

THE CURSE OF BEING A WOMAN IN INDIA

A Literature Review Submitted as a Requirement to Obtain the Degree of Professional in
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Abstract

This Literature review states the reality of women from India in the different social aspects such as, education, family, politics, religion, and work. This document will also provide relevant references from articles, books, magazines and web pages. This research expect to understand Indian culture concerning women, referencing some authors, in order to avoid stereotypes, having a general idea about how Indian society treats women in the overall contexts. At the end of the literature review, the reader will be able to analyze conclusions and settle its own judgments.

Keywords: India, women, stereotypes, culture, traditions, customs, violence, discrimination, human rights, education, family, politics, religion, work.

Resumen

Este informe literario expone la realidad de las mujeres de la India en los diferentes aspectos sociales tales como, educación, familia, política, religión y trabajo. También proveerá referencias relevantes de artículos, libros, revistas y páginas web. Esta investigación pretende entender la cultura India concerniente a las mujeres, con el fin de evitar estereotipos, tendiendo una idea general acerca de cómo, la sociedad de la India trata a las mujeres en contextos generales. Al final del informe literario, el lector podrá analizar las conclusiones y establecer sus propios juicios.

Palabras Claves: India, mujeres, estereotipos, cultura, tradiciones, costumbres, violencia, discriminación, derechos humanos, educación, familia, política, religión, trabajo.

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INTRODUCTION

This research contains a statement of the problem, literature review, and reliable references about Indian women violence taking into account the different social aspects such as, education, family, politics, religion, and work. One of the reasons of writing this document is because we feel interested to know more about this millenarian civilization. Furthermore, most of the people around the world do not have enough knowledge about Indian culture to be able to understand it.

This literature review cited some authors as references for this research, in order to clarify, and explain the reality of some Indian women regarding violence, discrimination, and suffering in certain parts of this South Asian country.

Finally, we expect the reader to increase its understanding about women Indian culture, leaving behind stereotypes and wrong judgments. We want to highlight the labor, dedication, love, and how women in India deny themselves in order to maintain an ancient culture, long-life traditions and to provide to the society human beings with morality and values.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India is a beautiful country located in South Asia, besides it is the second-most populous country in the world with over 1.2 billion people, however, most of the people from other countries do not have enough knowledge about Indian culture. When societies from other countries think about India maybe their thoughts are spicy food, snake charmers, poverty, multiple gods, elephants, and cows in the streets, besides others different stereotypes the world has when thinks about a specific place; it is highly probable those stereotypes are false, because in our opinion, people do not have sufficient information about diverse cultures and specifically Indian culture. However, there is an important matter in India that worries us a lot and it is Indian women; the reason is, they are human beings, but some of them are being discriminated and their rights are violated by their own culture. Though, it is inappropriate to generalize since this situation happens for some women and in some parts of India. Consequently, as soon as someone thinks about Indian women, people tend to picture a woman in a beautiful dress, wearing different kind of jewelry, but also they imagine a woman that suffers discrimination, domestic violence and added to that they get married in an early age.

The next author is giving a clear statement of the reality lived by some Indian girls and women, and how they have been underestimated by male gender in all the social aspects, Burton, Duvvury, & Varia (2000) argued, "Girls and women in India are usually less privileged than boys in terms of their position in the family and society and in terms of access to material resources" (p. 4). Since long time ago, Indian people think that women are the weakest gender, this means, women in India suffer gender discrimination from the moment they are born. Therefore, some Indian women have fewer opportunities to develop themselves as free human beings in this land.

In some parts of India, there people that have created organizations in order to improve Indian women situation, these ONGs are making an effort to help women in special places and regions where the number of abuses against women is higher, like for example in Rajasthan, where is located *Sambhali* an organization that supports women, particularly those ones who came from Indian's lowest caste. A caste is a system that

divides people. The Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHR&GJ 2007) said that “Caste denotes a traditional system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation. Caste divisions dominate in housing, marriage, employment, and general social interaction” (p. 6). Speaking personally, this system is discriminatory and affects lifestyle of countless people in India, especially Indian women.

Therefore, people perceptions are wrong and include stereotypes, caused by the insufficient knowledge that some societies have about Indian culture. In order to understand how in some places of India, the female gender is treated with violence, isolation and suffering we developed this literature review; so, that brings up to the question: is it true, that in certain regions of India being a woman is a curse?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this century, Indian women are perceived as isolated and abused women, but most of those perceptions are stereotypes, it also may not be denied that Indian women suffer and it seems to be unfair. However some of these facts are part of their culture and come from a historical background. The purpose of this document is to provide enough information in order to understand the situation of some Indian women, giving a critical point of view and demystify the stereotype whether being women in India is a curse for their customs and traditions. Additionally, several social aspects as: education, family, politics, religion, and work are developed along the document.

The Curse of Being a Woman in India: Historical Background

India is a big country with important traditions and values, besides women are important in order to keep those traditions, but some women suffer violence due to their customs. According to a volunteer and travel agency “Many Indian women face discrimination throughout all stages of their life, beginning at (or even before) birth, continuing as an infant, child, adolescent and adult” (Saarthak n.d). Sadly, some women in India have to face violence every day, even nowadays; where it is supposed there are laws in India that protect them.

It is not possible to generalize that all women in India are abused, because there are different cultures groups and each one of them have its own traditions, but it is a fact that several woman in all India suffer some sort of violence. It is reasonable to think that Indian women role is part of their culture, one of the reasons is that Indian women prefer to stay at home, building family values and keeping traditions, which is way they preserve their culture and costumes that comes from centuries ago until today. A research emphasized whether people want to understand the backgrounds of cultural practices in India, they require knowing more about the old religious mythology, when the Ramayana appeared. It

is an epic tale, vital for Hindu religious canon; where we can see the earliest ideals roles of a man and a woman and how the last one should act (Hundal, 2013). As well, in this epic tale it might perceive the importance of keeping traditions for Indian people. Hence, taking this into account, it can be said that most of the problems that Indian women face come from their cultural background and they keep them because traditions are essential for them. From our point of view, it is time to understand the past, the present and, the future of Indian culture; being respectful human beings without judging and giving Indian women the opportunity to decide what they want to do in all the aspects of life, keeping their values.

In the post-independence period (1947) some things change in India, for example; in 1971 a National Committee on the Status of Women was established to evaluate the changes that had taken place in the status of women caused by the constitutional, legal, and administrative events assumed since independence. (The Indian Council of Social Science Research, 1974, para. 1). It may be observed that government wanted to know about the situation of women in India. On the contrary, the researches explained that:

The National and State averages indicates rapid improvement in literacy, education, life expectancy, and political participation. These trends, coupled with the success achieved by a very small minority of women, could create an impression that the status of an average woman in India was very high. Our investigation, however, showed very uneven rates of development between regions, communities and various sections of the population which made it risky to rely exclusively on the quantitative indicators. (p.3). (The Indian Council of Social Science Research).

It seems that over the years not all women in India face the same difficulties or the same privileges due to some circumstances as: regions, communities, castes and even social status. However, it is positive that everyday more women are able to improve in literacy, education, political participation and life expectancy. On the other hand, if we want to know more about Indian women; why are they discriminated, their role and

position in the society, we need to start looking their development in the different areas where they act as; education, family, politics, religion and work that are essential aspects inside India society.

Education

Education is important for the human development in its daily life and culture; it also helps countries to grow economically, socially and culturally. However, In India, although it is important the education, there is not equality between women and men, for women in India always has been a big obstacle, but lately this situation has changed. According to Rouf Ahmad “Gender discrimination still persists in India and lot more needs to be done in the field of women's education in India. The gap in the male-female literacy rate is just a simple indicator. While the male literary rate is more than 82.14% and the female literacy rate is just 65.46%”. (Ahmad, 2015). From our perspective, education opportunities are increasing for Indian women. This demonstrates that there is not a big gap for Indian women, according to the rate mentioned before. Nowadays, Indian women can acquire knowledge and personal improvement in the academics fields.

Family

Indian women are important in their family surroundings, because they are all the time at home, taking care of their children, cooking, and doing the housework. However, they suffer family violence without the right to complain. Regarding to the International Center for Research on Women (2000) “The phenomenon of violence against women within the family in India is complex and deeply embedded. Women are subject to violence not only from husbands but also from members of both the natal and the marital home” (p. 4). There are several ways of family violence towards the Indian women, one of the most shocking habits are when women are obligated to get married in an early age, according to us, this is against human rights and it shows that Indian women are not allowed to take decisions, even for her own life. An important world organization states, “Child marriage is a manifestation of gender inequality, reflecting social norms that

perpetuate discrimination against girls” (UNICEF, 2014, p. 2). In our opinion, we can define that violence in Indian women is depending on the region, traditions, costumes, and background. Due to for some of them, perform their duties, for example being aware of the importance to be at home give them the opportunity to build long-life values for their children, owing to their children are going the next generation and they are going to preserve their existence with morality.

Work

The Society for Human Resource Management (Management, 2009)described the improvement and development for Indian women in the work field:

Historically, India has been a male dominated society. Yet, in the past two decades or so, social change has opened the possibility for women to attain managerial roles in corporate India. As more Indian women enter the workforce, particularly in the corporate world, this change is in dramatic contrast to the traditional Indian culture. (p.1)

Culturally, over the years, Indian male gender has always been dominating several social aspects in their communities. One of those environments has been the work field. Customs and traditions say that men are the ones who provide everything and sustain their families. Consequently, if the women are not allowed to work, they would not have the same opportunities than men have had. However, thanks to the globalization, and modern life of the last years, a huge social impact has helped to change a lot of stereotypes that have been created for Indian women. In our perception, nowadays, it can be observed, that Indian women are having a development concerning to the labor aspect, and now, they are able to work in more fields and they have had both professional and personal opportunities than before. Finally, we consider that it is an incredible fact, that Indian women have similar skills as men, in order to have equality benefits in the labor area.

Religion

Religion is a controversial topic around the world, despite it is hard to talk about it, we consider that this topic influences in a huge way to Indian women concerning to

discrimination and violence. Hinduism is the biggest religion in India; it has been practiced for millenniums. Because of this heritage and traditions, their believers must obey and fulfill all their commitments, as any religion. Therefore, through Hinduism vision, women have been created in order to fulfill an important second role in their families and to be always behind men.

As Jayaram states (n.d.) “According to Hinduism, the female was created by Brahman as part of the duality in creation, to provide company to men and facilitate procreation, progeny and continuation of family lineage.” (Traditional status of women in Hinduism, para. 2) From our perspective, some Indian women in Hinduism are underestimated, discriminated and seem to be less than men, they are just a simple company for their husbands and this does not reflect equality toward men, this is also depending of the region and background. As Sita Agarwal expresses in her book (1999) “No other religion, not even Islam or Christianity, burns its women, or slaughters one-tenth of all women each generation except Hinduism.” (p. 4) This is a worrying statement that makes us think that some religions in certain cultures could dominate, violate human rights or even the worse, it could kill their believers.

Politics

Around the world, not only in India, in most of the countries, politics seems to be an issue controlled by men. Women do not have a relevant participation in this social area. As a BBC article says (2014), “Despite having a female prime minister as long ago as 1966, women in India have historically remained marginal in politics and political parties have made little effort to woo them.” (Patel, para. 1). As a result, if Indian women are not being supported by the government in the politics, this may causes them a lot of suffering, rejection and discrimination.

In despite of a lack of women participation in politics, not everything is bad, and lately, women have started to stand and take dominion over politics. As the organization, International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics states, (2012) “The first national all-women political party (AWPP) in India, the United Women Front (UWF), was launched in October 2007 by Suman Krishan Kant. Its main aim was to boost women's representation

in traditionally male-dominated Indian politics” (p. 4) Consequently, this political party creation may help women to obtain freedom and also it may help them to have a crucial participation in their Indian government, in order to create new laws and as a result, they might obtain more protection and respect from the ones who violate their human rights. We can conclude that the majority of participation in politics is dominated by men, but this does not mean, that women also have had an important role in the improvement in their position toward their country.

ONGs

Regardless, those women are not alone; there are some organization in India that want to change this terrible situation, through legal assistance, promoting Entrepreneurship, improving women status, giving to them the opportunity to finish their studies and more benefits in order to help them. That is the case of FIWE the Federation of Indian Women Entrepreneurs, this ONG is trying to support woman, giving them a new vision across the business world. FIWE (2012) describes its target group and how to help:

Woman Entrepreneurs in India represents a dynamic group of Women who have broken away from the beaten track, where demands at home, family oppositions & cultural inhibitions, have led to lack of support, resources and opportunities; are now exploring new vistas of economic participation with an all new vigor.(para.1)

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

Mahatma Gandhi, using this famous quote an organization as Sambhali Trust has a project of Volunteering, thus lot of people from others countries help to change lives women in India. Sambhali Trust explained that “Not only will you help change the lives of hundreds of women and girls; you will also get an insight into the intricacies of Indian culture, and develop an understanding of how a grass-roots non-profit charitable organization operates” Sambhali (2016). It means anyone that possesses the will and resources to help can change somehow lives of woman in India and as a reward, the volunteers can obtain a memorable experience and the satisfaction of doing something good for others.

From our viewpoint, these are just two organizations of many others Indian organization that are supporting in different ways the situation of a woman in India, involving people from others parts of the world. It is a fact that exist organization form others countries that are assisting Indian woman, but it is important to highlight that India desires to change its difficult situation.

CONCLUSIONS

Before concluding, we want to highlight, how Indian women have preserved their values, moral, costumes, heritage, and traditions over millions of years, without being influenced by other cultures, because they proud of their families, customs and traditions.

One of the reasons, why Indian families are important, it is because, women can be in control of theirs homes and they can guide their families with morality. For that reason, some Indian women have a different mind-set and culture. For some of them, being at home, taking care of children and family, it is a pleasure, it is not a punishment, and it is the opportunity to build good morality with a good example to follow.

According to our research, not always it has existed education and work equality in India, because for years men have had more opportunities that women, since India is a chauvinistic society. As a result, some women may feel that they are not included in society. However, in the last 2 decades, this situation has changed in a huge way. Luckily, in our days, in some parts of India, some Indian women have the choice of selecting what they want.

India is the second-most populous countries in the world, with more than 1.2 billion of habitants. Additionally, India is a millenarian culture that has preserved many of their costumes, traditions, religions and heritage. That's why, for our western vision is difficult trying to understand and acknowledge those kinds of eastern behaviors. Consequently, western people deliver superficial and disrespectful judgments based in stereotypes.

The non-governmental Organizations in India had been important in this situation, they have been supported women that live hard circumstances of violence, giving them the opportunity to develop themselves, with the aim of decrease the rage of violence. Even though, it is a merit that Indian woman situation has been improving for the past last years. On top of that, the world has had the opportunity to help women in India through those organizations and besides, people have the chance to know more about Indian culture,

nevertheless it is not enough. That is why the purpose of this document to let the people understand more about this interesting culture.

After analyzing and considering some authors, we decided to submit a response to the research question with our own voice and personal viewpoint. Is it true, that in certain regions of India being a woman is a curse? From our perspective, we can conclude, that is irresponsible, ignorant and disrespectful delivering those kind of appreciations from our western vision, because from Indian vision, women have their established role in society for centuries. Of course, we acknowledge, that India has evident social problems, including Indian women facts as violence, discrimination etc., as we mentioned in our research, but is important not to generalize and give false statements using stereotypes.

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