

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 10 October 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Indian Women in the Mirror of Society

Nidhi Bhatt, Ph.D. (English Literature), B.Ed.

Women as Subordinates

After the creation of this Universe, the first existence was of Man and Woman, since without women, men would have been an incomplete creation. So, the need of women was felt. She acts as mother, sister and wife of man. She is the mother of man who subsequently rules over her and wants to protect her and keep her under his control.

However, Indian women are mainly like subordinates, I mean the family life and the work pattern convey the idea that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man. In our Indian society, so many women are working women, even though they depend on the male members. She is not regarded as an autonomous being in the society. She has to share all sorts of responsibilities in her life in the form of *Grahlaxmi*.

Manu, as quoted in *Hunter College Women's Studies Collective* (Ulku U. Bates, Florence L. Denmark, Virginia Held, Doroth) declared:

“Day and Night women must be kept in subordinate to the males of the family; in childhood to the father, in Youth to her husband, in old age to her sons. Even elsewhere; he must be worshipped as God” (*Hunter College Women's Studies Collective; Women's Realities, Women's Choices: An introduction to women's studies* (New York: Oxford Uni. Press 1983, P 68).

Ideal Picture Drawn by Others

In fact, society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. The woman may be seen and understood by her father in one way, her husband in another way, her son and daughter in some other ways and finally by herself in yet another way.

Even her views are not her own; instead these are thrust upon her by the male dominated society. She is hardly given any freedom. Shantha Krishna Swamy, explaining the position of women in society, points out :

“She is a creature who as a child is sold off to strangers for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband’s family, or who as a widow, in a final act of obliteration immolates herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre to be acclaimed as “Sati-Savitri” as an immortal”(Shanta Krishnaswamy, *The women in Indian fiction in English* (New Delhi : Ashish, 1984)

Change in Views

It was only in the early modern India that social reformists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jotiba Phule brought about a drastic change in the conditions of women in our country. She no longer remains a dumb creature as she was earlier.

In an article on Gandhi “Not by faith alone”, Ramchandra Guha writes, “Women is the companion, Gandhiji affirmed as early as 1918, with equal mental capacities and she has the same right of freedom and liberty”. (*Ram Chandra Guha “Not by faith alone”. The Sunday Express, 1 Oct, 1918*)

Legal Position and Reality

In India, legally speaking, women are given more rights than anywhere else. But because of the dominant nature of males and the submissive nature of women, the opportunities and rights reserved for her remain only in word. For this, the male mentality is highly responsible: they can’t believe in woman being equal to them.

Education is the basic right of every girl, whether she comes from poor background or economically backward community. Reformers like Maharshi Dhono Keshav Karve fought and sacrificed their life for the betterment of the condition of women in the country.

It has been due to the efforts of such people that women are making contribution in every walk of life at present. Even now women are surrounded by domestic injustice and crude customs of our society. They suffer the double stress of working outside as well as inside the home. Responsibilities increase when they give birth to children and bring them up.

Many Roles Assigned and Expected

An Indian woman has to perform many roles at a time. Although education and economic conditions have changed the attitudes, the working wife has to face the problems of marital adjustment. She experiences a conflict of values in herself. She is not able to combine the two roles thrust upon her: as the woman in the family and the woman as a worker.

As India is a country that has faced many changes in her past and all the time has tried to adapt herself to the situation, so are the women of India, who are always adjustable to the situation. Meanwhile, it is a wonder that no one in position of authority seems to be concerned about the terribly negative image of India that is taking roots abroad. Apart from the occasional patronising newspaper reports and TV analysis in the media, even medical journals now address the issue of female foeticides in India as a tragic phenomenon. Abortions are being reported from both rural and urban areas, but the attendant factors as well as the social contexts differ widely.

In the villages, the lack of proper facilities, lack of medical help, low levels of education and lack of expert advice may account for some loss of lives. But in the urban areas, even affluent sections of the society, lacking neither means nor education are perhaps more guilty of creating the long term demographic imbalance whose consequences can only be imagined.

Several Attempts and Plans to Improve

However, plenty of attempts have been made by the government through several schemes and plans. Then also, we can't say that they have fulfilled or succeeded in their job. In fact, now also women are struggling for their existence in the male dominated society. In the urban areas, the scenario is a bit changed regarding the freedom, respect and status of the women. But that also in the upper classes and the upper middle classes. Women of the lower classes continue to be mostly illiterate, and need more attention than hitherto given to them. The status of women of middle classes has not improved significantly.

Continuing Impact of Old Traditions

Whatever may be the reason, this is the fact that the old traditions and cultures still hold the society with their hard grip that can't be easily broken away.

As Maria Mies, after doing a sociological survey, points out:

“The career woman has not only to face the opposition of her surroundings and to struggle against many objective obstacles, but she is often divided in herself because she also often subscribes to the Indian ideas of womanhood. Her problems arise, firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a new social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity.”(Maria Mies, *“Indian Woman & Patriarchy”*, New Delhi : Concept, 1980, P 130)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 10 October 2011

Nidhi Bhatt, Ph.D. (English Literature), B.Ed.

Indian Women in the Mirror of Society

Sexual Harassment

The danger to woman through sexual harassment is an issue that has been rocking governments and creating ripples all over the world. Indian women have been, throughout the centuries, quietly tolerated sexual harassment at the workplace to save their reputation and because they had no hope of getting justice.

And yet, the idea of respect for women has a long tradition in India. According to the laws of Manu, women are to be revered. Without reverence for women no religious rituals have any meaning, he said. Centuries later, the Constitution of independent India, repeated this injunction in modern, secular language. Women, the Constitution states, have the fundamental right to live and work with dignity in a safe environment. Moreover, the Constitution says, it is the duty of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Emerging New Approaches

Yet, it cannot be denied that from Manu's time to our own, the dignity of women has been held high in words more than in deeds. Now, as rapid change is taking place and social institutions, traditions and customs are giving way to new ideas and practices, the confusions and contradictions of women's status are taken up openly and frankly. The National Commission for Women was established in 1992 for the empowerment of women and to stop the abuse of women such as dowry and female foeticide and infanticide.

In 1997, in response to the rape of a social worker in a village in Rajasthan, a panel of judges of the Supreme Court of India moved to protect the dignity and safety of working women. The Supreme Court issued guidelines specifying norms and procedures to govern the behaviour of employees and all others at work places, in both the Public and Private sectors to curb the social evil of sexual harassment of women.

How Can We Make Rules Work?

Rules and regulations to improve the condition of working women are helpful and even necessary, but they can only function if there is a change in attitude toward women. Woman and man are the two sides of the same coin.

Don't try to hide behind the old chicken and egg problem. Of course, you inherited a set of assumptions and stereotypes about women but no one is forcing you to hand on to them. Your attitude towards women is a choice you make, it may be positive or negative or, most likely, confused. It's up to you to sort it out, honestly and make it positive. True, our culture and upbringing ingrain attitudes and stereotypes about men and women in us that can be distorted and degrading - but no power in the moral forces you to keep those attitudes once you have seen they are destructive.

In fact, you can't insult women without insulting yourself first. As we understand it, gender equality also includes the right to work with dignity and, in particular, protection from sexual harassment.

Sensitizing Employees, Corporations and Government Departments

So, be respectful to women and women will respect you. A company-wide programme to inform and sensitive men and women to the issue of gender discrimination and harassment of women is necessary to uproot stereotype behaviour and create a responsible and respectful environment for women at the work place. The DuPont Corporation in the U.S., one of the leaders in working to maintain a positive environment for women, adopted a company-wide programme called, "A Matter of Respect", with the goal of creating a responsible and respectful environment, free of sexual harassment and discrimination.

Also, education is particularly vital for women to begin to break down the "dependent woman" syndrome, both in reality and in their own heads. It is the foundation stone for women coming into their own. No matter what her particular life-situation, education enables her to handle it better, to achieve more, to begin to develop herself. It is the basis for independence - a woman who can earn her own living can choose not to put up with sexual harassment or male-domination, whether at home or at work.

Even though, significant numbers of women have always had to work outside their homes to feed themselves and their families, this has traditionally been viewed as evidence of failure - Poverty, immorality, identity problems, personal calamity, broken marriage. A real woman, it has been told to us all for generations, takes care of others, but she cannot, does not and should not take care of herself. She needs a man to do that!

An American Psychotherapist, Dr. Laura Schlesinger puts it in a humorous way: "When the wife does not focus in on the needs and the feelings, sexually, personally, to make him feel like a man, to make him feel like a success, to make him feel like her hero, he's very susceptible to the charm of some other woman making him feel what he needs," She is just a wo-wo-wo on a man, as the popular psychologist and radio personality said. (*Dr. Laura: Women share blame for cheating men. Syndicated radio talk show host stirs controversy with remarks about wives.*)

Women are equipped with far more finely-tuned skills than men. As child-bearers and nest-defenders, they need the ability to sense subtle mood and attitude changes in others that could signal pain, hunger, injury, aggression or depression. This is commonly called 'Women's intuition'.

Finally, Men and Women are different. Not better or worse - just different. About the only thing they have in common is that they belong to the same species. They live in different worlds, with different values and according to quite different sets of rules. Men and Women of every culture, creed and hue Constantly agree over their partners' opinions, behaviour, attitudes and beliefs.

References

Ram Chandra Guha, "Not By Faith Alone", The Sunday Express, 1 Oct. 1918.

Hunter College Women's Studies Collective; Women's Realities, Women's Choices: An introduction to Women's Studies (New York: Oxford University Press 1983, P-68).

Shanta Krishnaswamy, "The Women in Indian Fiction in English" (New Delhi: Ashish, 1984).

Dr. Laura: Women Share Blame for Cheating Men. A Talk Show.

Maria Mies, "Indian Women and Patriarchy", New Delhi: Concept, 1980, P-130.

Nidhi Bhatt, Ph.D. (English Literature), B.Ed.
Princess College
Devpuri
Raipur (C.G.)
Pt. Ravishankar University, Raipur (C.G.)
nidhibhatt03@yahoo.com