of population programmes. For this we need to focus on the following areas

Change in mindset: the most important task is changing the mindset rooted in our belief system. On a hopeful note the results of a recent study by Pew Research Centre have shown that most States prefer to improve women's safety by teaching boys respect over teaching girls to behave.(PRC).⁷

Equal opportunities: Governments should establish mechanisms to accelerate women's equal participation and equitable representation at all levels of the political process and public life in each community and society and enable women to articulate their concerns and needs and ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes in all spheres of life. Governments and civil society should take actions to eliminate attitudes and practices that discriminate against and subordinate girls and women and that reinforce gender inequality

More stringent laws: Governments should take every possible action to remove all gender gaps and inequalities pertaining to women's livelihoods and participation in the labour market through the creation of employment with secure incomes, which has been shown to advance women's empowerment and enhance their reproductive health. Legislation ensuring equal pay for equal work or for work of equal value should be instituted and enforced

Shared space to be more sensitive towards their needs: No doubt mixed participation and partnership of both men and women at all types of workplaces needs to be increased, but more important is care, respect and sensitivity towards women, in the behaviour of men co workers.

Investing in health and education of women:

Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in health of women and girls will generate not only individual but also social returns. Healthy women tend to contribute more towards their family responsibilities and become more productive and competitive at their workplace. Healthy women will give birth to healthy children that will make a healthy nation. Educated and healthy women are more aware towards environment. Improving the status of women through investing in education and health, also enhances their decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life, especially in the area of sexuality and reproduction. This, in turn, is essential for the long- term success of population programmes. Our population and development programmes will be more effective when steps have simultaneously been taken to improve the status of women.⁽⁸⁾⁽⁹⁾

Challenges

No equality in reality: the biggest challenge is that we are ready to talk, to discuss, to write about giving equal space to women but not in our lives, this is acceptable as far as it is for others. When it comes to our own house then we would love to see, humble, submissive, kitchen queens, for whom saying no is not an option.

Guilt perspective: The most disturbing and dangerous fact recorded on the basis of informal, indirect, subjective interactions (as most women are likely to twist facts if they are questioned directly and they come to know that their answers would be used as factsheets),with many known women was, the guilt perspective deep seeded in their behaviour. On many occasions when they were ill, or tired. or short of time, and wanted to be helped by their husband, they were in reality not comfortable and had a feeling of guilt as if they were expecting something immoral. Be it the father, brother or husband the women/girls grew up listening to the one liners by their mothers, grandmothers, sisters, that keep echoing even in our subconscious mind.....

**Arre tu kyun uth gaya,
Tu kya kar raha hai rasoi mein,
Tu kyun bartan utha raha hai,
Tu rahne de ye tera kaam nahi hai.**

The imprints of such directives are dark and deep and will take a lot of time and effort before we are able to erase these

The Hope

India is a home to richest traditions and cultures of human civilization. We have been worshipping the idea, the image of ARDHNARISHWAR, but we failed to assimilate the symbolic message that is imbibed in our traditions, that the two sexes are complimentary and together they form the most beautiful, compassionate, powerful and indestructible entity. We need to commit ourselves to promoting full respect for human dignity and to achieving equality and equity between women and men, and to recognizing and enhancing the participation and leadership roles of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in development.

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