

Perspectives on Indian Woman

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Abstract

In every one of us is a secret shrine, where no one could intrude, to which we must retire as often possible and discover what our true self is as distinct from the appearance we present to the world outside.

Some claim that in ancient India women were accorded equal status with men, but owing to a variety of causes, she was relegated to a backward position in all walks of life. The woman was forced in to either of the two extreme moulds: one, the idealized woman as an embodiment of all virtues advantageous to man, the other projected her as a helpless and ignorant creature entirely dependent on man. In both cases the real woman was missing.

Keywords: Indian Women, Equal Status, Embodiment of Virtues, True Self

Condition of Indian Women

Mostly Indian women are controlled and conditioned by the dictates of their husbands and their family. Educated or illiterate, rich or poor they have to depend on their husbands for everything. Women are not treated on par with men and the men are entitled to a privileged treatment everywhere. It is they who control the destiny of women.

Women are indeed living at the mercy of men. At present a woman's existence depends on the men who came/come into her life, like a father, brother or husband. The men determine her fate, make decisions on her behalf and decide what is good or bad for her.

The material cares of the women (in the event of her family being wealthy) are taken care of by the affluence of wealth and servants. But their emotional needs do not seem to be met at all. As a result of this, they seem to live in a constant limbo of private sufferings, which are qualitatively different from the material sufferings of the woman.

Constitutional Guarantee versus Customs and Traditions

The constitution of India guarantees in clear terms the equality of women with men socially, economically and politically. But this is observed more on paper than in practice. Age-old customs and traditions continue to denigrate women. They are treated like human machines and all their activities are expected to be confined to the male approved domains. Any attempt made by a woman to modify the male-made boundaries of feminine existence is curbed drastically. Such is the lowly condition of subordination and servant-status forced upon the Indian women in every sphere of life.

The Condition of Young Women

Young men are always free to work against tradition and their own families, whereas the young women of the new generation are still controlled as in earlier times and suffocate with all the curbs and controls. These kinds of pressures placed on them by families lead them to far greater emotional and spiritual struggles and push them in to the path of unspeakable agonies and tragedies. These women having no faith in conventional religion and joint family and not following any conspicuous ideal, meet nothing but disaster in their lives. Thus, eventually many may meet with their unnatural death or lose their mental equilibrium.

What Does the Marriage do for them?

Marriages in India are performed mostly according to the choice of the parents. There is a lack of emotional involvement and very little communication exists between husband and wife. This is mainly due to the influence of the conventional society which expects a wife to engage herself always in household duties. “The diametrically opposed cultural background of the couple also comes in the way of mutual understanding and mental affinity”. (*Pathania, Usha, 1992, 26*) Though husband and wife are equal partners of their household in every respect, in

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most cases the Indian wives are not treated on par with their male partners. Husbands considering their wives as their subordinates, attach little importance to their feelings and emotions. It is they who control the destiny of women. The freedom which they can always take for granted is denied to women.

Marriage and Mental Activity

Marriage limits a woman's aspirations and their sphere of mental activity. It becomes not a fulfillment of the self, but a symbol of their confinement within the boundaries marked out for them by men through the centuries of their 'enclosure in the patriarchy'. Marriage means: "to find oneself like a young tree inside a tomb is to discover the power to crack the tomb and grow out to any heights" (*Pandey, 1999: 55*). Though marriage is a union of mind and body of the two concerned, marriage seems to provide only physical proximity for them. Mental communication and mutual understanding seem to escape them.

The Ultimate Fatality

Marriage appears to be the ultimate fatality for a woman in a society where everything seems to conspire against her longing for individual freedom. Marriages are shattering failures. The women are unable to adjust themselves to their challenging new role. A woman's role in marriage, according to the will of God was to be a "helper" who was a suitable partner to man in every particular, mental, spiritual, emotional, social and physical need (*The Bible, Genesis. 2:18*) Several religions do declare the divinity of marriage contract but in reality human practice and social traditions negate the scriptural declarations.

The burden thrown upon unwilling and very often unprepared women as an aftermath of marriage, mars their mental equilibrium. When they happen to be imaginative they try to withdraw to their childhood or to some fantasy arena, the brain child of their fancies. This in turn results in neurosis almost bordering on madness. The mental breakdown of women is the direct outcome of a terrible social malaise.

Today's Woman's Resistance

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The woman today challenges the traditional notions of an angel in the house and sexually voracious image. The woman today is essentially a woman of awareness and consciousness of her undeserved low position in the family and society.

We wonder how many people noticed that in our country Sita is worshipped along with Rama, Radha with Krishna, Parvathi with Shiva but strangely enough goddess Durga and Kali are worshipped in their individual capacity. Men are the devotees of goddess Durga, but they do not care for the emotions of women. Perhaps, men are worshippers of Durga and not of Sita.

Present a Durga-like Image

In order to gain respect from men, women must project a Durga-like image. The woman will always suffer in silence. Like Sita, she will always have to prove her chastity and undergo the *Agnipariksha* for no fault of hers. The dread of divorce keeps women in constant fear in several religions.

Constant Questioning Is Necessary

What is remarkable in the lives of women is that even though the quest for self-identity and individualism ends ultimately in failure, resignation and death, what is heartening is that there has been an inner consciousness for the right values of life and a more meaningful existence. This awareness and constant questioning of the present state of life is in itself a kind of protest symbolizing the rising of awareness. It is rebellion all the way to the final curtain.

It is really shocking that 50% of the problems are caused by men to the women. (*The Hindu*, 19.07.2009). Hillary Clinton said, “if we push the women backward, the nation cannot move forward.” (Meeting with the Self Employed Women’s Association in Mumbai on 19.07.2009)

Conclusion

In democratic countries like India one expects that women would be treated on par with men. But the tragedy is that the right to equality and freedom exists only in the Constitution. No doubt, women have started working in male territories, but modernizing has not brought an end

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to male domination. Hence, under the prevailing situation, women must realize that they have to save themselves. Qualities like unity, firmness of purpose, courage, self-determination and assertiveness have to be developed. The silence has to be broken. Women should fight as they have nothing to lose but their fetters. Love, respectability and freedom will not come on a golden platter; women must work hard for it. Freedom will afford them a chance to improve their lot.

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