

# The Struggle of Women in India

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## **Introduction**

All over the world women have a numerous amount of freedom. We have worked for it hard and have succeeded. There is a country in this world that the women don't have as much freedom as we do. That place is India. For centuries women in India have been struggling for freedom and the right to be treated fairly. During the time of Medieval India this was a 'dark age' for them. Muslims came and invaded the country and brought their own way of life. How they treat women was very different from what they were used to. They treat women as property of their father, brother, or husband and because of that they had no will power of their own. The Muslims believe in polygamy and took any women on the street they wanted and called them theirs. In order to protect the women they started to keep the women covered up with veils. Because of this veil the women had to wear, people started to see the women as useless and burden because they had to be protected. This was the start of how women were and are treated. (Mapsofind.com, 1999)

There are several things that are really making it hard for women to do anything because of how horrible they are being treated. It can be show in their health, their education, and just all around treatment from the men. The women are human beings and need to be treated the right way. What happened back then needs to get fixed, because those women can make a big difference if they are to have the same treatment, then the economy might just be better. (Sanaa Unus, 2000)

### **I. Health of the Women**

Men are the most important in India, which gives the more benefits and puts the women's wants and needs behind the men's. So if boys were to become sick they would be taken to the doctors and receive treatment. (Jejeebhoy and Rao, 1995). Women aren't allowed to wander off and go where they please. In the case of her needing to go the doctors, she would have to ask a male of the household to get permission to go. Usually the men would go with her, so if he didn't want to go, then she is out of luck and doesn't receive the treatment that she needs to get better.

A lot of women have health issues that have to deal with being pregnant. The goal for a woman is to conceive boys. Women try to have as many kids as they can so they can have at least two boys that will make it to their adulthood and carry on the family name. (Victoria A. Velkoff and Arjun Adlakan, 1998). Research has shown that numerous pregnancies and closely spaced births erode a mother's nutritional status which can negatively affect the pregnancy outcome (e.g., premature births, low birth-weight babies) and also increase the health risk for mothers. (Jejeebhoy and Rao, 1995).

Since the father prefers to have boys of girls, in the case of the mother conceiving a girl the father has a choice, does he want to keep her or get rid of her? In most cases he would have the baby girl aborted. When a woman is given an abortion they don't take the time to do it properly and safely, which can lead to health issues for women. If the father does decide to keep the little girl when she is born she is never treated as fairly from the get go. When the mother breastfeeds her kids, the girls are only fed for 23 months, and the boys 25 months (IIPS, 1995).

From the start of a women's life she is malnourished, though it gets worse as

The Struggling Women in India

3

they get older. Women cook the meals, give them to the men and let them eat. She is not allowed to eat anything until the men have finished. When they are finished she gets the scraps or nothing. Even eating just the scraps she doesn't get enough nutrients to keep her body running the way it should. (Mapsofind.com, 1999)

## **II. Women's Education Issues**

An education for anyone is an important thing to have. It's part of your survival in life. Depending on your education, depends on how well you will be able to support yourself and your family. They want to be able to support their family but it's hard for them because they have to buy things for school. They have to buy everyday materials, uniforms, and transportation because schools are far from home. The country is estimated to have  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the population living below the poverty line. Even if they were to go to school they would have a hard time paying for the things they need.

The families aren't the only ones who are in this situation; the schools are in the same situation. The classrooms, if there is one, because sometimes they work outside, they are poor and unsanitary. It was shown in an World Bank survey of Uttar Pradesh, that 54 percent of schools don't have water supply and 80 percent didn't have bathrooms. (Sanaa Unus, 2000) Also in the classroom there are more male teachers than there are female which shows that women don't receive a good education. The classrooms are also segregated by boys and girls.

This is another reason why women don't have a good education, and that's because of gender discrimination. If you a men had the choice to chose between letting a boy or

girl go to school and get an education, he would chose a boy. He would chose a his son because he would see it as an investment. It's seen that a girl who has an education

The Struggling Women in India

4

can be a liability to the family (Sanaa Unus, 2000). Men do not see the need for women to get a big education. They think that the education they need is that just enough to fulfil her domestic duties. Because of that, in 1965, the Indian government decided to rewrite textbooks in order to have them focus on the men and the big roles they played in history instead of the women (Sanaa Unus, 2000). All though that was a while ago, people have found textbooks that still are the same way.

Since women have a lack of education there are a lot of women who are illiterate. There are 330 million women above the age of 7 in India, and 60 percent, which is about 200 million, cannot read. (Sanaa Unus, 2000). With so many people not educated, it's not good for a country because it hold them back in the development of the economy for the country.

### **III. Mistreatment from Men**

Women don't just have health and education issues, they are also treated very poorly then what has already been previously mentioned. Women are abused physically and mentally. Violence towards women is a very common thing for them. It's been going on for centuries. It's been going on so long is because of the religions that started, such as Brahmanism and Hinduism, where these religions justified and prescribed every action that was towards the crushing of the women spirits to making her feel worthless and unwanted (Sita Agarwal 1999).

One problem women has a hard time dealing with is getting abuse for is dowry.

Dowry is where when she gets married her parents give her husband gifts (e.g., clothes, household goods, and cash). The demand for them does not stop till several years after they have been married (Victoria A. Velkoff and Arjun Adlakha, 1998). Just thinking about the men's point of view gifts, equal happiness, no gifts no happiness. Not every family can give him these gifts or if they can sometimes it could be very little, especially if they live under the poverty line. Many women get harassed and abused because the husband is not happy with her, and too much of it will lead to death, and it has led to death for many because of dowry's (Mapsofind.com, 1999).

If the women's husband is abusive for any reason at all and the woman wants to get a divorce she first has to look at a couple of things. First she has to look at her education. Does she have enough to survive on her own? If not then you go to the next thing. Can your family do it? Or do they even want you back? Many families can't accept her back because they either don't want the family name to be messed up, or they just don't have enough money for it. Once those options have been looked at you can't do anything, you are stuck with your husband until either one of you die, or he divorces you (Victoria A. Velkoff and Arjun Adlakha, 1998).

If a woman was to go live on her own she might not make it. All thought she works just as hard and long as the men do, not all of her work counts. The men mostly don't count it because the work she is doing is simple and unskilled work (Mapsofind.com, 1999).

Women also have no power in their life. As mentioned early they cannot go anywhere without permission. Well, that goes for everything else. She must have all

help in making every decision no matter how small it may be, it must be officially decided by a male family member, and then give permission to do so.

### **Conclusion**

All these three issues that have been mentioned work together. If the woman

The Struggling Women in India

6

does not have any education, then she will not know how to protect herself from the men in her life and how to keep her healthy. Since she has so much deprived from her she must make the best of what she has and work her hardest to give her husband and those what the need, not what they want. Education is still a big thing no matter where you live and here it's an absolutely necessity to survive. With almost 60 percent of the literate women only having a primary education or less, and 13 percent of Indian women have more than a primary education holds back not just them from supporting their family but it also holds the entire nation back.

All though the treatment of women isn't as bad as it was back then, there still is a long ways to go for them to be fully accepted into society. How they treat women is from religion and it's been taught to them by their fathers and grandfathers and so on. That doesn't mean that they have to treat them that way now. If they were to treat them equally and fairly the economy could grow because there would be more people knowing what they are doing.

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