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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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Abstract:

Domestic violence is common in India and cuts across barriers of class, caste and religion. Women in India face discrimination at every stage of life. In the first stage, a female foetus is often aborted and the girl child is not allowed to see the light of day. The second is female infanticide immediately after birth.

KEYWORDS:

Violence , Religion. , Constitution , Determination.

INTRODUCTION:

In the 1940s the Census of District Officer in British India recorded female infanticide in their official duty records. It is paradoxical that in a country where the constitution gives equality to women, thousands of girl children are denied the right to be born. Over the last ten years in different regions of the country, the number of foeticides has increased drastically. The gender ratio in India at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was 972 females per 1000 males. In the 1991 census it had declined to 929. The figures for the 2001 census shows only a slight increase to 931 females per 1000 males. The Prenatal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was introduced in 1991 and finally passed in 1994, but gender determination tests continue to be used to determine whether the foetus is female and whether to terminate the pregnancy.

FEMALE FOETICIDE AND INFANTICIDE

How do people justify female foeticide or infanticide? They believe that if girls are allowed to be born or allowed to grow up, they will have to be married and heavy amounts will have to be paid as dowry. In many sections of society, the family continues to incur expenses for the daughter's personal needs after her/marriage, including meeting childbirth expenses. Although it is illegal, the demand for dowry may also continue after the marriage. Many people argue that it is better to get rid of the girl foetus or infant than allow her to grow up and cause pain for the family later. Before the women's groups protested, local trains in Mumbai used to display advertisements for abortion clinics which read, spend Rs. 600 now or Rs. 60,000 later. Clinics offered walk in gender determination tests and facilities for aborting female fetuses. Mobile clinics in some parts of India offer not only facilities for gender determination, but also gender selective abortions.

FORCED MARRIAGE AT A VERY YOUNG AGE

Both the Constitution of India and the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1978, prescribed the minimum age of marriage for women at 18 statistics show that this is the average age for marriage in India, however the picture varies from region to region. If a girl child is forcibly married at the age of 11, 14, 15 or 15 this is violence. Young girls are married at a relatively early age in many rural areas and get caught in a relentless circle of marriage, motherhood, childcare and domestic drudgery. It is very difficult for these

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women to seek emancipation.

An empowered woman has the freedom to make choices. A woman has the right to make her own choices whether to pursue education and/or choose a partner in the marriage. At present many girls are withdrawn from school or college and married by force to a person chosen by their parents. Somebody else decides when she should get married and to whom, when she should have her first child, how many children she should have, whether she should abort a female foetus or whether she should kill a female child. Her rights exist in theory, but in practice she has no control over her body or her life.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

Domestic violence is a worldwide phenomenon. Surveys by the international centre for research on women estimate that 60% of women face violence at some point in their marriage (Times of India, 17 Dec. 2004). Double standards operate. People say that a woman is regarded with great respect and is very revered but the reality is that countless women are subjected to many forms of violence. Female foeticide is violence committed against both the mother and the unborn female foetus. Physical violence continues sometimes until the end of a woman's life. Family violence is one of the most oppressive blocks to women's emancipation because it is so frequently hidden and denied.

Women are afraid to speak out about their sufferings fearing the social shame it would bring to herself and her family. Poverty, economic and social insecurity for women and the disappearance of sources of livelihood. The National Crime Bureau of India noted an increase in reported violence against women from 82,818 cases in 1994 to 113,000 in 1998 with 13,910 registered cases of rape. Between 1987 and 1992 in Orissa there was a 305% increase in dowry deaths, and a 55% increase in rape cases. Just 12% of those charged were convicted. Karnataka, a medium development indicator state, has the highest rate of dowry deaths in the country (Karnataka is a state where development is neither high nor low in comparison with other states in India). Female foeticide, dowry deaths, rape, caste violence, and maternal mortality are only a few of the overt forms of violence faced by women. Low social status, early marriage, too many children too closely spaced is still the realities faced by many rural poor women.

When a woman is killed for dowry, it is not only her right as a woman that is trampled, but her right to life itself. Indian Government Statistics for 1999-2001 show that a total of 6,347 Indian women were killed by fire.

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 prohibits the giving or taking of dowry. Giving and taking of dowry is punishable by five years imprisonment and Rs. 15,000 or the value of the dowry, whichever is more. Demand for dowry is punishable by a minimum of 6 months to 2 years imprisonment and a fine of upto Rs. 10,000.

Wherever dowry has already been given it must be returned to the woman within three months of the date of the marriage people are unaware that laws exist to protect victims of domestic violence. Many women do not know that they can go to a police station or a law court to seek protection. Unfortunately, if a woman is being beaten and she does seek police protection's he is often confronted by hostile law enforcing authorities. This is because the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 states that the institution of marriage does not fall under secular law. The government recognizes Hindu law and supports its religious canon that states that the marriage must be preserved at any cost. That cost may include the woman's health, sanity and life. Law enforcing agencies usually apply the law by telling her to endure and adjust to situations of domestic violence. This cannot take precedence over other secular laws that protect women, such as laws against dowry, domestic violence, property rights etc. Many women want to get out of oppressive situations at home, but there are few secure shelters for battered women. Women who continue silently to endure such treatment are considered long suffering and good role models.

DENIAL OF EDUCATION:

Patriarchy, whether enforced by men or women, denies knowledge to women in order to sustain its influence. It discourages them from questioning their roles and prevents them from having control over their own lives. Violence in the form of physical brutality targets the woman's body through beating and harassment. Denial of rights to education and other necessities are also manifestations of violence. If you remove a girl from school you haven't beaten her but you have deprived her of her rights.

Our patriarchal society frequently denies education and information to girls. Either they are never enrolled in school or they are withdrawn very easily. In rural areas, families are heavily dependent on the labour of the girl child. Increasing poverty has made it essential for parents to work as labourers and the girl children back home are saddled with the responsibilities of cooking, looking after younger children, collection of fuel and fodder and carrying food to their parents at work.

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Today nearly half the female population in India remains illiterate despite greater numbers of females having attended schools. Government investment in education is very low, but investment in education for girls is lower. The census for 2001 indicates that the literacy of women is 54.16% with 46.70% of rural women being literate.

According to the 2001 census, 296 million people in India are illiterate, although this figure has lowered since 1991 when the illiteracy figure was 328 million. When girls do get educational opportunities, they excel. Since 2000 girls have consistently been out performing boys. The higher secondary 12th standard results for India for 2004 reveal that 82.28% girls passed compared with 71.29% boys. In no place did the boys score better than the girls. This patten can also be found in the UK.

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