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The Concussion Of Domestic Violence On Women Empowerment

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"All marriages are sacred, but not all are safe."

- Rob Jackson

ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a process in which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices. It can be briefly expressed as several ways of valuing women and her opinions. It includes raising their standards, educating them and creating awareness among them about their mental, physical and spiritual strength. Although there have been many courageous women who have defied preconceptions, women have historically been subjected to all kinds of abuse, manipulation, and suffering that made them feel unworthy and unsuitable. The empowerment of women and autonomy of women is very essential for the achievement of sustainable development. It is admirable that women have broken through barriers, shown their talent, and participated in practically all fields of effort. Her achievements, sacrifice and contribution in nation building is beyond the limits of the sky. Gender equality and empowering women is fundamental in having a peaceful and prosperous world. The goal of women's empowerment is to give themselves power, not to dominate men. It is past time for the globe to become a gender neutral society that provides not only opportunity but also facilities that would promote women involvement. The greatest obstacle to empowerment is the procedural aspect of empowerment notwithstanding cultural and societal constraints. This essay discusses domestic violence, which is one of the main crimes against women that has been devastating the world for a long time. In essence, domestic violence refers to when a man abuses his position to exert control over his partner through violence or other abusive behaviours. It further elucidates upon the national and international initiatives to curb it explaining the reasons attributing abusive behaviour and the effects of such abuse on women, children and society.

KEY WORDS : Woman, Domestic Violence, Abuse, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women from a long time are not only downtrodden or subjugated but also being exploited, tortured and misused. From the place of her employment to her place of shelter, she is at a vulnerable stage susceptible or subjected to abuse. Subordination of Women and the unfair disparity of men and women and the ideology of husbands being superior has been the major factors attribution towards the ill treatment of women. Violence against women is a worldwide issue and domestic violence is a prominent concern. Domestic violence can include physical and mental mistreatment of women in a household which ultimately leads to the enslavement of women. It encapsulates sexual abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, force and threats, terrorization, isolation, manipulation, victimization, oppression, slavery so on and so forth. Domestic violence is one of those several setbacks which cause sluggishness in the development of the nation. Empowerment of women in a country contributes highly towards its development. India's efforts to make women empowered started during the period of imperialism where several laws were made to prohibit Sati, devadasi system, child marriage, female infanticide and several other social evils against women. India was the nation which gave voting rights to women before the US and also had Indira Gandhi as its first prime minister. Globally, there were several conventions initiated by the United Nations and the most significant one is The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girls' equal rights³. In Spite of this convention there are much more committees and conventions which assists and insists on the development of women and women liberation.

2. HISTORICAL INCEPTION OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The history of mankind has always considered women as something important for men. Women were treated like the property of men and nothing else. When she is young she is her father's property, when she is married she is subjugated to her husband and then she belongs to her. She is being looked down as a commodity or slave who must act according to a man's whims and fancies. She has been ill-treated by society for ages. The justification to this statement would be pertinent with an outlook of religious views on women

2.1 RELIGIONS ON WOMEN

Hinduism

A woman in Hindu laws and customs are subjugated to her agate relations. Manu, the lawgiver stated that Day and Night women be held by their protectors in status of subjugation⁴. The Hindu laws and customs stated that a woman can never be independent and shall be subordinate to a man.

Christianity

The faith says that woman is cursed by the sinful act of Eve, who tasted the forbidden fruit and tempted Adam. The status of woman comes from the original sin in the Garden of Eden. "Eve ate the forbidden fruit first and therefore she has to pay for it⁵." This curse towards womankind led to the ill-treatment of women. She was considered as the prime reason for a man's downfall.

³Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women for Youth <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/cedaw-for-youth> (last visited on 12th jan 2024 @ 2:40 pm)

⁴ Dr. Lohit Naikar, "Human Rights, Women and Law" 12 (Vidyanidhi Prakashana, Gadag 1st edn... 2013)

⁵ M H Kidwai, *Women under Different Social and Religious laws* 19,(Seema Publications, New Delhi, 1st edn...1976)

Buddhism

Gautama Buddha who considered as a perfect man of all times considered that every contact with woman was something unholy and considered woman as a sex consisting of wickedness, falsehood and greediness⁶. He couldn't reconcile his married life and had to leave his wife for his own perfection.

Islam

Islamic religion believed that a good woman is a lady who obeyed her husband and covered her body parts as Allah has guarded them. Mohammedans believed that any sorts of disobedience should be punished⁷

2.2 GROWTH OF FEMINISM

The growth of feminism started when the concept of husbands' superiority over women was slowly diminished and discouraged. Women started recognizing their natural rights. The theory of man and woman being alike and should be given equal rights emerged. The romantic ideology contended that men and women are essentially different but they complete and complement each other and assign equal value⁸. The Marxist ideology says that family life has developed into a patriarchal system in which women are enslaved, suppressed and isolated from the public life and community⁹

Feminism basically is a collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies with opposing, varied and conflicting views largely motivated by the experience of women, with reference to the inequalities of social, political and economic backdrop¹⁰

Feminism on the one hand aims for eradicating gender inequality and to protect women rights on the other hand it stands for earning and establishing equity for men and women. Considering this feminism has been categorized as:¹¹

1. Liberal Feminism
2. Radical Feminism
3. Legal Feminism
4. Cultural Feminism
5. Postmodern Feminism
6. Socialist Feminism

Liberal Feminism

The idea of liberal feminism rooted in the 18th century in the western countries. Liberalists focus on individual rights and freedoms as the central ethic of the ideal society. Early feminists adopted the liberal view that the worth of an individual¹². The traditional sex role men engaging in gainful employment and

⁶ SUPRA Note 4

⁷ Giriraj Shah, *Encyclopedia of women's study 5*, (Gyan Publication House, New Delhi, 1995)

⁸ SUPRA Note 4, pg no 15

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Mamata Rao, *The Law Relating to Women and Children 10*, (Eastern Book Company, New Delhi, 4th edn... 2019)

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Laura Ann Davis, "A feminist justification for Adoption of An Individual Filing System" 62 *Southern California Law Review* 223 (1988)

women being a pious wife whose main duty is to rear children was liberalized and the concept of equality was focused.

Radical Feminism

The followers of radical feminism saw women as a class who were suppressed by a class known as men. Radical feminists demand for destruction of patriarchy which is preserved through marriage and sexual division of labour¹³. Radical feminism teaches to be self-reliant and independent.

Social Feminism

Karl Max and Fredric Engels was the founder of socialist feminism. They believed that powerlessness of women in society is rooted in the thought of women being oppressed by unpaid housework which significantly isn't a gainful employment.

Cultural Feminism

It had its origin in the work of Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow. They believe in the universal differences between masculine and feminine personalities and embrace women differences¹⁴

Legal Feminism

The aim of feminism has been to uncover the shortcomings of the dominant legal form of life in relation to women and by necessary implication, also in relation to men¹⁵.

Post-modern Feminism

India was indifferent to the concept of equality and individual freedom; its own culture was oppressive to women which led Raja Ram Mohan Roy to abolish Sati practice. MK Gandhi brought in the concept of Sthree Shakthi and convinced women to participate in freedom struggle and other reforms by such other renowned reformers. They started a revolution against sexual discrimination and crimes against women. Eventually their persistent efforts paved way for a proper legal framework and written rule for empowering women.

3. STATUS OF WOMAN

The term status means "sum total of various culturally ascribed roles one has to play and the rights and duties inherent in a social position"¹⁶. The status of women and be studied by the position of women divided into

1. Vedic Period
2. Post Vedic Period
3. Islamic Period

¹³ SUPRA Note 10

¹⁴ Supra Note 4

¹⁵ Ngaire Naffine "In Praise of Legal Feminism" 22 Legal Studies 77 (2002)

¹⁶ Aleyamma George, "Role and Status of Women in Indian society" 98 Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1978

4. British Era

5. Contemporary Period

Vedic Period

This period was between 2500 BC -1500BC. This time frame was the best for women. Girls were educated and also excelled in *vedas* and *upanishads* women could opt their life partner in an open court like *swayamvara*. Wives were considered equal to their husbands and equally took part in all religious, social, and economic activities. According to Manu Smrithi inappropriate behaviour towards women was considered as *adharma*. Widow Remarriage was allowed with special conditions¹⁷. Widows could make children if her husband was infertile or died before having children through a process called Niyoga¹⁸.

Post Vedic Period (1500 B.C. - 500 B.C.)

With the efflux of time, the position of women changed into ignominy, deprivation and hurdles. There was a decline in women's education. Girls were gradually restricted from going out of their residence. Or move freely in public. Every right provided was curtailed. Birth of a girl child was considered a financial drain, inauspicious and misery. "A wife is a comrade; a daughter is a misery and a son a light in the highest heaven¹⁹." Yet, daughters were considered equal to sons according to Manu and Brihaspati. The practice of child marriage was evolved in this era. Women were denied to participate in religious ceremonies and were only recognised as mothers. Widow marriage was prohibited and there was a practice of Sati and Jauhar.

Islamic Period (500 A.D. – 1800 A.D.)

This period is known as the dark era for women. They were considered slaves and chattels. There was injustice, inequality and intolerance everywhere. The marriageable age was significantly lower and education was limited to rich and royals. Women were subjected to *pardah* and were forbidden to visit holy shrines. Women lost all their liberal activities and had become a property of their male masters. Widow Remarriage was prohibited and was considered inauspicious and bad luck

British Era

Sati, child marriage, polygamy, Patriarchal joint family, prohibition of widow remarriage and *Pardah* system were the factors responsible for the deterioration of the status of women. In British India, the Bhakti movement and several of the missionaries impacted training to women. The Hunter Commission underscored one of the requirements for female education in 1822²⁰. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's strong agitation against Sati made Sati a crime of culpable homicide in December 14 1829²¹. The English education and western liberal ideas and the nationalist agitation against imperialism were impetus to the enforcement of reformative laws for women development

Contemporary Period

Post independence, the adoption of constitutions and several other social legislations brought in improvement in the status of women. Women were treated equally to their male counterparts. Daughters get equal share in their ancestral property. Widow Remarriage was legalized. She now enjoys a respectable position.

¹⁷ SUPRA Note 10

¹⁸ SUPRA Note 4

¹⁹ K. Gill, "Hindu Women's Right to Property in India" Deep and Deep, New Delhi, 17 (1986)

²⁰ Raj Kumar Pruthi, Romila Pruthi and Rameshwari Devi "Status and Position of Women: In Ancient, Medieval and Modern India" 5-75 (Mangal Deep Publications, 2001).

²¹ SUPRA Note 4

4. OFFENCES AGAINST WOMEN

The Semantic meaning of crime against women is direct or indirect physical or mental cruelty to women. Crimes which are directed specifically against women and in which only women are victims are characterized as Crime against Women²²

The criminal law of the nation has listed down these offences:

1. Rape
2. Domestic Violence
3. Assault
4. Sexual Harassment
5. Attempt to Disrobe A Woman
6. Voyeurism
7. Stalking
8. Words or Gesture Intending To Insult the Modesty Of A Woman
9. Dowry Death
10. Acid Attacks
11. Women Trafficking
12. Cyber Crimes and Bullying

These are some of the well known offences against a woman, yet there are other offences which isn't known to the world

5. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is characterized by the misuse of power by one adult in a relationship to dominate another. It involves establishing control and instilling fear through various forms of abuse, such as physical, psychological, social, financial, or sexual. The violence may occur intermittently, sporadically, or persistently. Domestic Violence can be exhaustively defined as, “ the infliction of any bodily injury or harmful physical contact or destruction of property or threat thereof or harmful physical contact or destruction of property or threat thereof as a method of coercion, control, revenge or punishment upon a person with whom the actor is involved in an ongoing intimate relationship²³.”

According to the United Nations Secretary-General, “Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace²⁴. Violence against women has emerged as a serious issue at international forums all over the world. Out of which Domestic violence has emerged as a huge issue which destroys the life of many women.

5.1 CAUSES OF ABUSE

Domestic violence against women has been a longstanding issue. Throughout history, women have been perceived as weak, vulnerable, and susceptible to exploitation. The occurrence of violence against women has unfortunately been widely accepted. While cultural norms, religious customs, economic factors, and political circumstances may contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence, it is important to recognize

²² Awadhesh Kumar Singh and Jayanta Choudhury, “Violence against Women and Children-Issues and Concerns” New Delhi, Serials Publications, 2012, p.1

²³ Women’s And Children’s Treatment committee, Standards for Services to Battered Women and Their Children, Colorado, London, 1995

²⁴ UN Secretary General, Violence Against Women, Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action – Report of the Secretary General, UN Doc: DPI/2035/D,(May, 2000).

that ultimately, the decision to commit an act of violence is a personal choice made from a range of available options²⁵. Cultural norms play a significant role in perpetuating domestic violence. In many societies, patriarchal values have been deeply ingrained, where men are considered superior and hold power over women. These norms often dictate that women should be obedient, submissive, and dependent on their male counterparts. Consequently, any deviation from these expectations may result in violence as a means of asserting control and maintaining the established power dynamics. Religious customs can also contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence against women. Some religious teachings and interpretations may reinforce gender inequality, emphasizing the subordination of women to men. This can create an environment where violence against women is justified or even encouraged, as it is seen as a means of enforcing religious principles or maintaining traditional gender roles. Economic factors can further exacerbate the issue of domestic violence. Financial dependence on an abusive partner can leave women trapped in abusive relationships, as they may lack the resources or support to leave. Economic disparities and limited access to education and employment opportunities can also contribute to the vulnerability of women, making them more susceptible to violence. Political circumstances can also influence the prevalence of domestic violence against women. In societies where there is a lack of legal protection or enforcement, perpetrators may feel emboldened to commit acts of violence without fear of consequences. Weak legal frameworks, corruption, and inadequate support systems can hinder efforts to address and prevent domestic violence, perpetuating a cycle of abuse. However, it is crucial to recognize that the decision to commit an act of violence is ultimately a personal choice made by the perpetrator. While external factors may contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence, it is important to hold individuals accountable for their actions. By shifting the focus from blaming societal factors to addressing personal responsibility, we can work towards creating a society where violence against women is not tolerated or accepted. Education, awareness, and support systems are essential in empowering women and challenging the deeply ingrained beliefs and norms that perpetuate domestic violence.

5.2 KINDS OF ABUSE

1. Physical violence
2. Sexual violence
3. Verbal violence
4. Social violence
5. Emotional violence
6. Intellectual violence
- 7 Other forms of violence

5.3 EFFECTS OF ABUSE

Domestic violence has far-reaching effects beyond physical harm, impacting the social, economic, psychological, spiritual, and emotional welfare of both the victim and the perpetrator, as well as society at large. This form of violence significantly contributes to the poor health outcomes experienced by women, affecting their mental and physical well-being, as well as their reproductive and sexual health. The consequences may manifest as injuries, gynecological issues, temporary or permanent disabilities, depression, and even suicide. Sufficient evidence exists to substantiate the claim that women who endure domestic violence are more prone to reproductive health issues. Research conducted in North India has revealed an increased odds ratio of gynecological symptoms among women who have encountered physical and sexual violence, in comparison to those whose husbands have not engaged in domestic violence. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that abusive men are more inclined to engage in extramarital affairs and contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), consequently putting

²⁵ Kaur, Ravneet, and Suneela Garg. "Addressing domestic violence against women: an unfinished agenda." *Indian journal of community medicine : official publication of Indian Association of Preventive & Social Medicine* vol. 33,2 (2008): 73-6. doi:10.4103/0970-0218.40871

their wives at risk of acquiring STDs as well. Additionally, it has been observed that such men exhibit lower rates of condom usage²⁶.

Psychological and emotional violence encompasses various forms of mistreatment such as repeated verbal abuse, harassment, confinement, and deprivation of physical, financial, and personal resources. The quantification of psychological abuse poses significant challenges, with only a limited number of studies conducted to determine its prevalence rates. Qualitative research suggests that continuous psychological abuse can be equally detrimental to one's well-being as physical abuse. The erosion of an individual's self-esteem can result in severe mental and physical health consequences and has been identified as a significant factor contributing to suicide. In certain cases, women may find the incessant insults and oppressive behaviors associated with emotional abuse more distressing than physical attacks, as they effectively undermine their sense of security and self-assurance²⁷.

6. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The concept of women's empowerment involves empowering women to enable them to make independent decisions and have control over their own lives. This includes giving women the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to achieve their goals and fulfil their potential. Women's empowerment also involves challenging and changing societal norms and structures that limit women's rights and opportunities. By empowering women, we can create a more equal and just society where all individuals have the freedom and agency to live their lives to the fullest. Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally²⁸.

6.1 HUMAN RIGHTS AND WOMEN

Human rights to women are indispensable, inalienable and integral part of human rights. The United Nations have committed to protect the life, liberty and status of women at all levels. It has identified that all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender are thus violative to fundamental human rights. Gender injustice and insensitiveness manifests itself in the form of discrimination, crime and violence against women²⁹. With a view to enhance dignity of women the United Nations have come up with several conventions to act as security agency to protect women's rights. The progress of women has been a central concern of the United Nations since its establishment. The UN Charter's Preamble establishes a fundamental objective to reassert belief in basic human rights, in the respect and value of every individual, and in the equal rights of both genders. In 1946 the Commission on the Status of Women was established to deal with women's issues. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights had affirmed the principle of inadmissibility of discrimination and proclaimed that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, including distinction based on sex³⁰. Nevertheless, significant discrimination against women persisted due to various societal constraints rather than legal ones. This discrimination went against the fundamental principles of equal rights and human rights. On November 7, 1967, the General Assembly approved a Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. To uphold the principles outlined in the Declaration, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was established, often referred to as an International Bill of Rights for Women, this Convention aims to

²⁶ Stephenson, Rob, Michael A Koenig, and Saifuddin Ahmed, "Domestic violence and symptoms of gynecologic morbidity among women in North India." *International family planning perspectives* (2006): 201-208.

²⁷ World Health Organization "Domestic violence: a priority public health issue in the Western Pacific Region." (1998)

²⁸ European institute of gender equality, 'Empowerment of women' available at ,< https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1246?language_content_entity=en > accessed on 15th January 2024

²⁹ Flavia Agnes "Law and Gender, Inequality The Politics of Women Rights In India " Oxford University Press, New Delhi (2008)

³⁰ SUPRA Note 4

combat discrimination against women worldwide. A comprehensive set of rights has been established for all individuals, including women, with additional measures in place to safeguard the human rights of women. In conjunction with the aforementioned Convention, three Conferences were conducted during the U.N. sponsored International Women's Decade (1976-1985) in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985). The fourth conference took place in Beijing in 1995, significantly raising global awareness about women's issues. The Beijing Conference declared that 'Women's rights are human rights' and advocated for the integration of women's human rights within various United Nations human rights bodies³¹. It addressed the matter of violence against women in both public and private spheres as a human rights concern. The Conference urged for the elimination of any conflicts that may arise between women's rights and harmful consequences. In 2000, the UN General Assembly held a Special session on 'Women: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century' to evaluate advancements in women's issues. During its 49th Session in February 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women reviewed the progress made on the Women's Human Rights Agreement, known as the Beijing Platform for Action. The Conference covered various areas such as poverty, environment, economy, education, human rights, power and decision-making, and the rights of the girl child. In 2005, the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly reaffirmed the World Summit Outcome. The Summit committed to advancing gender equality and eradicating pervasive gender discrimination. On March 14, 2011, the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women convened in the Economic and Social Council Chamber to address the current state of gender-based violence worldwide. Apart from this there are other lists of conventions for the protection of women³².

6.2 GENDER EQUALITY AND CONSTITUTION

The struggle for gender equality and the existence of gender based discrimination represents the nasty face of society. Gender equality is essential and is reiterated by many international dogmas as it is the primary step for development of the nation. The charter of the United Nations Organization asserts equal rights for men and women. The Indian Constitution, which came into effect on January 26, 1950, encompasses Articles 14 to 16 that ensure equal rights for both men and women. Gender-based discrimination is strictly prohibited. Even before many western countries granted women the right to vote, India's independence in 1947 marked the implementation of universal suffrage for women. In 1966, India became the second nation in modern history to have a female leader, Indira Gandhi, following the election of Sirimavo Bandaranaike as the president of Sri Lanka in 1960, making her the first female head of state in South Asia³³. The makers of the Indian constitution wanted to change the inferior and subordinate position of women and embarked on the principles of equality in the constitution. Beginning with the Preamble of the Constitution of India, the term Equality of status and opportunity is provided to all citizens which itself is a backbone for the provision of Right To Equality entailed in Part III of the constitution. Gender Equality is enshrined in the Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State policy.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993³⁴.

The Provisions under Indian Constitution For Gender Equality are:

- Article 14, confers on men and women equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social sphere.
- Article 15, prohibits, discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.

³¹ ibid

³² SUPRA Note 30

³³ Dr. Sandeep Singh Assistant Professor CRM Jat College Hisar, "Women Empowerment in India: A critical Analysis", Universal Research Reports| Refereed | Peer Reviewed, ISSN : 2348 - 5612 | Volume : 10 , Issue : 01 | January - March 2023

³⁴ India, Ministry of Statistics and programme Implementation, Women and Men in India 2012, 14 th Issue,p. xiii

- Article 16, provides for equality of opportunities matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state.
- Art 19 provides women with all kinds of Freedom
- Article 21 the blanket article which provides all citizens the right to life
- Article 23 the provision against exploitation, traffic in human beings and other forms of forced labour.
- Article 39(a)(d), mentions policy security of state equality for both men and women the right to a means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 42; direct the State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Article 51 A (e) imposes a constitutional duty to renounce all derogatory practices against women
- Article 325 provides for the Right to vote for all citizens

7. HINDRANCES IN EMPOWERING WOMEN

Despite the introduction of numerous Acts and Plans by both national and state governments to uplift Indian women, they continue to face disadvantages and discrimination in various societal domains such as social engagement, political involvement, economic participation, educational opportunities, and reproductive healthcare. Women in India are widely seen as economically deprived, with only a limited number engaged in service-oriented and professional sectors. There are various hindrances in empowering women few of them are:

Lack of women engagement in leadership

When there is less involvement of women there is a lack of diverse perspectives in decision-making processes, hindering comprehensive policy formulation. In a research conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, India was ranked 127th out of 193 nations³⁵ in terms of the percentage of women who serve in the lower house of parliament. In a nation where women make up half the population, India has 14% representation in the Lok Sabha and 11% in the Rajya Sabha.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment refers to the act of exploiting a young girl through sexual means, whether it occurs within the confines of her home, on the streets, in public spaces, transportation, offices, and so on. Perpetrators of such acts can include family members, neighbours, friends, or even relatives.

Social norms and cultural practices

Child marriage and female genital mutilation continue to be detrimental practices that persist in society. It is alarming to note that one out of every five young women worldwide is forced into marriage before reaching the age of 18. The prevalence of child marriage emphasizes the urgent need for a change in attitudes and the implementation of legal frameworks that protects the rights of women and girls.

³⁵ World Economic Forum, “Gender gap report”(2023)

Inadequate access to education and health care

This disparity in education levels between men and women has significant implications for gender equality and economic development. Women who lack access to education are more likely to face barriers in accessing employment opportunities, healthcare, and political participation. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and marginalization for women and their families.

Child Marriages

The practice of marrying off young girls by their parents as a means to avoiding dowry is a deeply rooted and prevalent tradition in rural India. Dowry, a payment made by the bride's family to the groom's family has long been a social custom in many parts of the country. However, in recent years, the exorbitant demands for dowry have become a burden for many families, leading to financial strain and even pushing them into debt.

Selective abortion and female infanticide

In India, the long-standing practice of conducting abortions on female fetuses after determining their sex and engaging in sex-selective abortion by medical professionals have been widespread

8. MEASURES FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN

In India, the presence of women in various fields such as business, politics, medicine, sports, and agriculture is steadily increasing. The successful execution of India's second lunar mission, Chandrayaan-2, in 2019 was led by two female scientists from the Indian Space Research Organization. This remarkable achievement challenges the prevailing stereotype that only men should be involved in rocket science. Furthermore, in 2020, the Supreme Court's affirmation of the government's stance on women serving as army leaders marked another significant milestone. Since their induction into the military in 1992, women have held diverse roles including fighter pilots, physicians, nurses, and engineers³⁶. These examples highlight the Indian women who have shattered the glass ceiling in the armed forces, despite the ongoing global debate surrounding women's participation in combat roles. In the field of medicine, women in India are excelling as doctors, researchers, and healthcare professionals. They are contributing to advancements in medical science and playing a crucial role in improving healthcare outcomes for the population. Women are also actively involved in sports, with Indian female athletes achieving success in various disciplines and representing the country on the international stage. In agriculture, women in India are playing a vital role in farming and rural development. They are actively involved in agricultural activities, managing farms, and implementing sustainable farming practices. Women farmers are contributing to food security and economic growth in rural areas, showcasing their resilience and determination in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Overall, the increasing presence of women in diverse fields in India is a positive sign of progress towards gender equality and empowerment. These women are breaking barriers, challenging stereotypes, and inspiring future generations to pursue their dreams and aspirations, regardless of gender. Their achievements are a testament to the potential and talent of women in India and serve as a beacon of hope for a more inclusive and equitable society.

India's narrative of women's empowerment would remain unfinished if we disregard the essential grassroots efforts undertaken by the government and civil society organisations. The federal and state governments have introduced novel initiatives, policies, and programs to empower women in urban as well as rural regions. These measures have played a crucial role in fostering women's empowerment.

³⁶ SUPRA Note 34

Few Measures by the government are³⁷:

1. One Stop Centre and Universalization of Women Help-lines:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) is responsible for overseeing the implementation of two initiatives funded by the Nirbhaya Fund: the One Stop Centre program and the Universalization of Women Helplines. The One Stop Centres, also known as Sakhi Centres, are designed to offer a comprehensive range of services to women who have experienced violence, including domestic violence. These services include police assistance, medical care, legal aid and counselling, psycho-social support, and temporary shelter, all under one roof. The Women Helpline (WHL) Scheme, on the other hand, provides round-the-clock emergency and non-emergency support to women affected by violence in both public and private settings. This support includes connecting them with the appropriate authorities, such as the police, One Stop Centre, hospitals, and legal services.

2. Swadhar Greh Scheme:

The Swadhar Greh Scheme is currently being executed as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide institutional support for the rehabilitation of women facing challenging circumstances, enabling them to live their lives with dignity.

3. Working Women Hostel:

The Government has introduced the Working Women Hostel Scheme to offer secure and conveniently situated housing for working women, along with day care services for their children, in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas where job opportunities for women are available.

4. Ujjawala Scheme:

The Ujjawala Scheme is currently being executed as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with the aim of preventing trafficking and providing assistance in terms of rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation to victims of trafficking involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

5. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao(BBBP) :

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme was initiated on January 22, 2015, with the purpose of tackling the decreasing Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and associated challenges concerning the empowerment of girls and women throughout their lives. The scheme aims to combat gender-based sex selective elimination, safeguard the survival and well-being of female children, and promote their education and active involvement in society.

6. Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK):

The Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) Scheme was sanctioned in November 2017 as a centrally sponsored initiative aimed at empowering rural women through community involvement. Its objective is to promote coordination among various schemes and programs designed for women. The scheme is executed by State Governments and UT Administrations, with a cost sharing ratio of 60:40 between the Central and State governments, except for North East & Special Category States where the funding ratio is 90:10. In the case of Union Territories, 100% of the funding is provided by the central government.

³⁷ Press Information Bureau

Government of India ,Ministry of Women and Child Development,“SCHEMES /PROGRAMMES FOR Empowerment Of Women”(2022) <<https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1795471>> accessed on 12th January 2024

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The writers through this paper have reiterated the significance and importance of supporting women and protecting her human rights. The prime goal of this paper is to enlighten the readers about the need for liberating, empowering and developing women, reinstating the fact that women empowerment is the need of the hour for nation's empowerment. There are various indicators which limit or hamper the process of empowering women; shockingly women themselves are hindrance in delimiting themselves. They often tend to weaken their strengths and strengthen their weaknesses. More than half of the women think that hitting them is acceptable when the partner is not cooking well, is not taking good care of the home and kids, refuses to have sex with the spouse, acts disrespectfully toward the in-laws, etc. This attitude has to be changed, women should know that they are equal to their husbands and they need not oblige to whatever he commands and all sorts of abusive conduct is offensive and they have a proper redressal forum under the suitable laws for preserving justice. The paper also puts forth the causes for abusive behaviour seen in men or his relatives and the effects of such in his children and society.

