

MANAGING RESOURCES AND WELL-BEING OF WOMEN

**Dr. Abha Khetarpal*

**Associate professor, Dept. of Home-Science, D.A.V. College for Girls, Yamunanagar (Haryana)*

ABSTRACT

In Indian households, often organized around extended families, violence can erupt in many forms. It occurs between siblings, sexual partners, in-laws, children and parents, young and old. Gender-based violence not only violates human rights, but also hampers productivity, reduces human capital and undermines economic growth. Countries have made some progress in addressing violence against women and girls. In 102 countries there are no specific legal provisions against domestic violence, and marital rape is not a prosecutable offence in at least 53 nations. While violence against women within a marriage has been a crime, the narrow scope of existing laws and lack of legal measures for victims led women's groups to campaign for a new and broader civil statute. In 2005, they successfully pushed through the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Violence against women and girls have far-reaching consequences, harming families and communities. The society should follow Gandhian Principles and should be free of class consciousness, gender bias, communal prejudices and exploitation of all kinds. It should represent a true humanity which promotes social harmony in thought and deed by offering equal opportunities to its members, irrespective of the gender, caste and creed. In keeping with our traditions and cultural heritage, women expect from society a genuine community feeling of mutual respect, trust and understanding. Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography. It takes place in the home, on the streets, in schools, the workplace, in farm fields, refugee camps, during conflicts and crises. It has many manifestations--from the most universally prevalent forms of domestic and sexual violence, to harmful practices, abuse during pregnancy, so-called honour killings and other types of femicide

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Half a century ago Jawaharlal Nehru had said: "While the world sleeps, India awakens to freedom". But the tryst of Indian women with destiny is still elusive. Though the country has made a lot of progress, the role of Indian women in society remains only peripheral. In independent India, women, particularly tribal women and those belonging to the backward classes, are victims of male terrorism. They are singularly disabled and need to be enlightened by their representatives in political and social life. Since Independence, there has been tremendous progress with regard to the status of women, though not all of it is satisfactory. Actually, there has been a contradictory process. On the one hand, there has been some awareness about the need for gender equality but on the other hand, oppression and atrocities against women have been on the increase for some years now. Cases of wife-beating, dowry deaths, kidnappings, molestation, rape and aminocentesis are common. Everyone knows that a number of cases are not registered with the police due to the social stigma attached to rape cases. Newspapers are full of alarming news about rape cases, including gang rapes of minor girls. In matrimonial disputes our approach generally is to bring about reconciliation between husbands and wives by patient, persuasive and impartial handling of cases. Experience shows that police interference does not always help. If the village woman escapes female infanticide at birth, survives infancy despite discriminatory feeding and health practices, and grows into adolescence, she faces the next hurdle of post-puberty marriage and early motherhood. Repeated pregnancies and undernutrition endanger her health and can be fatal. A whole bunch of cliches comes to mind — rape, dowry, crime, violence, sexual harassment, incest, wife-beating, rights, quotas, gender, sexism, feminism and many more.

Time has come for adopting a revolutionary approach. With the introduction of reservation for women, the nation, or for that matter, the world can be lifted to heights of greatness and distinction. There is a great need for awakening of women socially. Without social amelioration, political rights have no value. There is a visible gap between the law as it stands and the law as it operates. The need is to bridge the gap. It is one thing to declare, and another to enforce. The potential of human rights law vis-a-vis women is worth addressing in India, especially in view of the Indian Constitution, but the problem of enforcement should not be underestimated. The fact that women tend to suffer human right abuses in a specific way has often been ignored. Gender discrimination has been a universal phenomenon in human history from time immemorial. On account of her biological constitution, social taboos and scriptural sanction, the social position of the woman has always been considered as inferior and subordinate to man in society. However, with the dawn of modern age, old values have changed. There are times when we need the support of people against particular cases of violence against women. The response has been tremendous. With new awareness on account of education, economic development, social awareness, social organisations, industrialisation, urbanisation, disintegration of joint families, economic and technical developments, pressures of consumer society, more opportunities for work, development of means of communication and transportation and social mobility, a great change has occurred in the attitude towards women. Subsequently, the position of women has certainly been enhanced. Women have now certainly got a status in society. A working women's position is

certainly different from that of housewife. But the attitude and behaviour of society towards working women is not yet satisfactory and just. Although women have joined almost every profession in our country and most of them are doing excellent work, the working women have to put in a great deal of hard work to reach the top. But everything does not stop there. She has to fight hard to retain her position and make people realise the worth of her skills. Economic independence is essential for the personality development of woman and for providing economic support to her family. It gives her confidence, liberty, identity, security, a status and a feeling of sharing the economic needs of the household. Much work is needed on the social front for the harmonious development of the position of women in our society.

The dominant nature of the male in our society is one of the major factors to be sublimated to the spirit of equality. Girls should not be considered an unwanted burden, liability and problem. They need equal attention and loving treatment for the mental and physical development of their personality. Women should have more facilities for education, applied sciences, professional courses and training and more career prospects and avenues of employment. We need more women welfare organisations to make efforts at the grassroots level for the welfare of women and development of society.

We need more opportunities for the development of women entrepreneurship in the socio-economic, industrial and commercial spheres so that women can play a definite role in the economic development of the country and contribute significantly in the task of nation building. Woman should not be taken as an object of liability, property, a sex symbol but as an equal human being. Although she has awakened to realize her potentialities, she still needs more awareness and alertness about her rights and duties. She has definitely a serious role to play in the 21st century. At the national front the women have also an additional role to play in the preservation and conservation of our cultural values. We have to safeguard our young generation from the influx of western culture which is devoid of any morality and human sensitivity, through media and other devices of communication. This impact of western values is eroding our cultural ethos and spirituality. The 21st century must become synonymous with the time the woman finally got her rightful place in society. And her status at home will largely determine her standing in the world. Respect for a woman, her needs and aspirations is essential because only then can she give her best to society. A happy woman will make a loving home and bring up sons and daughters who have a healthy outlook towards life and are not scared to denounce the evils afflicting every little step of our walk towards a peaceful existence. Thus, to begin with there must be democracy in the family. The husband and wife should work as a team with both partners having an equal say in decision-making. The real change will be when man's psyche undergoes a transformation and both men and women meet mid-way rather than the girl always making all the adjustments. The woman must not be condemned to play the role of a maid to the man - whether it is father, brother husband, father-in-law, brother-in-law or son. Society needs to be rid of a lot of shortcomings that have only undermined the position of woman. Just as the practice of sati has been abolished (well, almost), the world would be a far better place if people spent their time in constructive activities rather than collecting dowry for their daughters or marrying them off during childhood and leaving them to their "fate" or satisfying their lust by kidnapping, raping and dumping girls. In order to iron out the unevenness in society, the women must be educated and they should learn to assert their rights and shun the injustices heaped on them. Women cannot advance without education. As rightly said educate a man, and you educate one person. Educate a woman and you educate the whole family. Women are putting in creditable efforts, but a lot remains

To be achieved. Equality to all", as promised in our Constitution, still evades Indian woman. Movements need to be launched on a war-footing for granting economic and social justice to women. Given the opportunity, women do not lag behind their male counterparts. The educated Indian woman today is full of power and vision and none can match her prowess when challenged. Basically, what is required today is to bring an awakening among them by providing ample opportunities for education and awareness of their rights.

Times have changed and so have values and needs but certain values are eternal and are not going to change. Since society is a web of inter-relationships, individuals must respect each other's feelings and capabilities as society is an extension of a family and expecting something from fellow human beings means fulfilment of their expectations as well. So, we have to pause, think and act according to the needs of the time but not without love, care and responsibilities.

Ultimately, whether it is empowerment of women or atrocities against women, family, society and the community are what really count. Attitudes are developed when a child is small and these attitudes are reflected later in society. Unfortunately, in India, the mindset of man has always been to subjugate women and to give her space behind the curtain. In recent times, there has been a tremendous awareness among women for which the women's movement is primarily responsible. Women activists, have, from time to time, raised issues of rape, sexual harassment or harassment at places of work and last, but not the least, on discrimination throughout life. Each individual is a member of society. Therefore, I feel, what comes first is what we can contribute to society and only then can we talk of expectations. Apart from being a wife and mother, a woman also feels the need to establish her identity, fulfil her own ambitions and experience financial independence too. The family, which is a unit of society, must understand this aspect and it must respond by creating a congenial environment and by adopting a broader outlook. The plight of women in India is a sad reflection on our society. By overlooking the injustices meted out to them at the social, political and economic levels, the state becomes party to the discrimination being faced by the women in this "man's world". Despite the laws enacted to give equality to women in all spheres of life, they are denied the basic right to live with dignity. In fact, the conditioning is such that if a woman is wronged, even raped, she is looked down upon. The problem is worse in rural poor houses where education is not a norm of life. Yet it goes to the

credit of women that they continue to carry out their responsibility towards the house and children. They are the ones who have to bear the brunt of any upheaval. People are quick to point a finger at the woman but nobody extends the hand of support. What is expected is support and help, not protection. Before the situation goes worse, all agents of socialisation — schools, religion, home, politics etc. — must be activated to ensure a fair deal for this section of society which has been battered for ages. Since education begins in the womb itself, the role of parents cannot be underestimated. Each person individually will have to pave the path for a harmonious existence of the sexes with none treading on each other's feelings, sentiments and entitlements. We must work towards a world free of any atrocity. Our country was known for its simple living but in the last 25 years, we have become materialistic. The society should follow Gandhian principles and be free of class consciousness, gender bias, communal prejudices and exploitation of all kinds. It should represent a true humanity which promotes social harmony in thought and deed by offering equal opportunities to its members, irrespective of the gender, caste and creed. In keeping with our traditions and cultural heritage, women expect from society a genuine community feeling of mutual respect, trust and understanding. Society has not recognised the contribution of women. It is time that the invisibility and marginalisation that has been her lot till now gives way to the woman getting her due. The contradictions inherent in our society wherein goddesses and cows are worshipped but living girls and women are denied a respectable existence must end. Guru Nanak not only rejected the lowly social status of woman but declared her to be the essence of social coherence and progress, and equal to man in every sphere of life.

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