

STUDY OF IMPACT OF CULTURE ON WOMEN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT:

THIS ARTICLE REVIEWS THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL FACTORS ON MENTAL HEALTH OF AN INDIAN WOMEN. MARKED GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA HAS LED TO SECOND CLASS STATUS OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY. THEIR MOBILITY, WORK, SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-IMAGE, IN FACT THEIR WORTH AND IDENTITY, SEEM TO DEPEND UPON THE MALE MEMBERS OF A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY. WOMEN'S LACK OF EMPOWERMENT AND BOTH FINANCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE HAVE RESTRICTED THEIR SELF-EXPRESSION AND CHOICES IN LIFE. THIS, ALONG WITH FAMILY, SOCIAL AND WORK PRESSURES, HAS A DEFINITE IMPACT ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH. THIS PAPER DISCUSSES SOME RECENT ADVANCES IN THE AREA OF MOVEMENTS THAT HAS GAINED TREMENDOUS IMPETUS IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IS THE REDISCOVERY OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN HISTORY AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMAN CULTURE. THESE DIVERSE COLLECTIONS DEMONSTRATE THE FAR-RANGING IMPACT WOMEN HAVE HAD ON ALL ASPECTS OF CULTURE. FROM INNOVATIVE WOMEN ARTISTS AND PIONEERING SCIENTISTS AND TECHNOLOGISTS TO THE WOMAN WHO CAMPAIGNED FOR UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND SOCIAL EQUALITY, THEIR STORIES PROVIDE A WINDOW ON TO WOMEN'S MULTIFACETED CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR SHARED HERITAGE.

KEY WORDS: WOMEN, CULTURE, ANTHROPOLOGY, MENTAL HEALTH; CULTURAL VIOLENCE.

INTRODUCTION

India is facing enormous social, economic and health challenges, including inequality, violence, political instability and high burden of diseases. Women continue to experience systematic violations of their human rights and to be largely excluded from decision-making². In situations of war and military occupation, women are to an alarming degree the victims and targets of atrocities and aggression³. To combat war as the ultimate expression of the culture of violence, we must address issues such as violence against women in the home, acts and reflexes of aggression and intolerance in everyday life, the banalization of violence in the media, the implicit glorification of war in the teaching of history, trafficking in arms and in drugs, recourse to terrorism and the denial of fundamental human rights and democratic

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² See Crawford, Philip Charles. "An Enlightening Look at the Feminist Ideals that Informed This American Icon". School Library Journal. Retrieved 13 October 2011.

³ T.J. Demos, Dara Birnbaum, Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman, MIT/Afterall Books, 2010, p1. ISBN 1-84638-066-9.

freedoms⁴. When women's health has been addressed in this region, activities have tended to focus on issues associated with reproduction, such as family planning and childbearing, while women's mental health has been relatively neglected.

A culture of peace requires that we confront the violence of economic and social deprivation. Poverty and social injustices such as exclusion and discrimination weigh particularly heavily on women. Redressing the flagrant asymmetries of wealth and opportunity within and between countries is indispensable to addressing the root causes of violence in the world⁵. Efforts to move towards a culture of peace must be founded in education; as stated in UNESCO's Constitution: since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. Even in the new millennium, women in South Asia are deprived of their socio-economic and legal rights⁶. They live in a system where religious injunctions, tribal codes, feudal traditions and discriminatory laws are prevalent. They are beset by a lifetime social and psychological disadvantage, coupled with long years of child bearing. They often end up experiencing poverty, isolation and psychological disability. In some urban regions of South-Asian countries, women's social roles have changed to some extent. They have now comparatively more opportunities for education, employment and enjoyment of civil rights within society. However, the de-stereotyping of the gender roles which have been traditionally assigned by our society is still far away.

In India, most of the societies the customary thought of people is that "girls are born to be fed throughout their lives" and "boys are born to earn and support the whole family". This thought is reflected through certain discriminative behaviors of people. Sex selection during pregnancy is still rampant in India, where women are forced to abort a female fetus. The birth of a baby boy is celebrated with great enthusiasm even in very poor families, and they look for every possibility for celebration on the occasion of birth of a male child. On the other hand, the birth of a baby girl is not welcomed. The situation is even worse in some rural areas of India where the girls are even deprived of their right to live. In one of the rural areas of India, it happened that, when a woman came home from hospital cradling her newborn daughter, her mother-in-law mashed a poisonous coriander into the dollop of oil and forced it down the infant's throat. The reason behind it was that sacrificing a daughter guarantees a son in next pregnancy. The couples are often forced by elderly members of family, particularly mother-in-laws, to keep on taking chances for the birth of a baby boy, which in many cases results in the birth of five or six girls.

Non-governmental organizations, women rights movements, Amnesty International and human rights workers periodically manage to follow-up the victims of violence and bring the culprits to justice. In India, some ancient traditions and customs are still followed promoting various forms of violence against women. These include honor killings, exchange marriages, dowry, female circumcision, questioning women's ability to testify, denying their right to choose the partner, confinement to home. The most frequent causes for acts of violence are domestic quarrels due to the inability of a woman's family to make dowry payments at time of marriage. In some rural areas of India, girls are deprived of their marriage rights only to keep the property in the family. In India, very often young unmarried girls and women suffer tremendous physical and psychological stress due to the violent

⁴ 'Lasso of Truth': The curious tale of Wonder Woman's creator". Retrieved 24 March 2014. Comics Sightings in TV and Film. Marvel Masterworks.com. Retrieved 13 October 2011.

⁵ Wertham, Frederic (1954). *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Reinhart & Company. 192, 234–235. ISBN 1-59683-000-X.

⁶ Robbins, Trina. "Wonder Woman: Lesbian or Dyke: Paradise as a Woman's Community". Papers. Girl-wonder.org. Retrieved 13 October 2011. And: DiPaolo, Marc (2011). *War, Politics and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda In Comics and Film*. McFarland & Company. 14. ISBN 9780786485796.

behavior of men. The nature of violence includes acid throwing, rape, wife-beating, murder of wife, kidnapping and physical. Besides that, many women and young children from South-East regions are trafficked and forced into prostitution, undesired marriages and bonded labor. Illiteracy, political forces, a feudal and tribal culture, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religious principles, and above all a girl's low status in the society encourage and sustain sexual exploitation of women. The trafficked victims face violence, intimidation, rape and torture from the employers, brothel owners and even law enforcement agents. This sexual servitude is maintained through overt coercion, physical abuse, emotional blackmail, economic deprivation, social isolation and death threats. Customs and traditions are often used to justify violence. The present scenario in India is still dramatic particularly in the rural areas, where the tribal chief remain in command.

An analysis of various studies in different regions of India revealed an overall prevalence rate of mental disorders in women. Women had significantly higher prevalence rates for neuroses, affective disorders and organic psychoses than men. A study carried out in India⁷ showed that factors associated with depressive disorders in upper and middle class women were marital conflicts conflict with in-laws (13%), financial dependency (10%), lack of meaningful job (14%), and stress of responsibilities at home and at work (9%). Another study conducted in India revealed that the most frequent factors forcing women to commit suicide were conflicts with husband and in-laws. The women who face domestic violence from husband and in-laws have no way out, because the system considers these acts of violence as acceptable. The police and law enforcement agencies are normally reluctant to intervene, considering it a domestic dispute. If the woman abandons her marriage, she has to face innumerable problems, like non-acceptance from society, financial constraints and emotional problems of children growing up without father. The tendency of women to internalize pain and stress, and their lower status with less power over their environment, render them more vulnerable to depression when under stress.

Now a days, almost 80% females are into jobs. But along with them they have to fulfill all the requirements of the family members. Have to perform all the house hold jobs along with the job where as men only do the job and dominate on females and force them to do all house hold activities. In some regions of India violence has reached staggering levels; in a recent population-based study from India, nearly half of women reported physical violence. In India, only women are thought to be responsible for producing the next generation, and the blame for the absence of the desired number of children is unquestioningly placed on them, leading to a destabilization of their social status. Studies have revealed that severe emotional harassment is experienced by a large number of these women in their marital homes in the form of ostracism from family celebrations, taunting and stigmatization, as well as beating, and withholding of food and health care⁸. A study carried out in Karachi explored the experiences among women suffering from secondary infertility: 10.5% of them reported they were physically and verbally abused by husbands and 16.3% by in-laws. Nearly 70% of women facing physical abuse and 60% of those facing verbal abuse suffered severe mental distress

There are several types of violence against women, not all of which take the form of brutal assaults. Demands by society on widows, however young they were, to lead a rigidly austere life, socially isolated and without any access to men, have been condoned for ages as necessary measures to keep them from temptation and sin. The practice of "sati" in certain parts of India, by which the wife threw herself into the funeral pyre of her husband, has been

⁷ "Lasso of Truth". Retrieved 24 March 2014.

⁸<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1525125/#B12>
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1525125/#B13>

documented in the not too distant past. Such behaviors of self-denial, torture and even death are indeed sanctified and glorified and there are even temples erected for the goddess of sati

The rate of mental distress has been reported to be high also in working women in India, and cultural factors are among the contributing variables. This mental distress usually remains unacknowledged. Finally, the recent economic reforms in India have been accompanied by a rise in the incidence of reported domestic violence, rape and alcohol abuse. In ancient India, Vedic people established a social system in which father, instead of mother became the head of the family. Throughout ancient history, women were obliged to abide by the laws made by men.

However, it is also true that Vedic society had a number of women in key positions and that certain austerities could not be performed without their wives even in the early ritualistic period. In fact according to legends Lord Brahma was forced to take up a girl named Savitri as his consort for a special worship, in the absence of his wife Saraswati. The ritualistic Vedic culture was indeed male dominated. Women folk only helped in the preparation of things for the rituals and fire sacrifices and did not conduct rituals themselves. Intellectual revolution followed as the fire sacrifices of the Vedic culture was challenged by thinkers including women, who speculated on the nature of religion

Independence of India heralded the introduction of laws relating to women. The Constitution provided equality to men and women and also gave special protection to women to realize their interests effectively. Special laws were enacted to prevent indecent representation of women in the media and sexual harassment in workplaces⁹. The law also gives women equal rights in the matter of adoption, maternity benefits, equal pay, good working conditions etc. At the international level, the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sought to guarantee better legal status to women. However, certain contentious issues like the Jammu and Kashmir Permanent Resident (Disqualification) Bill 2004 (which deprived a woman of the status of permanent residency of the State if she married an outsider) and the Supreme Court judgment in Christian Community Welfare Council of India (in an appeal over the Judgment of the High Court, Mumbai). The latter has permitted, under certain circumstances, the arrest of a woman even in the absence of lady police and at any time in the day or night. These instances have once again brought to the forefront the traditional male domination¹⁰, who speculated on the nature of religion. Despite major changes that have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in India, defining activities that are deemed appropriate for women¹¹. They are, by and large, excluded from political life, which by its very nature takes place in a public forum. In India, an important mechanism of male dominance is the propagation of gender ideology through sanctions of religious practices and their gender-selective interpretation by the community leaders. Moreover, increasing exposure to violence through popular reading, theaters, film and TV shows, satellite culture, etc. directly or indirectly encourage men to commit offences like rape. Theoretically Government of India regards man and women as equal. However, the states concern to preserve the existing patriarchal social order is clear from the ways laws operate in respect to violence against women.

⁹ Bullough Vern and Bonnie Bullough (1987), *Women and prostitution. A social history*, p. 94, New York: Prometheus.

¹⁰ CEDPA & PRIDE (1997), *Devadasi system continues to legitimize prostitution: the Devadasi tradition and prostitution*, India: Annual Report.

¹¹ "AIDS catastrophe", en *The Nation*, New York: The Nation Associates. Giri, V. Mohini (1999), *Kanya: exploitation of little angels*, New Delhi: Gyan. International Labour Organization (ILO) (2000), "Globalization's losers become its movers", en.

CONCLUSIONS

The cultural and religious practices in India give the Indian women a low position in the society, where the male dominates them. Though, during the last few decades many reforms have been taken place to improve the women status in the society but still the Indian women are standing behind the male. Every year, thousands of young girls offer to God by their parents to escape from the poverty across the India and later on these young girls serve as prostitute in their village and community. Though this practices existed in rural India, as the demand of prostitutes (in their community) has declined over the year, which is affecting to their family income, so to get the high income the parents are selling their daughter with the permission of the temple priest to the traffickers and afterwards these women brought to big cities and forced to work as prostitutes. Information stated that every year thousands of women are entering to the prostitution and subjected towards the exploitation. Though, gender-based violence and sexual exploitations, in various forms including rape, domestic violence, honour of killings and trafficking in women leading to a heavy toll on mental and physical health. This increasing gender based violence and sexual exploitations are recognized as a major public health concern and a serious violation of basic human rights.

In the last few decades a lot has been done in legal aspects to improve the women status in Indian society but still Indian women has no independency. Every day at least 12 women are dying because of violence and nearly thousands of Indian women are exploited by this patriarchal society through various ways, where flesh trade is one of them (UNICEF, 1997). Apart from this the constitution of India proclaims the equality between men and women, but in reality still Indian women are remain a sub-ordinate position in this patriarchal society, where they are treated as subjects to serve men's desire. This whole process is now an issue of global dimensions but it requires an urgent and concerted response. The gravity of the situation has sent shocks waves in Indian societies due to the AIDS pandemic. A comprehensive approach is essential to address the economic, social, political aspect of women trafficking. It is necessary to deal with the perpetrators, as well as assist the victim of trafficking. To combat of women trafficking the following aspects are most essential to achieve:

- Prevention in terms of addressing the issues of poverty, access to education, employment opportunities, programs for sustainable livelihood and poverty alleviation.
- Special attention for education of the tribal people and financial upliftment through agriculture.
- Abolish of the cultural practices like Devadasi, Basavi, Jogin, and Bhavin and the social milieu like dowry, and widow from the Indian society.
- Promoting gender equality.
- Mobilizing the concerned business communities against commercial sexual exploitation.
- Migrant women in search of employment, who are run away or driven away from their homes or, those who are lost are in danger of falling prey to commercial sexual exploitation. Contact centres will be establish in major cities at near the railway station and bus station to give guidance and information to women in need of temporary shelter about equality, development and peace are inextricably linked. There can be no lasting peace without development, and no sustainable development without full equality between men and women. The new millennium must mark a new beginning. We must dedicate ourselves to averting violence at all levels, to exploring alternatives to violent conflict and to forging attitudes of tolerance and active concern towards others. Always provided it involves the full participation of women, action to

remedy a pervasive culture of violence is not beyond the capacity of the people and governments of the world. Women's capacity for leadership must be utilised to the full and to the benefit of all in order to progress towards a culture of peace. Their historically limited participation in governance has led to a distortion of concepts and a narrowing of processes. In such areas as conflict prevention, the promotion of cross-cultural dialogue and the redressing of socio-economic injustice, women can be the source of innovative and much needed approaches to peace-building. Women bring to the cause of peace among people and nations distinctive experiences, competence, and perspectives¹². Women's role in giving and sustaining life has provided them with skills and insights essential to peaceful human relations and social development. Women subscribe less readily than men to the myth of the efficacy of violence, and they can bring a new breadth, quality and balance of vision to a joint effort of moving from a culture of war towards a culture of peace. Girls and women constitute a large majority of the world's educationally excluded and unreached. Ensuring equality of educational access and opportunity between the sexes is a prerequisite for achieving the changes of attitudes and mind-sets on which a culture of peace depends. Even in the new millennium, women in India are deprived of their socio-economic and legal rights. They live in a system where religious injunctions, tribal codes, feudal traditions and discriminatory laws are prevalent. They are beset by a lifetime social and psychological disadvantage, coupled with long years of child bearing. They often end up experiencing poverty, isolation and psychological disability. In some urban regions of India, women's social roles have changed to some extent. They have now comparatively more opportunities for education, employment and enjoyment of civil rights within society. However, the de-stereotyping of the gender roles which have been traditionally assigned by our society is still far away. In regard of the violence against women we must take a day out to judge, analyse and eliminate any caused violence on them. And internationally it is celebrated on 25th November every year as "white ribbon day" also.

From the Indian history, it has always been proved that a woman is always been torture physically, mentally and sexually. Always, she is treated as a doll which looks nice when being inside the four walls of house and till time do everything as per the instructions given to her. If she forbids being a doll, then her dignity is violated by others and violence on woman takes place. It's the time to form such society that reassure women that violence is unacceptable and that no woman deserves to be beaten, sexually abused, or made to suffer emotionally. As someone saying that "compassion is going to open up the door. And when we feel safe and are able to trust, that makes a lot of difference." It's time now, to take initiative to stop violence against women to provide a world where every woman will think of her not a doll but a woman. We feel happy to be a part of this mission for stopping violence against women, and proudly able to say we are not alone but many are with us. As a famous saying says that cleanliness starts from home!

¹² Chakraborty, Kakolee (2000), Women as Devadasis: origin and growth of the Devadasi profession, New Delhi: Deep and Deep.