Contemporary Women's Issues in India

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We are living in an age of profound social transformations that are steadily progressing. There seem to be an unsettled situation and an increasing restlessness all around us. Questions continue to arise and are discussed with growing interest in various dimensions. Some of the most important and evolving questions pertains to women.

The women's issues deal with (a) position that women should hold in society, (b) development of their powers and ability to enjoy equal rights with men, (c) abolishment of oppression and exploitation, and (d) promotion of mental and physical welfare to enjoy freedom.

As we know, with globalization and technological growth in the 21st century, the gender related issues have been and continue to be addressed locally, nationally, and internationally. Between 1975 and 2002 alone, about 10 important conferences on gender issues were held globally through the efforts of the United Nations. They include: The International Women's Year, Mexico Women's Conference, UN Decade for Women, Copenhagen Women's Conference, Cairo International Conference, and Beijing Women's Conference. The Beijing Declaration that "Women's rights are human rights" constitutes the most revolutionary statement in the history of mankind for women's emancipation and for the enhancement of the status and empowerment of the marginalized sections of the humankind.

Overall, conferences like these have greatly influenced and motivated women all around the world to bring about changes through Women's Studies programs, Women's movements, NGOs, government and legal interventions. However, issues and actions surrounding women will continue to emerge as changes occur in economic, political, and social spheres around the globe.

In the United States, an article in Time magazine published in 1987 titled "Are Women Fed Up" reported that 95 percent of the women complained of emotional and psychological harassment by men. The latest Time magazine article finds that 66 percent of women who are successful in terms of their position and power in the labor market reported being "very unhappy". Just recently, President Obama made a profound statement in his response to a negative comment made by one of his campaign strategists, "there is no tougher job than being a mom", validating women's freedom to make choices. The message is that women's views and concerns must be acknowledged for the well-being of the society.

Women's issues in India constitute a vast range and the subject can be approached in a variety of ways. Therefore, Women's Studies in India has a divided identity connecting to the world of academia through educational system and to activism through NGOs. It is no surprise therefore that India being a country of diverse population in terms of culture, class, caste, religion, region, environment (rural or urban), etc. needs to address the wide varieties of social, economic, political, and legal issues. One must grapple with a host of difficulties to address women's issues and challenges because of the diversity among women as well.

Here I am reminded of my experience as a participant in the first Women's Empowerment Day celebration conference held in New Delhi, the capital city of India in April 1999, two years before the statutory declaration of the Year of Empowerment of Women. About 500 women from urban and rural local governments attended this event. Several women leaders from rural areas shared with the audience their miserable life experiences because of exploitation, discrimination, rape, and abuse by their family, male landlords, and police officers. I was amazed to observe the courage of these women, most of whom did not have even high school education. However, they discovered new strength and courage to overcome barriers and found themselves in leadership positions to bring about change in the community.

Any careful observer of Indian women will discern a paradoxical scenario. On the one hand, there exists an educated, articulate, assertive elite which has excelled in many endeavors. One can find Chanda Kochhar, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and Nainalal Kidwai on Forbes' list of the 50 most influential women. On the other hand, many women in India suffer from discrimination and deprivation resulting in their marginalization. While a woman may be at the peak of success, she simultaneously may be silently suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. Compared with the past, women in recent times have achieved a lot but they still must travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. Compared to men, women are more illiterate, less employed, less visible in decision making bodies, have less access to nutrition and medical care and, worst of all, have less chance of even entering the world from their mother's womb.

Development of women has been receiving the attention of the Government of India right from the very First Five-Year Plan (1951-56) in terms of prioritizing women's education, and maternal and child health services. There was just a shift of approach from 'welfare' in Fifth plan to 'development' in the Sixth Plan. In fact, in India, the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980 – 85) is regarded as a landmark for the promotion of the cause of women. It is here that the concept of "women and development" found its way for the first time. The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992 – 97) launched in 1992 shifted the thrust of various schemes for women from 'development to empowerment'. In continuation of this process, the government of India declared 2001 as the year of Women's Empowerment. However, notwithstanding the untiring and continuous efforts on the part of the government as well as many NGOs, much more needs to be done to ensure the unhindered enjoyment of rights by women.

It is in the fitness of things to look at the various measures aimed at ensuring rights of women in India in the post-independence phase and the problem areas which require intensive attention by everyone. The Preamble to the Constitution of India resolved to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Fundamental Rights, the Directive Principle of State Policy and the Fundamental Duties of the Constitution ensure both rights and privileges to women. Besides the instrument of Constitution, the government took recourse to legislation in Parliament to alter the state of affairs regarding women. This process of "empowerment through legislation" continues, and arguably, this can be also regarded as one of the effective means of enhancing the status of women.

The 1974 publication of the report "Toward Equality, a Report on the Status of Women" that was to be presented in International Women's Year (scheduled for 1975 per the request of the United Nations) was the first major effort to analyze the extent to which constitutional guarantees of equality and justice for women had actually not been met. The findings of this report, with certain modifications, are still very applicable in India in 2012. However, the advances made by some Indian women have been and continue to be remarkable. Moreover, institutional changes have made a difference, as exemplified by the prominent roles Indian women continue to play in India and on the world stage. But, sadly, millions of women have not benefited from "modernity," whether economic, technological, political or social.

So, what are the areas where the Indian women are experiencing violation of rights and fighting for justice and equality and in what ways women are striving with determination and commitment to bring change in these areas? Based on literature and research findings, some key issues pertaining to modern women relate to women's rights, such as education, political representation and participation, economy, gender based discrimination and violence, and status of tribal and Dalit women as well as women's activism.

Women and Education

Access to education has the potential to broaden the boundaries of women's social roles by endowing them with greater skills and resources as well as by transforming their attitudes and values. Education is indispensable for comprehending social problems, coping with social changes, and accessing employment opportunities. Unfortunately, the spirit in favor of education for girls has not been reflected in terms of achievements. **According to 2011 Census, the literacy rate for women in the country is only 46 percent.** The main impediment on the universalism of primary education is the problem of female enrollment. In rural India, the picture is really bleak. Although female enrollment in schools has been on the rise, the drop-out rate continues to be very high due to numerous socio-economic factors. In many poor households, girls must assist in domestic chores, take care of younger siblings and battle against widespread and entrenched biases against girls' education. No one can deny that low female literacy rate has a negative impact on health and social issues including sex ratios, crude birth rate, crude death rate, mean age of marriage and the couple protection rate.

Average years of education and still in school	1983	1993/94	1999/00	2004/05	2007/08
Rural Females					
Years of Education	1.3	2	2.5	3.3	3.8
% in School (age 15-24)	5.6	8.9	13.6	18.1	22.6
Rural Males					
Years of Education	3.4	4.6	4.7	5.7	6.1
% in School (age 15-24)	17.2	16.9	26	29.3	33.4
Urban Females					
Years of Education	4.7	6.1	6	7.3	7.6
% in School (age 15-24)	22.5	30.6	33.2	35.6	40.1
Urban Males					
Years of Education	7.2	8.2	7.8	9	9.2
% in School (age 15-24)	28.5	39.2	38.4	40.3	43

Note: Years of Education is the mean of the population ages 15-59 years

Women and Economy

Many social analysts believe that the key to women's empowerment in India is to endow them with economic security. However, in every index – ownership of property, control of resources, wages earned, and food consumed, etc.— Indian women are lagging behind men. Indian women's economic backwardness can be explained in terms of public policies that regard women's work as supplemental to family incomes and to the economy generally. The census data indicate a decline in women's participation in the formal economic sector, as a percentage of the total female population. As production moved from the household to the organized sector of the economy, women lost the most. They were unable to compete for jobs in the new industries that relied more heavily on technology and required skills they did not possess nor could acquire. Their presence in the modernized workforce was also not regarded as desirable.

A host of explanations have been put forward for the decline in the number of women in the workforce and their concentration in the agrarian sector. The major factor which has affected women adversely is the growing dominance of the unorganized labor sector. In this sector, women have no other option than to work under insecure conditions and without the guarantee of minimum wages. Women who work at home or in family holdings are considered either as non-workers or supplementary workers at the most.

In the organized labor sector, due to social legislation and welfare measures, many employers feel hesitant to employ women. As the Planning Commission once commented, "The labor market is not as neutral as between men and women", which means that for given levels of skill and ability, the labor market is still weighted in favor of male workers.

Of course, women have successfully made substantial gains in certain sections of the service industries. However, their success in these fields has brought to light problems associated with housing, transportation, sexual harassment and a conservative mindset.

CSIS REPORT (2012)

Percent of Population in the Labour-Force (in % , ages 15-59)*					
	1983	1993/94	1999/00	2004/05	2007/08
All India	68.3	71.2	62.8	62.5	58.7
Females	40	46.5	38.9	38.6	32*
Males	90.5	90.2	85.6	85.5	84.6
Rural India	70.5	75.5	66.3	65.9	61.7
Females	45.1	53.1	45.2	44.7	37.6
Males	91.1	92	87	86.9	85.6
Urban India	61.8	54.3	54.2	55	52.2
Females	23	23	22.5	24.3	19.7
Males	88.6	82.4	82.4	82.7	82.5

Note: 1) Labour force refers to the 15-59 age group that reports that they are working, or looking for work, according to the 'weekly status' definition of employment.
2) Surprising drop to 32 percent - maybe considered an outlier

Despite the powerful voices in defense of globalization, a stark duality in its consequences is being witnessed. Globalization has offered new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been fully systematically assessed. Benefits of the globalized economy have been unevenly distributed, leading to increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas.

Women and Political Process

The granting of political equality and the enshrinement of the principle of universal adult franchise by the Indian constitution are milestones in the direction of women's political empowerment. Though one witnesses a flurry of informal political activity by women to promote their own interests, their role in the formal political structures has remained very limited. To make matters worse, a significant number of politically powerful women were able to reach the apex of their political careers mainly due to inscriptive considerations. As has been pointed out very aptly by Neera Desai, a noted expert on women's issues, two contradictory processes can be discerned as far as the participation by the Indian women in decision-making is concerned. At one level, many women assume leadership roles by their involvement in mass movements by poor peasants, Dalits, tribal members, or workers. At another level, when it boils down to contesting elections or assuming leadership roles in political parties, these same women become marginalized. The concern for women's wider political participation has been reflected in the UN Human Development Report which states, "development, if not engendered, is fatally endangered."

Politics throughout the ages has been constructed and molded based on those norms which have been identified loosely as masculine. The result is the distancing of women from everything political. Women are perceived as part of the social structure and not as part of the power phenomenon. Stereotypical gender roles pose a great hurdle in women's political empowerment. The public-private domain theory has been used ideologically to justify women's exclusion from public politics. Women's confinement to a narrow and limited domestic sphere adversely impacts their effective political participation. However, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have facilitated the entry of large number of women into various local self-government institutions. Yet the representation of women in the highest law-making body, i.e. Parliament of India, has always been less than 10 percent. The Women's Reservation Bill seeks to enhance this representation to one-third of the total seats of Parliament, because 'this critical mass 'is crucial if women's voices need to be heard in politics.

Political Representation / Women in Power

The table below shows the representation of women in the Lok Sabha, India's Lower House of Parliament, from the first Lok Sabha in 1952 to the fifteenth in 2009. The number of women elected has remained between 19 and 59. The 15th Lok Sabha has now the maximum of 59 members, representing 10.8 % of the total strength of the Lower House. The 12th Lok Sabha (1998) had 43 women members who constituted 7.91% of the total strength of the House. The 6th Lok Sabha (1977) had the lowest representation of women members with only 19 members. They represented 3.50 % of the total strength of the Lower House.

50

Women Members in Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament)				
Lok Sabha	No. of seats	No. of women contestants	No. of women elected	Percent. of seats
First - 1952	489	-	22	4.4
Second-1957	494	45	27	4.45
Third-1962	494	66	31	6.27
Fourth-1967	520	67	29	5.57
Fifth-1971	518	86	21	4.05
Sixth-1977	542	70	19	3.50
Seventh-1980	542	143	28	5.16
Eighth-1984	542	162	42	7.74
Nineth-1989	543	198	29	5.34
Tenth—1991	543	326	37	7.10
Eleventh—1996	543	599	40	7.36
Twelfth-1998	543	274	43	7.91
Thirteenth-1999	543	284	49	9.02
Fourteenth-2004	543	355	45	8.29
Fifteenth-2009	543	556	59	10.8

The 14th Lok Sabha had 45 women MPs, constituting just 8.29 percent of the total lawmakers elected. They were elected among the 355 women candidates who had contested the 2004 general elections. A record number of 59 women were elected to the 15th Lok Sabha, with a plurality, 23, belonging to the Congress Party alone. In all, 556 women had contested the 2009 General Elections (*Thaindian News,* May 18, 2009). One can take heart in the fact that nearly 90 percent of the female MPs are college graduates and as many as 60 percent have higher degrees (Divya, May 2009).

The Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament: The low representation of women in the popular house of national legislature has been sought to be remedied by the provision of reservation. During Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister, the National Perspective Plan advocated a 30 percent reservation for women. The Women's Reservation Bill introduced in July 1996 by the Deve Gowda-led United Front provided for 33 percent reservation for women in legislatures. Ever since its first introduction, the fate of the Women's reservation has been hanging in balance due to lack of consensus.

Despite of slow pace of women's representation and political participation as a whole, women have adorned high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, leader of the Opposition. **As of 2011, the President of India, the Speaker of Parliament (Lok Sabha), the Opposition Leader in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Minister (who belongs to the Dalit group) of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state, are all women.**

Gender-based Violence

One big obstacle to empowering women in India is the increasing occurrence of gender violence. In the era of globalization, in addition to goods and services and money, concepts, values and lifestyles also acquire a wide outreach. This has led to a culture of excessive consumerism, with features of unbridled greed, aggression and violence. All these undoubtedly create a milieu that adversely impacts the dignity and security of women. It heightens their vulnerabilities both at home and in public places.

Gender violence as a critical concern encompasses rape, wife battering, domestic violence, sexual harassment at the workplace as well as in the public domain, trafficking of women, the regressive portrayal of women in media, sex determination tests leading to female feticide, dowry deaths, communal violence and so on (Karlekar, 2005).

About 5,000 dowry related deaths occur each year despite the Dowry Prohibition Act passed in 1961 and amended in 1985 (Wikipedia, 2012). The good news is that among the urban educated, such dowry related abuse, harassment, and deaths has been reduced considerably. The number of female infanticides and foeticides in some strata of society is too high, revealing that the survival of the female child is a precarious possibility. According to the Report of National Crime Bureau, 150,000 crimes are taking place annually against women, of which the number of domestic violence cases run up to 50,000. In India, a woman is reportedly raped every 30 minutes, suffers a dowry death every 75 minutes, is tortured every 9 minutes a woman by in-laws, is murdered every 16 minutes, and kidnapped every 23 minutes.

Crime Against Women in India

Year	Number of Crimes
2006	164,765
2007	185,312
2008	195,856
2009	203,804
2010	213,585

Crime against women has increased continually during the last five years. The number of crimes with significant increases within 5 years are various forms of abuse by in-law families including husband and relative, molestation, and rape. In some states, certain crimes have increased by almost 300 percent.

Female Deficit

The declining sex ratio (940 females per 1000 males in 2011) is a wakeup call for the entire society. The child sex ratio is still more alarming. While it is 914 for the entire country, it is 919 in rural areas and 902 in urban areas. The birth of a girl child is, even in the new millennium, a calamity in many households, cutting across different classes. A girl child is viewed as an economic and social liability. She is unwanted, hence disposable. Skewed sex ratios have moved beyond the states of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. With reports of increasing numbers of female fetuses being aborted across the country, from Odisha to Bangalore, there is enough evidence to suggest that the next census will reveal a further fall in child sex ratios throughout the country.

Gender Ratio in India

The tables below show a slight increase in the sex ratio according to the 2011 census compared to the census data in 2001. However, the figure is much below the world average of 990 females. The steady decline of child sex ratio is certainly a concern.

Sex Ratio in India	
Year	No. Women Per 1000 Men
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	927
2001	933
2011	940

Child Sex Ratio	
Year	No. Female Children Per 1000 Male Children
2001	927
2011	914

Having fewer women does not mean the premium on them increases. The market theory of demand and supply does not work in the gender context in biased cultures. On the contrary, women are being subjected to more violence than before and families are being forced to keep them confined in their homes. In countries like India, where the social status of women is low, their diminishing numbers will lower their status further. It is now clear from the declining sex ratio among the zero to six age group, as found in the 2011 Census, that economic and social development could actually be worsening anti-female discrimination in India.

However, sex selection in India does not take place in a legal vacuum. The prime legislation at the all-India level remains the PNDT, or Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, which passed in 1994.The Act was subsequently amended in 2003, and renamed the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, the PC&PNDT in order to include pre-implantation techniques.

Surveys conducted on the implementation of the Act have thus far yielded mixed results. The legislation has received wide publicity, both at national and regional levels. Many public departments and civil-society organizations have also seized upon the provisions of the law to push for stronger implementation. At the same time, many difficulties and loopholes in the provisions of the Act have been identified. **These include: lack of resources to carry out inspection and monitoring, lack of corresponding qualified staff, poor performance of advisory committees at various levels, political pressures brought by the "Appropriate Authorities", and insufficient understanding of the law. Governments at various levels in India do not have much political incentive to launch large-scale operations to implement the PC&PNDT.**

Problems of Muslim Women

There exists general indifference or apathy toward the 70 million Muslim women in India who have been facing humiliating aspects of their lives such as polygamy and divorce. Muslim Personal Law as practiced in India contravenes the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in several respects. Article 5(a) of the CEDAW asks all States to take appropriate measures for "elimination of prejudices and customary and other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotype rules for men and women."

India ratified the CEDAW in 1993 but declared its reservation on this particular article on the plea of its conformity with its policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any community without its initiative and consent. In conformity with the provision of gender equality in the Indian Constitution, articles of CEDAW and a commonly understood spirit of equality and justice for women in Islam, the reformists maintain that Muslim Personal Laws as practiced in India are against these provisions and demand to bring about progressive changes in the customary practice of Sharia.

The All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB) was formed in 2005 parallel to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. The main focus of this Board lies on resolving the marital problems like divorce, maintenance and desertion of wives by husbands, employment generation for women, marriage of destitute girls, equal rights for daughters in ancestral properties, etc. In fact, Muslim women are even more disadvantaged since the Maulanas never come to the rescue of the harassed, divorced or victimized women while the administration refuses to interfere, labeling it a religious matter (India Today, Sept. 21, 2006). AIMWPLB in 2008 released a separate Nikahnama which rejects divorce through SMS, e-mail or phone and recognized the right of the Muslim women to seek divorce (Khula). A Supreme Court order in October 2007 made the registration of marriages mandatory for all.

The Shah Bano case in the 1980s, which involved a 73-year old woman's rights to maintenance after divorce, exemplified the conflict between religion, culture and women's rights. In this case conservative ulemas took it upon itself to represent the 'Muslim Community.' The historical surrender of State power to the pressure of Islamists in the Shah Bano Case, by amending the Constitution and neutralizing the Supreme Court judgment, was a signal of its helplessness toward the cause of Muslim women. Since then, several similar cases have been brought to national attention. Throughout these debates, the voices of Muslim women were rarely heard (Upadhyay, 2008).

However, since the 1990s, several individuals and groups have emerged across India and are working to change this situation by claiming their right to represent themselves. Two networks are worthy of mention: the Muslim Women's Rights Network and the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan. Both networks are questioning the notion that Muslim women are voiceless victims by asserting their political agency.

They challenge the authority of conservative Muslim male-dominated forums such as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board to represent the entire Muslim community (Kirmani, 2011). Both networks are also engaged in contextualizing the multiple disadvantages encountered by Muslim women in a broader pattern of economic, social and political exclusion.

Although no further legal reforms have taken place regarding Muslim women's rights since the Shah Bano case, the presence of Muslim women-led networks marks a significant shift in the Indian political landscape. Through organizations like these, women from marginalized communities find new ways to engage with and challenge structures of power and authority at multiple levels. Muslim women are finding spaces for themselves to actively engage in redefining their identities and reformulating relations of power.

Status of Tribal/Dalit Women

Tribal women have a peculiar position and status in the tribal society. In some tribal societies, matrilineal and matriarchal systems exist. Most of the tribal organizations have clearly defined areas of work among the males and the females. According to literature, though the work domain assigned to woman is important in terms of sustenance of the family, they are relatively low in the hierarchy of work domains (superior-inferior domain) when viewed from the value rating of work.

Tribal women in Indian society have been contributing positively to the local economy by participating actively along with men in the pursuit of economic activities to earn livelihood. In reality, women are perceived to do more hard work in the fields than men. They participate in all agricultural operations except plowing. They work in all sectors of indigenous cottage industries, tribal arts, and production of artifacts.

In other words, they share major responsibilities in the production process. The division of work is heavily loaded against a tribal woman, because, in addition to an equal or greater burden in the economic production process, she must take the sole responsibility of household chores, which is a stupendous task. Child-rearing is also her sole responsibility. Tribal women working in the fields carrying a child on their backs is a common sight in the tribal areas. Nowhere will one find a tribal man carrying the child on his back while he works in the field. This kind of division of labor places women in a disadvantageous position compared to their non-tribal counterparts (Das. 2010).

In the market place, tribal women are seen as vendors as well as buyers, especially in the weekly market—a scene normally not found in non-tribal communities. The tribal woman has the freedom to choose her husband and often dates with boys without any restriction. Premarital sex is also prevalent in some community. This arrangement is conspicuous by its absence in non-tribal counterparts. Whereas her parents, due to the dowry system followed in marriage, consider the non-tribal girl as an economic liability, the tribal girl is considered as an economic asset. The concept of 'bride price' justifies this. A tribal groom must pay bride price to the bride's father in marriage for the economic loss the father will incur.

Dalit groups, referred also as Scheduled Castes, are the most vulnerable groups with absolutely no power to realize rights and to report against their violations. They are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, treated as "untouchables" and are the most poor, oppressed, and exploited members in society, socially, economically, and politically. A wide variety of regional groups are included as Dalits. The protection of the Civil Right Act was passed in 1976 to stop discriminatory practices against the Dalit group. The Prevention of Atrocities Act enacted in 1989, is perhaps a sad reflection of the state of discriminatory practices with respect to these groups. With the lack of proper enforcement of the law, Dalit women are exploited, sold, trafficked, and forced to a life of violence. NGOs such as "Voices of Indian Women" are undertaking steps to help them overcome and prevent their fear of exploitation and realize their human rights.

Women Activism in India

There are important examples of successful advocacy in relation to political, legal, economic, and social wellbeing of women. A few of them are noted below:

- Women's movement in UP still recreates the vivid image of women peasants clinging to the trees and defying the forest contractors to "cut them down" to protect the environment. It formed the basis of the book "Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India."

- The first anti-liquor campaign was organized by women in a village to protest their husbands and fathers using all the money in liquor shops and starving their families. This massive protest demonstration was staged to draw attention from the government and became a cry for action. This movement in one state soon spread to four other states.
- Women called for stalling mega-dam building projects that destroy traditional habitats. This was a protest for saving cultivable land, the source of sustenance and homes to indigenous people.
- Women organizers were successful in mobilizing around 3,000 people to block the collector's path to make him agree to appoint doctor in the village primary health center that had not seen a doctor for years.
- Women participated in large numbers in a protest rally to block POSCO, a South Korean iron ore company that had planned to set up a huge steel plant, one that would adversely affect the environment and the cultivation of lands serving as the main source of livelihood for people.

Women's groups conducted big and emotional campaign through public rallies, demonstrations, and street plays on the issue of dowry to raise awareness about the issues and seek public support

Conclusion

Women in India face many challenges in diversity. They suffer from rights violations as well as gross gender inequality in education, labor force participation, and political participation in India. While women have been somewhat successful in Indian political life, they have not nearly active in its economic life. The very decline of sex ratio per the 2011 census supports the notion that a female child is still considered to be a liability.

In the political sphere, women are not in the corridors of power. However, at the grassroots level where so many violations of rights take place, women have mobilized themselves to protest against curtailment of their rights. Women have been at the forefront of anti-attack agitation in many rural areas to address domestic violence against women.

The predominantly patriarchal culture in India has adversely impacted women over the years. The caste system, which reinforces the patriarchy, further limits women's freedom and growth. Despite some recent positive changes, the broader trend in the sex ratio still supports the preference of a male child to a female child, as evidenced in instances of female feticide, female infanticide, and dowry deaths.

On a positive note, women continue to make great strides to bring changes at various levels in society through their leadership. Young educated students seem to be determined to fight against any form of gender based violence regardless of the source. Their visibility has been sufficiently increased through measures by Government, NGOs, key women's organizations, and Women Studies programs. In the words of Amartya Sen, "it is extremely important to acknowledge and focus on the constraints that bind women and keep them in little boxes. The removal of these constraints and captivity has to be a major goal of political action and social agitation…the possibility of change is also a part of the manifest reality of the world in which we live."

Key Women's Organizations in India (NGOs)

- AICAIP (All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples-----Delhi
- Joint Women's Program ---Delhi
- National Council of Women in India ----Pune
- National Commission of Women ---Delhi
- Diverse Women for Diversity ---Delhi
- Saheli ----Delhi
- Sakhi ---- Delhi
- Center for Women's Studies and Development –Chandigarh
- Women and Media Group –Mumbai
- The Women's Center of India ---Mumbai
- Maitreyi ---Mumbai
- Akshara ---Women's Resource Center ---Mumbai
- Center for Social Justice –Ahmedabad
- India Women Scientist's Association (IWSA)
- Center for Informal Education and Development Studies –Bangalore
- Working Women's Forum ---Chennai
- Streelekha –Bangalore
- St. Ignatius Social Center --Karnataka

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