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Various Aspects of Indian Society with Reference to Women's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

About a quarter of Indians (23%) say there is “a lot of discrimination” against women in their country. And 16% of Indian women reported that they personally had faced discrimination because of their gender in the 12 months before the 2019-2020 survey.

In addition, three-quarters of adults see violence against women as a very big problem in Indian society. To improve women's safety, about half of Indian adults (51%) say it is more important to teach boys to “respect all women” than to teach girls to “behave appropriately.” But roughly a quarter of Indians (26%) take the opposite position, effectively placing the onus for violence against women on women themselves.

On the whole, however, Indians seem to share an egalitarian vision of women's place in society. Eight-in-ten people surveyed – including 81% of Hindus and 76% of Muslims – say it is very important for women to have the same rights as men. Indians also broadly accept women as political leaders, with a majority saying that women and men make equally good political leaders (55%) or that women generally make better leaders than men do (14%).

Yet these views exist alongside a preference for traditional economic roles. Indians generally agree that when there are few jobs available, men should have more rights to a job than women (80%), including 56% who completely agree with this statement. Majorities of both men and women share this view, though men are somewhat more inclined to take this position.

KEYWORDS-society, women, India, safety, political, traditional, economic

INTRODUCTION

Roughly a quarter of Indians (23%) say there is “a lot of discrimination” against women in India today. (Respondents were given two options; they could either say there is a lot of discrimination against women, or there is not a lot of discrimination.) Christians are the religious community most likely to perceive widespread discrimination against women in India (30%).

Indian women are only slightly more likely than Indian men to say there is a lot of discrimination against women in the country (24% vs. 22%, respectively). In general, views on gender discrimination do not differ much – if at all – between respondents of different ages or education levels.[1,2,3]

While most Indians do not perceive a lot of gender discrimination in their country, Indians are modestly more likely to say there is a lot of discrimination against women than to say the same about discrimination against religious groups or lower castes.

Indians in different regions have very different perceptions of how much discrimination women face. In general, respondents in the South are more likely than those in the Hindi Belt to feel there is a lot of discrimination against women in India today. For example, in the Southern states of Telangana and Tamil Nadu, more than a third of adults say there is a lot of discrimination against women (44% and 39%, respectively). By contrast, in the Hindi Belt states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, only 6% of respondents say this is the case. As Pew Research Center previously has reported, South Indians also are more likely than Indians in the Hindi Belt to perceive a lot of discrimination against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The Northeastern state of Assam stands out, with 52% of respondents reporting widespread gender discrimination. This mirrors the broader pattern of respondents in the Northeast being among the most likely to say there is a lot of discrimination in India against people from various religious groups and from lower castes. But in general, the majority of Indians in most states and union territories say there is not a lot of discrimination against women.

Most Indian women say they have not recently experienced gender discrimination

Fewer than one-in-five Indian women (16%) said they had personally felt discriminated against in the 12 months before the 2019-2020 survey because of their gender. And women were only slightly more likely than men to say they had experienced gender discrimination in the past year (16% vs. 14%, respectively).

Christians – despite being the most likely religious group to say there is a lot of discrimination against women in India – had the lowest rate of women personally reporting discrimination because of their gender (9%).

Across India, women in different age groups and with different levels of education reported experiences with gender discrimination at roughly similar rates. However, women who had faced recent financial difficulties (those who said they had not been able to afford food, housing or medical care for themselves or their families in the last year) were twice as likely as those who had not recently faced such financial difficulties to report that they personally had experienced gender discrimination in the past year (22% vs. 11%).^[4,5,6]

Survey respondents' personal experiences with gender discrimination also varied across the country. On the upper bound, women in Jammu and Kashmir and in Assam reported the highest levels of personal gender discrimination in the past year (35% and 32%, respectively), while women from Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh were among the least likely to say they personally had faced discrimination because of their gender (7% and 6%, respectively).

Indians favor teaching boys respect as a way to improve women's safety

Amidst India's ongoing problem with violence against women, the survey asked respondents whether, to improve the safety of women in their community, it is more important to teach boys to respect all women or to teach girls to behave appropriately.

About half of Indians (51%) say it is more important to teach boys to respect all women, while roughly a quarter (26%) say it is more important to teach girls to behave appropriately. Others offer a variety of additional responses, such as that teaching both things is important or that it depends on the situation (13%); that improving law and order or policing is the most important way to protect women's safety (7%); or that women are already safe (2%). A very small share (2%) did not offer a response to the question.

Women are somewhat more likely than men to say that teaching boys to respect all women is the most important way to improve women's safety (53% vs. 48%).

Within all of India's major religious communities, the most common response is "to teach boys to respect all women." However, while Christians and Sikhs are somewhat less likely than other groups to say this, they are more likely than people in other religious groups to say that both kinds of teaching are important or that the right approach depends on the situation.^[7,8,9]

While opinion does not vary substantially among Indians of different ages or educational backgrounds, a sizeable gap does emerge around religious commitment. Indians who say religion is very important in their lives are more likely than others to say that teaching boys to respect all women is crucial to improving the safety of women (52% vs. 43%).

Opinions on the best way to improve women's safety vary considerably across India. For instance, 63% of Rajasthan residents say it is more important to teach boys to respect all women, compared with 40% of people in West Bengal.

In the South, people in neighboring states have differing views. Only about a third of Tamil Nadu residents would prioritize teaching boys to respect all women (34%), compared with over half of Andhra Pradesh locals (56%).

Most Indians say it is very important that women have same rights as men

Most Indian adults (80%) say that, in general, it is very important for women to have the same rights as men, with solid majorities of all major religious groups sharing this view. Buddhists are especially likely to say gender equality is very important (91%), while Muslims and Christians are somewhat less likely than members of India's other major religious communities to express this sentiment (76% and 70%, respectively).

Nationally, women, younger Indians (ages 18 to 34), and college graduates are slightly more likely than others to say it is very important for women to have the same rights as men.

Overall, Indians with high levels of religious commitment – i.e., those who say religion is very important in their lives – are more likely than other Indians to believe that gender equality is very important (83% vs. 65%). And those with a favorable view of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are modestly more likely than others to endorse equal rights for women (83% vs. 76%).[10,11,12]

Broadly, Indians in the South are somewhat less likely than those elsewhere to say it is very important for women to have the same rights as men. For example, while 80% of Indian adults overall think gender equality is very important, smaller shares in Kerala (72%), Telangana (71%) and Andhra Pradesh (66%) take this position. Still, large majorities across Indian states and union territories share this sentiment.

Most Indians believe women to be equally good political leaders as men

India has a long history of women holding political power, from the 1966 election of Indira Gandhi, one of the world's first woman prime ministers, to other well-known figures, such as Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee and Sushma Swaraj.

The survey results reflect this comfort with women in politics. Overall, a small majority of respondents express the opinion that, in general, women and men make equally good political leaders (55%). Some Indians (14%) even say women tend to make better political leaders than men. Only a quarter of Indians say that men generally make better political leaders than women.

Modest differences by gender exist. Men are more likely than women to believe men are superior politicians (29% vs. 21%, respectively), while women are slightly more likely to favor the abilities of women leaders (16% vs. 13%).

Younger Indian adults (ages 18 to 34) and college graduates are somewhat more likely than their elders and those with less formal education to say women and men make equally good political leaders.

Views on gender and political leadership differ substantially across Indian states. In a handful of states, about a third or more of the population says that men generally make better political leaders than women, including a slim majority in Himachal Pradesh (54%).

By contrast, only about one-in-eight adults in the East Indian state of Odisha (12%) say men make better political leaders. In Odisha and several other states, solid majorities say women and men make equally good political leaders.

In a few states – including the three Southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu – roughly one-in-five or more people surveyed say women generally make better political leaders than men.[13,14,15]

Most men and women think men should be given hiring preference when there are few jobs

While a majority of Indians express openness to women political leaders and endorse equal rights for women, the vast majority of the population (80%) agrees with the idea that “when there are few jobs, men should have more rights to a job than women,” including 56% who completely agree with that statement. Most Indian women as well as men express total agreement with this statement, though men are somewhat more likely to do so (59% of men vs. 54% of women).

Although the survey was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, this question may have become even more relevant because women in India have disproportionately suffered from long-term job losses amidst the pandemic's economic fallout.

Opinion varies by religious group. Nearly two-thirds of Muslims (64%) completely agree that men should get preference for jobs over women, compared with roughly a third of Christians (34%) who take the same view.

Highly religious Indians are especially likely to fully agree that limited jobs should go to men: Six-in-ten Indians who consider religion very important in their lives say this, compared with about four-in-ten Indians for whom religion is less important (38%).

College graduates are somewhat less inclined than others to completely agree that men should have more rights to a job when employment opportunities are scarce (49% vs. 57%).

People in some Southern states are among the least likely to completely agree that men should have more rights to limited jobs than women. Fewer than half of respondents in Karnataka (45%), Andhra Pradesh (41%), Telangana (41%) and Kerala (28%) hold this view.[16,17,18]

At the same time, a majority of residents in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu (60%) fully agree that when there are few jobs, men should be given preference in hiring. This view also is prevalent in most Hindi Belt states, such as Uttar Pradesh (69%), Haryana (67%) and Madhya Pradesh (66%). And in Himachal Pradesh, nine-in-ten respondents express total agreement with this notion.

DISCUSSION

The worth of a civilization can be judged from the position that it gives to women. Of the several factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture, one of the greatest is the honoured place ascribed to women. Manu, the great law-giver, said long ago, 'where women are honoured there reside the gods'. According to ancient Hindu scriptures no religious rite can be performed with perfection by a man without the participation of his wife. Wife's participation is essential to any religious rite. Married men along with their wives are allowed to perform sacred rites on the occasion of various important festivals. Wives are thus befittingly called 'Ardhangani' (betterhalf). They are given not only important but equal position with men.

But in the later period the position of women went on deteriorating due to Muslim influence. During the Muslim period of history they were deprived of their rights of equality with men. They were compelled to keep themselves within the four walls of their houses with a long veil on their faces. This was definitely due to Islamic influence. Even today in some Islamic countries women are not allowed to go out freely. The conservative regimes of Iran and Pakistan, for example, have withdrawn the liberties given to women folk by the previous liberal governments. Even in India the Muslim women are far more backward than their Hindu, Christian and Sikh counterparts. The sight of Muslim women walking with long 'Burkas' (veils) on their person is not very rare. The women are, as a matter of fact, regarded as captive and saleable commodities in Muslim families. One man is allowed to have so many wives with the easiest provision of divorce. The husband can divorce a wife just by saying 'I divorce you' under the provision of Muslim laws. This is what the emperors did hundred years back and the men are doing it even now in almost all Islamic countries. Even in this last phase of the twentieth century rich and prosperous men of Islamic countries keep scores of wives in their harems. It was natural outcome of the Muslim subjugation of India that woman was relegated to a plaything of man, an ornament to decorate the drawing room. Serving, knitting, painting and music were her pastimes and cooking and cleaning her business.

In the wake of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's movement against women's subjugation to men and British influence on Indian culture and civilization the position of women had once again undergone a change. However, it was only under the enlightened leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that they re-asserted their equality with men. In response to the call of Gandhi they discarded their veil and came out of the four walls of their houses to fight the battle of freedom shoulder to shoulder with their brothers. The result is that the Indian Constitution today has given to women the equal status with men. There is no discrimination between men and women. All professions are open to both of them with merit as the only criterion of selection.[19,20,21]



As a result of their newly gained freedom Indian women have distinguished themselves in various spheres of life as politicians, orators, lawyers, doctors, administrators and diplomats. They are not only entrusted with work of responsibility but also they perform their duties very honestly and sincerely. There is hardly any sphere of life in which Indian women have not taken part and shown their worth. Women exercise their right to vote, contest for Parliament and Assembly, seek appointment in public office and compete in other spheres of life with men. This shows that women in India enjoy today more liberty and equality than before. They have acquired more liberty to participate in the affairs of the country. They have been given equality with men in shaping their future and sharing responsibilities for themselves, their family and their country.

It is a fact that women are intelligent, hard-working and efficient in work. They put heart and soul together in whatever they undertake. As typists and clerks they are now competing successfully with men. There are many women working in the Central Secretariat. They are striving very hard to reach highest efficiency and perfection in the administrative work. Their integrity of character is probably better than men. Generally it was found that women are less susceptible to corruption in form of bribery and favouritism. They are not only sweet tongued but also honest, efficient and punctual in their jobs as receptionists, air-hostesses and booking clerks at railway reservation counters. As a matter of fact they are gradually monopolising the jobs of receptionists and air-hostesses.

Another job in which Indian women are doing so well is that of teachers. In country like India where millions are groping in the darkness of illiteracy and ignorance efficient teaching to the children is most urgently needed. By virtue of their love and affection for the children the women have proved the best teachers in the primary and kindergarten schools. They can better understand the psychology of a child than the male teachers. Small children in the kindergarten schools get motherly affection from the lady teachers. It is probably significant that the Montessori system of education is being conducted mostly by the women in this country.

Women have been serving India admirably as doctors and nurses. Lady doctors have been found to perform efficient surgery by virtue of their soft and accurate fingers. They have monopolised as nurses in the hospitals and nursing homes. Very few men have been able to compete with them in this sphere because the women have natural tendency to serve and clean. It is thus natural tendency found in women which motivated Florence Nightingale to make nursing popular among the women of the upper classes in England and in Europe. She showed the way to women kind how nobly they can serve humanity in the hours of sufferings and agonies.

Women's contributions in politics and social services have also been quite significant. We cannot fail to mention the name of Indira Gandhi who shone so brilliantly and radiantly in the firmament of India's politics. She ruled this country for more than a decade and took India victorious out of Pakistan-war which resulted in the historic creation of a new country, Bangladesh. In the field of social service Indian women have also done some excellent jobs. They have not only served the cause of the suffering humanity but have also brought highest laurels for the country. The name of Mother Teresa cannot but be mentioned. She brought the Nobel Prize for India by her selfless services to the poor, destitute and suffering people of our country in particular and the needy and handicapped people of the world in general. Today, we need the services of the educated women who can tour throughout the country and help in removing human sufferings. The Government is alarmed at the rapid growth of population in the rural areas in particular. Women volunteers can more easily take up the task of canvassing the advantages of family planning among the rural womenfolk. They can, more easily than men, carry on propaganda against hazards of unhygienic conditions under which the villagers live. In urban areas they can efficiently take up the task of visiting and teaching the orphans and the helpless widows in the orphanages and the widow welfare centres. They can train them in sewing, knitting, embroidery and nursing in which women by nature excel. They can also train them in the art of music and dancing.

But all this should not lead us to conclude that the women should look down upon domestic life. The main sphere of action for them who have not taken up jobs outside should be essentially a happy home which is their real kingdom and where their sweet manners and mature advices as wife, mother, sister and daughter make tremendous effects on the male members of the family. The progress of a nation depends upon the care and skill with which mothers rear up their children. The first and foremost duty of Indian women should, therefore, be to bring forth noble generations of patriots, warriors, scholars and statesmen. Since child's education starts even in the womb and the impressions are formed in the mind of a child while in mothers arms women have to play a role of vital importance. They have to feel and realise at every step of their life that they are builders of the fate of our nation since children grow mainly in mothers arms. They should also discourage their husbands and sons from indulging in bribery and other corrupt practices. This they can do only when they learn the art of simple living by discarding their natural desires for ornaments and a living of pomp and show. In many cases families have been running in deficit due to the extravagance of the housewives in maintaining a

high standard of living. The result is that the earning male members of the family are forced to fill up the gap in the budget by corrupt practices. Corruption has been so far the greatest impediment in way to India's progress. Minus corruption India would have been one of the most developed nations of the world.

There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in the last fifty years but yet they have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male dominated society. The Hindu Code Bill has given the daughter and the son equal share of the property. The Marriage Act no longer regards woman as the property of man. Marriage is now considered to be a personal affair and if a partner feels dissatisfied she or he has the right of divorce. But passing of law is one thing and its absorption in the collective thinking of society is quite a different matter. In order to prove themselves equal to the dignity and status given to them in the Indian Constitution they have to shake off the shackles of slavery and superstitions. They should help the government and the society in eradicating the evils of dowry, illiteracy and ignorance among the eves. The dowry problem has assumed a dangerous form in this country. The parents of the girls have to pay thousands and lacs to the bridegrooms and their greedy fathers and mothers. If promised articles are not given by the parents of brides, the cruel and greedy members of the bridegrooms' family take recourse to afflicting tortures on the married women. Some women are murdered in such cases. The dowry deaths are really heinous and barbarous crimes committed by the cruel and inhumane persons. The young girls should be bold enough in not marrying the boys who demand dowry through their parents.[22,23,24] The boys should also refuse to marry if their parents demand dowry. But unfortunately the number of such bold and conscientious boys is very few. Even the doctors, engineers, teachers and the administrative officers do not hesitate in allowing themselves to be sold to the wealthy fathers of shy and timid girls. Such persons have really brought disgrace to their cadres in particular and society in general. The government should enact stringent laws to afflict rigorous punishment on dowry seekers, women's murderers and rapers.

RESULTS

The status of women in India has been subject to many changes over the time of recorded India's history.^[3] Their position in society deteriorated early in India's ancient period, especially in the Indo-Aryan speaking regions,^{[a][4][b][5][c][6]} and their subordination continued to be reified well into India's early modern period.^{[d][7][4][5]}

During the British East India Company rule (1757–1857), and the British Raj (1858–1947), measures aiming at amelioration were enacted, including Bengal Sati Regulation, 1829, Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856, Female Infanticide Prevention Act, 1870, and Age of Consent Act, 1891. The Indian constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex and empowers the government to undertake special measures for them.^[8] Women's rights under the Constitution of India mainly include equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination; additionally, India has various statutes governing the rights of women.^{[9][10]}

Several women have served in various senior official positions in the Indian government, including that of the President of India, the Prime Minister of India, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. However, many women in India continue to face significant difficulties. The rates of malnutrition are exceptionally high among adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women in India, with repercussions for children's health.^{[e][11]} Violence against women, especially sexual violence, is a serious concern in India.^[12]

The degree to which women participate in public life, that is being outside the home, varies by region and background. For example, the Rajputs, a patrilineal clan inhabiting parts of India, especially the north-western area, have traditionally practiced ghunghat, and many still do to this day. In recent years however, more women have started to challenge such social norms: for instance women in rural Haryana are increasingly rejecting the ghunghat.^[170] In India, most population (about two thirds)^[171] is rural, and, as such, lives in tight-knit communities where it is very easy for a woman to ruin her family's 'honor' through her behavior. The concept of family honor is especially prevalent in northern India. Izzat is a concept of honor prevalent in the culture of North India and Pakistan.^[172] Izzat applies to both sexes, but in different ways. Women must uphold the 'family honor' by being chaste, passive and submissive, while men must be strong, brave, and be willing and able to control the women of their families.^[173] The rural areas surrounding Delhi are among the most conservative in India: it has been estimated that 30% of all honor killings of India take place in Western Uttar Pradesh,^[174] while Haryana has been described as "one of India's most conservative when it comes to caste, marriage and the role of women. Deeply patriarchal, caste purity is paramount and marriages are arranged to sustain the status quo."^[175]

In 2018 the Supreme Court of India lifted a decades-old ban prohibiting women between the ages of 10 and 50 from entering Sabarimala temple in Kerala. In 2019 two women entered the temple under police protection. Hindu nationalists protested the women's entry and Sreedharan Pillai, State President of the Kerala branch of the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (of which Indian prime minister Narendra Modi is a member) described the women's entry into the temple as "a conspiracy by the atheist rulers to destroy the Hindu temples."^[176] Prime Minister Modi said, "We knew that the communists do not respect Indian history, culture and spirituality but nobody imagined they will have such hatred," The shrine is dedicated to the worship of Lord Ayyappa, a celibate deity, and adherents believe the presence of women would "pollute" the site and go against the wishes of the patron deity. The two women had to go into hiding after entering the temple and were granted 24 hour police protection. One of the women was locked out of her home by her husband and had to move in to a shelter. Dozens of women seeking entry to temple have since been turned back by demonstrators.^[177]

Prior to November 2018, women were forbidden to climb Agasthyarkoodam. A court ruling removed the prohibition.^[145]

India has a highly skewed sex ratio, which is attributed to sex-selective abortion and female infanticide affecting approximately one million female babies per year.^[190] In, 2011, government stated India was missing three million girls and there are now 48 less girls per 1,000 boys.^[191] Despite this, the government has taken further steps to improve the ratio, and the ratio is reported to have been improved in recent years.^[192]

The number of missing women totaled 100 million across the world.^[193] The male-to-female ratio is high in favor toward men in developing countries in Asia, including India, than that of areas such as North America. Along with abortion, the high ratio of men in India is a result of sex selection, where physicians are given the opportunity to incorrectly determine the sex of a child during the ultrasound.^[194] India currently has a problem known as the "missing women", but it has been present for quite some time. The female mortality in 2001 was 107.43.^[195] The deaths of these "missing women" were attributed to the death history rate of women in India starting in 1901.

The gap between the two gender titles is a direct response to the gender bias within India. Men and women in India have unequal health and education rights. Male education and health are more of a priority, so women's death rates are increasing.^[195] The argument continues that a lack of independence that women are not allowed to have is a large contributor to these fatalities. Women in India have a high fertility rate and get married at a young age. Those who are given more opportunity and rights are more likely to live longer and contribute to the economy rather than that of a woman expected to serve as a wife starting at a young age and continuing the same responsibilities for the rest of her life. As women continue to "disappear," the sex ratio turns its favor toward men. In turn, this offsets reproduction and does not allow for a controlled reproductive trend. While the excess mortality of women is relatively high, it cannot be blamed completely for the unequal sex ratio in India.^[neutrality is disputed] However, it is a large contributor considering the precedence that Indian men have over women.

Sanitation

In rural areas, schools have been reported to have gained the improved sanitation facility.^[196] Given the existing socio-cultural norms and situation of sanitation in schools, girl students are forced not to relieve themselves in the open unlike boys.^[197] Lack of facilities in home forces women to wait for the night to relieve themselves and avoid being seen by others.^[198] Access to sanitation in Bihar has been discussed. According to an estimate from 2013, about 85% of the rural households in Bihar have no access to a toilet; and this creates a dangerous situation for women and girls who are followed, attacked and raped in the fields.^[199]

In 2011 a "Right to Pee" (as called by the media) campaign began in Mumbai, India's largest city.^[200] Women, but not men, have to pay to urinate in Mumbai, despite regulations against this practice. Women have also been sexually assaulted while urinating in fields.^[200] Thus, activists have collected more than 50,000 signatures supporting their demands that the local government stop charging women to urinate, build more toilets, keep them clean, provide sanitary napkins and a trash can, and hire female attendants.^[200] In response, city officials have agreed to build hundreds of public toilets for women in Mumbai, and some local legislators are now promising to build toilets for women in every one of their districts.^[200]

Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving female Prime Minister.^[18]

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14),^[19] no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1)),^[20] equality of opportunity (Article 16),^[19] equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)) and Article 42.^{[21][19]} In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).^[22]

Feminist activism in India gained momentum in the late 1970s. One of the first national-level issues that brought women's groups together was the Mathura rape case. The acquittal of policemen accused of raping a young girl Mathura in a police station led to country-wide protests in 1979–1980. The protest, widely covered by the national media, forced the Government to amend the Evidence Act, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Indian Penal Code; and created a new offence, custodial rape.^[22]

Since alcoholism is often associated with violence against women in India,^[23] many women groups launched anti-liquor campaigns in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and other states.^[22] Many Indian Muslim women have questioned the fundamental leaders' interpretation of women's rights under the Shariat law and have criticised the triple talaq system (see below about 2017).^[14]

Mary Roy won a lawsuit in 1986, against the inheritance legislation of her Keralite Syrian Christian community in the Supreme Court. The judgement ensured equal rights for Syrian Christian women with their male siblings in regard to their ancestral property.^{[24][25]} Until then, her Syrian Christian community followed the provisions of the Travancore Succession Act of 1916 and the Cochin Succession Act, 1921, while elsewhere in India the same community followed the Indian Succession Act of 1925.^[26]

In the 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs. Self-help groups and NGOs such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in the advancement of women's rights in India. Many women have emerged as leaders of local movements; for example, Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.^[23,24,25]

In 1991, the Kerala High Court restricted the entry of women above the age of 10 and below the age of 50 from Sabarimala Shrine, as they were of the menstruating age. However, on 28 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India lifted the ban on the entry of women. It said that discrimination against women on any grounds, even religious, is unconstitutional.^{[27][28]}

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti).^[14] The National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women was passed that same year.^[29]

In 2006, the case of Imrana, a Muslim rape victim, was highlighted by the media. Imrana was raped by her father-in-law. The pronouncement of some Muslim clerics that Imrana should marry her father-in-law led to widespread protests, and finally Imrana's father-in-law was sentenced to 10 years in prison. The verdict was welcomed by many women's groups and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board.^[30]

According to a 2011 poll conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, India was the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women,^{[31][32]} India was also noted as the worst country for women among the G20 countries,^[33] however, this report has faced criticism for promoting inaccurate perceptions.^[34] On 9 March 2010, one day after International Women's day, Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill requiring that 33% of seats in India's Parliament and state legislative bodies be reserved for women.^[3] In October 2017 another poll published by Thomson Reuters Foundation found that Delhi was the fourth most dangerous megacity (total 40 in the world) for women and it was also the worst megacity in the world for women when it came to sexual violence, risk of rape and harassment.^[35]

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is a legislative act in India that seeks to protect women from sexual harassment at their place of work. The Act came into force from 9 December 2013. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 introduced changes to the Indian Penal Code, making sexual harassment an expressed offence under Section 354 A, which is punishable up to three years of imprisonment and or with fine. The Amendment also introduced new sections making acts like disrobing a woman without consent, stalking and sexual acts by person in authority an offense. It also made acid attacks a specific offence with a punishment of imprisonment not less than 10 years and which could extend to life imprisonment and with fine.^[36]

In 2014, an Indian family court in Mumbai ruled that a husband objecting to his wife wearing a kurta and jeans and forcing her to wear a sari amounts to cruelty inflicted by the husband and can be a ground to seek divorce.^[37] The wife was thus granted a divorce on the ground of cruelty as defined under section 27(1)(d) of Special Marriage Act, 1954.^[37]

On 22 August 2017, the Indian Supreme Court deemed instant triple talaq (talaq-e-biddat) unconstitutional.^{[38][39]}

A 2018 poll by Thomson Reuters Foundation termed India as the world's most dangerous country for women.^[40] The National Commission for Women^[41] and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies^[42] rejected the survey for its methodology and lack of transparency.^[43]

Also in 2018, the Supreme Court of India struck down a law making it a crime for a man to have sex with a married woman without the permission of her husband.^[44]

Prior to November 2018, women were forbidden to climb Agasthyarkoodam. A court ruling removed the prohibition.^[45]

The Indian Armed Forces began recruiting women to non-medical positions in 1992.^[75] The Indian Army began inducting women officers in 1992.^[76] The Border Security Force (BSF) began recruiting female officers in 2013. On 25 March 2017, Tanushree Pareek became the first female combat officer commissioned by the BSF.^[57]

On 24 October 2015, the Indian government announced that women could serve as fighter pilots in the Indian Air Force (IAF), having previously only been permitted to fly transport aircraft and helicopters. The decision means that women are now eligible for induction in any role in the IAF.^[77] In 2016, India announced a decision to allow women to take up combat roles in all sections of its army and navy.^[77]

As of 2014, women made up 3% of Indian Army personnel, 2.8% of Navy personnel, and 8.5% of Air Force personnel.^[78] As of 2016, women accounted for 5% of all active and reserve Indian Armed forces personnel.^[77]

In 1972 Kiran Bedi became the First Lady Indian Police Service Officer and was the only woman in a batch of 80 IPS Officers, she joined the AGMUT Cadre. In 1992 Asha Sinha a 1982 Batch IPS Officer became the First Woman Commandant in the Paramilitary forces of India when she was posted as Commandant, Central Industrial Security Force in Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited. Kanchan Chaudhary Bhattacharya the second Lady IPS Officer of India belonging to the 1973 Batch became the first Lady Director General of Police of a State in India when she was appointed DGP of Uttarakhand Police. In 2018 an IPS Officer Archana Ramasundram of 1980 Batch became the first Woman to become the Director General of Police of a Paramilitary Force as DG, Sashastra Seema Bal. In March 2018, Delhi Police announced that it would begin to induct women into its SWAT team.^[79]

On February 17, 2020, the Supreme Court of India said that women officers in the Indian Army can get command positions at par with male officers. The court said that the government's arguments against it were discriminatory, disturbing and based on stereotype. The court also said that permanent commission to all women officers should be made available regardless of their years of service.^[80] The government had earlier said that women commanders would not be acceptable to some troops.^[81]

CONCLUSION

In most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names, and do not get a share of parental property.^[22] Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them, women continue to have little access to land and property.^[109] In India, women's property rights vary depending on religion, and tribe, and are subject to a complex mix of law and custom,^[110] but in principle the move has been towards granting women equal legal rights, especially since the passing of The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005.^[111]

The Hindu personal laws of 1956 (applying to Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains) gave women rights to inheritances. However, sons had an independent share in the ancestral property, while the daughters' shares were based on the share received by their father. Hence, a father could effectively disinherit a daughter by renouncing his share of the ancestral property, but a son would continue to have a share in his own right. Additionally, married daughters, even those facing domestic abuse and harassment, had no residential rights in the ancestral home. Thanks to an amendment of the Hindu laws in 2005, women now have the same status as men.^[112]

In 1986, the Supreme Court of India ruled that Shah Bano, an elderly divorced Muslim woman, was eligible for alimony. However, the decision was opposed by fundamentalist Muslim leaders, who alleged that the court was interfering in their personal law. The Union Government subsequently passed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights Upon Divorce) Act.^[113]

Similarly, Christian women have struggled over the years for equal rights in divorce and succession. In 1994, all churches, jointly with women's organizations, drew up a draft law called the Christian Marriage and Matrimonial Causes Bill. However, the government has still not amended the relevant laws.^[14] In 2014, the Law Commission of India has asked the government to modify the law to give Christian women equal property rights.^[114]

Crimes against women

The map shows the comparative rate of violence against women in Indian states and union territories in 2012. Crime rate data per 100,000 women in this map is the broadest definition of crime against women under Indian law. It includes rape, sexual assault, insult to modesty, kidnapping, abduction, cruelty by intimate partner or relatives, trafficking, persecution for dowry, dowry deaths, indecency, and all other crimes listed in Indian Penal Code.^{[115][116]}

Crime against women such as rape, acid attacks, dowry killings, honour killings, and the forced prostitution of young girls has been reported in India.^{[117][118][119]} TrustLaw, a London-based news service owned by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, ranked India as the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women to live based on a poll of 213 gender experts.^{[120][34]} Police records in India show a high incidence of crimes against women. The National Crime Records Bureau reported in 1998 that by 2010 growth in the rate of crimes against women would exceed the population growth rate.^[22] Earlier, many crimes against women were not reported to police due to the social stigma attached to rape and molestation. Official statistics show a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women.^[22]

Acid attacks

An analyses of Indian news reports determined that 72% of cases reported from January 2002 to October 2010 included at least one female victim.^[121] Sulfuric acid, nitric acid, and hydrochloric acid, the most common types of acid used in attacks, are generally cheap and widely available as a common cleaning supply.^{[122][123]} Acid attacks against women often are done as a form of revenge and are often done by relatives or friends. The number of acid attacks has been rising in recent years.^{[124][125]}

Child marriage

Child marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India but is not so continued in Modern India to this day. Historically, child brides would live with their parents until they reached puberty. In the past, child widows were condemned to a life of great agony, shaved heads, living in isolation, and being shunned by society.^[17] Although child marriage was outlawed in 1860, it is still a common practice.^[126] The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 is the relevant legislation in the country.

According to UNICEF's "State of the World's Children-2009" report, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, rising to 56% in rural areas.^[127] The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.^[128]

Domestic violence

Domestic violence in India is endemic.^[129] Around 70% of women in India are victims of domestic violence, according to Renuka Chowdhury, former Union minister for Women and Child Development.^[130] Domestic violence was legally addressed in the 1980s when the 1983 Criminal Law Act introduced section 498A "Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty".^[131]

The National Crime Records Bureau reveal that a crime against a woman is committed every three minutes, a woman is raped every 29 minutes, a dowry death occurs every 77 minutes, and one case of cruelty committed by either the husband or relative of the husband occurs every nine minutes.^[130] This occurs despite the fact that women in India are legally protected from domestic abuse under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.^[130]

In India, domestic violence toward women is considered as any type of abuse that can be considered a threat; it can also be physical, psychological, or sexual abuse to any current or former partner.^[132] Domestic violence is not handled as a crime or complaint, it is seen more as a private or family matter.^[132] In determining the category of a complaint, it is

based on caste, class, religious bias and race which also determines whether action is to be taken or not.^[132] Many studies have reported about the prevalence of the violence and have taken a criminal-justice approach, but most women refuse to report it.^[132] These women are guaranteed constitutional justice, dignity and equality but continue to refuse based on their sociocultural contexts.^[132] As the women refuse to speak of the violence and find help, they are also not receiving the proper treatment.^[132]

Dowry

A map of the Indian dowry death rate per 100,000 people, 2012.

In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act,^[133] making dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal. However, many cases of dowry-related domestic violence, suicides and murders have been reported. In the 1980s, numerous such cases were reported.^[91]

In 1985, the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom) Rules were framed.^[134] According to these rules, a signed list should be maintained of presents given at the time of the marriage to the bride and the bridegroom. The list should contain a brief description of each present, its approximate value, the name of who has given the present, and relationship to the recipient. However, such rules are rarely enforced.

A 1997 report claimed that each year at least 5,000 women in India die dowry-related deaths, and at least a dozen die each day in 'kitchen fires' thought to be intentional.^[135] The term for this is "bride burning" and is criticised within India itself.

In 2011, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 8,618 dowry deaths. Unofficial estimates claim the figures are at least three times as high.^[131]

Female infanticide and sex-selective abortion

In India, the male-female sex ratio is skewed dramatically in favour of men, the chief reason being the high number of women who die before reaching adulthood.^[22] Tribal societies in India have a less skewed sex ratio than other caste groups. This is in spite of the fact that tribal communities have far lower income levels, lower literacy rates, and less adequate health facilities.^[22] Many experts suggest the higher number of men in India can be attributed to female infanticides and sex-selective abortions. The sex ratio is particularly bad in the north-western area of the country, particularly in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir.^[136]

Ultrasound scanning constitutes a major leap forward in providing for the care of mother and baby, and with scanners becoming portable, these advantages have spread to rural populations. However, ultrasound scans often reveal the sex of the baby, allowing pregnant women to decide to abort female fetuses and try again later for a male child. This practice is usually considered the main reason for the change in the ratio of male to female children being born.^[137]

In 1994 the Indian government passed a law forbidding women or their families from asking about the sex of the baby after an ultrasound scan (or any other test which would yield that information) and also expressly forbade doctors or any other persons from providing that information. In practice this law (like the law forbidding dowries) is widely ignored, and levels of abortion on female fetuses remain high and the sex ratio at birth keeps getting more skewed.^[137]

Female infanticide (killing of infant girls) is still prevalent in some rural areas.^[22] Sometimes this is infanticide by neglect, for example families may not spend money on critical medicines or withhold care from a sick girl.

Continuing abuse of the dowry tradition has been one of the main reasons for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides in India.

Honour killings

Honour killings have been reported widely in India, most frequently in the northern regions of India. This is usually motivated by a girl (or, less commonly, a boy) marrying without the family's acceptance, especially for marrying outside their caste or religion or, more particular to northwestern India, between members of the same gotra. In 2010, the Supreme Court of India issued notice in regard to honor killings to the states of Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.^[138]

Accusations of witchcraft

Violence against women related to accusations of witchcraft occurs in India, particularly in parts of Northern India. Belief in the supernatural among the Indian population is strong, and lynchings for witchcraft are reported by the media.^[139] In Assam and West Bengal between 2003 and 2008 there were around 750 deaths related to accusations of witchcraft.^[140] Officials in the state of Chhattisgarh reported in 2008 that at least 100 women are maltreated annually as suspected witches.^[141]

Rape

Rape in India has been described by Radha Kumar as one of India's most common crimes against women^[142] and by the UN's human-rights chief as a "national problem".^[143] Since the 1980s, women's rights groups lobbied for marital rape to be declared unlawful,^[142] but the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 still maintains the marital exemption by stating in its exception clause under Section 375, that: "Sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape".^[144] While per-capita reported incidents are quite low compared to other countries, even developed countries,^{[145][146]} a new case is reported every 20 minutes.^{[147][148]} In fact, as per the NCRB data released by the government of India in 2018, a rape is reported in India in every 15 minutes.^[149]

New Delhi has one of the highest rate of rape-reports among Indian cities.^[148] Sources show that rape cases in India have doubled between 1990 and 2008.^{[150][151]}

Sexual harassment

Eve teasing is a euphemism used for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. Many activists blame the rising incidence of sexual harassment against women on the influence of "Western culture". In 1987, The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was passed^[152] to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings or in any other manner.^[21,22,23]

Of the total number of crimes against women reported in 1990, half related to molestation and harassment in the workplace.^[22] In 1997, in a landmark judgement the Supreme Court of India took a strong stand against sexual harassment of women in the workplace. The Court also laid down detailed guidelines for prevention and redressal of grievances. The National Commission for Women subsequently elaborated these guidelines into a Code of Conduct for employers.^[22] In 2013 India's top court investigated on a law graduate's allegation that she was sexually harassed by a recently retired Supreme Court judge.^[153] The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act came into force in December 2013, to prevent Harassment of women at workplace.

According to a report from Human Rights Watch, despite women increasingly denunciate sexual harassment at work, they still face stigma and fear retribution as the governments promote, establish and monitor complaint committees.^[154] As South Asia director at Human Rights Watch explained, "India has progressive laws to protect women from sexual abuse by bosses, colleagues, and clients, but has failed to take basic steps to enforce these laws".^[154]

A study by ActionAid UK found that 80% of women in India had experienced sexual harassment ranging from unwanted comments, being groped or assaulted. Many incidents go unreported as the victims fear being shunned by their families.^[155]

Trafficking

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956.^[156] However many cases of trafficking of young girls and women have been reported.^[26]

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