

# **Dignity of Women—A Fragile Social Issue In The Context Of Violation Of Human Rights**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of Human Rights for women, so long neglected, poses as an important and sensitive topic for discussion. There are several significant issues ruling the women's human rights like—Work-Family balance, Emotional Abuse, Domestic Violence, Sexual Exploitation, Gender discrimination, Purposive discrepancy in the work-place and several others. All these involve gross violation of Human Rights. The aim of present paper is two-fold. First, an enquiry is to be made into the aspects of Human Rights violation in respect of women. Here focus is on the aspect of the business of sexual exploitation or simply prostitution, where the victim is a woman, being deprived of the normal happiness and comforts of a family life, which though regarded as usual or acceptable, remains for them a far-fetched dream of the precious human life. Secondly, an attempt will be made to answer the question—'what is meant by the 'status' of men and women in cultures around the world? – in order to gain awareness of the actual status of women in society and whether the present practice of demoralizing women and exploiting them in every possible opportunity should be discarded and done away with.

## **Introduction**

Scientific discoveries and technology have helped the human society to evolve and progress from the primitive stage of Hunter-gatherers to the present mode of living with expectations of reaching out to the stars in near future. However much the society has progressed and developed, it is the endangered humanity lying latent which compels the humanitarian aspect of the members of the society to give it its due attention. It is the basic idea which framed the first human society when human beings realized the advantages of living in close proximity for protection against both natural disasters as well as wild beasts.

UDHR or Universal Declaration of Human Rights states—'all members of the human family have equal and inalienable rights' and that all are entitled to the rights and freedoms it contains 'without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.'

It is the respect for each and every member of the society along with an inherent sense of duty, not only towards other fellow human beings but to non-human animals along with the nature around, is what the concept of Human Rights consists in.

The inextricably inter-related concepts of Rights and Duties highlights the particular aspect of Human Rights as evaluated in the present modern society. It is '...the moral

solidarity of all human beings...’ which is to be pursued consciously for the resolution and full enjoyment of Human Rights.

It is this aspect of Human Rights which has been recognized by all the major religions which mention explicitly ‘.....the inherent dignity of the individual or the sacred nature of the human personality’.

The concept of Human Rights acquired the present broad and rich scope immediately after the worldwide disaster inflicted by World War II and emphasizes a few indications in its conception and realization.

First, Human Rights emphasizes on human beings along with their close surroundings; second, human beings are no longer citizens of a particular country, rather they are to be treated internationally, third, international laws are the ultimate decisive body as far as Human Rights are concerned, fourth, quite naturally the states are ruled by laws concerning the interest not of just human beings but the community of human beings worldwide, fifth, the rights associated with the dignity of human beings constitute the moral foundations of friendly relations among countries and finally the individual beings can even go against his or her own state if he or she feels that his or her Human Rights have been violated by the state.

The realization of the five-fold aspects of Human Rights mentioned above led to the world-wide movement of Human Rights. The concept of Human Rights possesses immense potency to be developed in every aspect of our day-to-day life, as it is a concept with multiple facets in the face of increasing complexity in day-to-day activities leading to ever complicated social relationships abound in the society.

However, the need for the protection of Human Rights for women has not been much emphasized by the society in spite of women being one of the inherent factors of human civilization.”....The history of the international human rights movement has been one of neglect of women’s human rights’.

But after the universal declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948, the international community of human beings ‘....put its faith in broad-based universal human rights in order to address women’s issues....’

Therefore, the concept of Human Rights for women, so long neglected, poses as an important and sensitive topic for discussion. There are several significant issues ruling the women’s human rights like—Work-Family balance, Emotional Abuse, Domestic Violence, Sexual Exploitation, Gender discrimination, Purposive discrepancy in the work-place and several others. All these involve gross violation of Human Rights.

## **Objective**

The aim of the discussion is two-fold.

- (A) First, an enquiry is to be made into the aspects of Human Rights violation in respect of women. Here focus is on the aspect of the business of sexual exploitation or simply prostitution, where the victim is a woman, being deprived of the normal happiness and comforts of a family life, which though regarded as usual or acceptable, remains for them a far-fetched dream of the precious human life.

‘Prostitution’ is the significantly important source of abuse and exploitation of women. ‘.....Prostitution is a practice in which girls...usually between the ages of ten and twenty

are tricked, kidnapped or otherwise lured from their homes by “brothers”.....and brought to urban areas to serve as prostitutes, receiving little or no wages for their work’.

Several factors actively work towards the making of a prostitute out of an innocent female in the society—

- i) Poverty
- ii) Lack of Education
- iii) Gender
- iv) Adverse actions of family members
- v) Work-place exploitation

- i) It is the economic vulnerability of poor women which forces them to take up the line of sex workers ‘.....Poverty is a precondition for Prostitution.’ Failing economy of the family, insecure family structure, social prejudice, pressure from the parents to fend for them—sometimes compel young women and even children to take up the profession. Sometimes it so happens that the eldest daughter of the family enters the profession to take care of the whole family although she is shunned socially by the other members.
- ii) Lack of education is a frequent precursor to the profession of prostitution. Literacy rate being very low in general, children as well young women are unaware of the basic rights of a citizen and especially of the women. Moreover, being devoid of sufficient educational qualification, they are unable to secure respectable jobs and thereby lands in the profession making easy money. In fact it is the limited career option of poor under qualified and uneducated women which is the significant factor of entering the profession.
- iii) Gender is the factor which is the most normal as well as significant factor for recruitment into the profession. Female gender is the most sought after concept in the discussion of prostitution. Although same sex prostitution plays quite an important role in the present society, still it is the sexual intercourse between two opposite genders which is vital and most craved for situation since the ancient historical dates till date.

In fact, some women who are purchased or trafficked for prostitution are actually purchased on the basis of their ‘...appearance, skin-color and characteristics based on ethnic stereotyping. Throughout history, women have been enslaved and made to work as prostitutes basing on race, ethnicity as well as gender and class.’

- iv) Adverse actions of family members implying forced rape, physical tortures by near and dear ones might also lead to prostitution. It might also happen that close members of the family can sell off a younger one for a huge sum of money and the latter is turned into a prostitute.
- v) Finally, working places are frequently used for sexual exploitation. In fact women undergo sexual exploitation at their jobs in order to stay employed. “....the most frequent reason given by these women for leaving their last job was that prostitution would provide.... ‘Better pay for what they had to do anyway.’

It is considered to be one of the normal privileges or pre-requisites of the senior officers or the boss to get an overtly sexual and beautiful woman as his secretary who is bound to obey him, work dutifully under him and allow him to have all kinds of sexually

comfortable situations and thereby get undue lift in salary as well as good positions in her job in return.

Mention can be made here of colonialism which exploits not only natural resources but also the people of that country. Economic depletion, war-time violence contributes to the vulnerability of the indigenous women who are thereby brutally exploited as prostitutes.

The business of sex workers is so profitable that those hapless women are transported internationally to most lucrative markets. Such trafficking can only continue and flourish when commercial sex business is accepted in the receiving countries. 'The unique status of women' which is the root cause of Prostitution has never been addressed in any country which would involve penalization of the 'brokers' and awareness in the society through community or general education programmes.

(B) Secondly, an attempt will be made to answer the question—'what is meant by the 'status' of men and women in cultures around the world? – in order to gain awareness of the actual status of women in society and whether the present practice of demoralizing women and exploiting them in every possible opportunity should be discarded and done away with.

As a precursor to this discussion certain factors need also to be understood like—i) incest and childhood torture ii) racism iii) domestic violence iv) rape v) colonialism vi) poverty and addiction vii) male attitude viii) profitable business ix) stress disorders x) culturally relevant evaluation and treatment.

All these are the social conditions which single-handedly or in unison can give a true picture of how the women are actually treated in a community. The last two are the ones which are perhaps related to the means of escaping from the business.

Even politics do not spare these hapless women working as sex workers. In fact many states and their governments protect the commercial sex business mainly because of the massive profits. Economically backwards countries give away their women in the market as lucrative goods. However, these source countries might vary as per the '.....economic desperation of women, promotion of women, and promotion of prostitution /trafficking by corrupt government officials who issue passports and visas, and criminal connections in both the sending and the receiving country such as gang-controlled massage parlors and the lack of laws to protect women who immigrate.'

Moreover medical and social sciences rendered to these hapless women are never adequate enough due to lack of respect for them. What these women require are psychological, physical and vocational rehabilitation. The social system needs to be changed in order to help the programmes that assist the women in prostitution.

'Disconnectedness', which is the innermost traumatic experience, is one such example which require an all-out change, for it is the process of reconnection that is needed for recovery and which only the survivor can guide and conduct. For this reconnection, other survivors are required, but if the 'will to trust' is destroyed, how the reconnection will ever happen...

Therefore, social scientists are forced with certain basic issues like—how to determine the relative status of men and women in the society and what actually would help to determine the relativity of the same.

A detailed discussion is required in order to rouse human conscience (men and women alike), to stress on the equality of men and women with a view to reformulate and change the existing social system.

Prostitution is the bitterest experience of ‘...being hunted, dominated, harassed, assaulted and battered’. Series of Human Rights are violated like ‘...sexual harassment, economic servitude, educational deprivation, job discrimination, domestic violence, racism, classism, vulnerability to frequent physical and sexual assault, and being subjected to body invasion that are equivalent to torture’.

It is to be observed-- whether this form of severe wrong can be erased from the society. My aim is to find out whether society should attempt to amend the damage done in the form of wasting away the valuable years of one’s youth as well as depriving them of the care, security, love and happiness of a well-knit family which is the basic privilege of the child born in a society.

Several conferences have been held at international level on Women and their Rights. Our discussion while including those international calls for women around the world would focus on the Indian scenario as well.

As the history of Human Rights movement is observed, it is seen that it has simply neglected the Human Rights of Women. Prior to the 1948 United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there had been a number of international agreements safeguarding Women’s Rights, like, Hague Conventions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dealing with marriage, divorce and guardianship of minor, international agreements of 1904, 1910, 1921, 1933 attempting to prevent trafficking of women.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of U.N. focused on the protection of women’s issues and the issues of other minorities from the perspectives of universal human rights. It is the general notion of non-discrimination which forms the basis of two main Human Covenants—one on Civil and Political Rights and the other on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

However, this non-discrimination simply may not take care of the protection of the rights of many women.

With this idea in view and with the view to favor more gender-neutral proclamation, the international body addressing specific women’s rights was the United Nation’s Commission on the status of women established in 1947. This body initiated the International World Conferences in 1975 (Mexico City), 1980 (Copenhagen), 1995 (Beijing), International Women’s Decade (1975—1985) and also initiated drafting of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

This CEDAW aims at addressing substantive and actual equality of women instead of assuring equal protection in the eyes of law. The Convention attempts to impose standard of equality in public and private life.

‘...the obstacles to women’s advancement often appear insurmountable; it is also the case in contemporary India that serves to progress are established, open and active’.

Indian government is at the most emitting a mixed outlook for the Indian women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is the most sincere and untiring efforts of local groups, basic grass root organisations and non-government organisations that go on to create situations enabling women from diverse religious and social contexts to voice their protest against the existing social vices and work for bringing about changes towards betterment in their lives.

It is to be noted in this context that women’s issues and religion, caste, community issues are inextricably linked i.e. to understand women’s issues in India one has to take into

consideration that religion, class and caste often become significantly important in determining as well as addressing such issues.

Indian women however, though not totally ignorant of the difficulties and disadvantages of life, are constantly undergoing the process of balancing the traditional ongoing roles and responsibilities in keeping pace with the demands of constantly changing modern environments.

Although the women from different backgrounds can always afford all kinds of educational and professional opportunities, the not so fortunate women in the society are restricted by different socio economic conditions which limit job opportunities, career advancements, and access to medical supervision and insufficient legal action for domestic violence, harassment or assault.

As India has been a British colony from the mid-nineteenth century till 1947, several legislative interventions formulated and practiced under the British colonial government to modern Indian acts as well as women's and people's movements have all attempted to improve the status of women, though it has always happened that poor or disadvantaged women are very often denied their rightful Rights.

However, Indian government along with non-government organizations is making good progress in safeguarding as well as helping the lower middle class and poor women to progress in life by securing their Human Rights and providing them with opportunities for education leading to literacy and basic awareness, pay protection, safeguarding work environments which often lead to sexual harassment and also providing support for maternal leave, day-care facilities for children of working mothers and finally also safeguarding the inheritance and property rights.

## **Research Methodology**

(A) Our enquiry into the nature of Human Rights violation against women would focus on the cases of women either being forced to act as sex workers through unfavorable social conditions physical tortures, emotional abuse or workplace exploitations tricked or lured by the middlemen or the women deliberately entering the profession with an eye for easy money as the business at first sight appears to be immensely profitable.

In other words, attempt will be made to enquire into the existing social conditions where women and children from lower middle class or poor family background are lured with the options of lucrative jobs, decent or luxurious living and sometimes even with the promise of two square meals a day which their family fails to provide.

Contrary to the above, enquiry is also required of the cases of women from affluent and rich women who by their own choice earn easy and huge sums of money through the profession in order to satisfy their thirst for higher and higher standards of living. Circumstantially, the former are unaware victims, while the latter are voluntary workers, though the consequences in both the cases are more or less the same—the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Therefore, there will always remain the search for the requirements of women escaping prostitution and thereby legal approaches for the same will be discussed.

(B) From another point of view, theoretical discussions, rigorous counseling and knowledge of legal procedures are absolutely necessary to develop the mental

framework of sexually abused children as well as women. As this business of sex workers or prostitution is there since very ancient times, it is a concept which appears to be the part and parcel of our social life. What is detestable is the abusive and traumatic social life of the sex workers and the brutal treatment received once they become physically unfit for the job and the social stigma attached to their profession.

Therefore, a detailed discussion is required on values, human rights, women's human rights and the aspects of human rights violation in the cases of women being uprooted from their normal family life and thrown into the business of sex workers in order to either provide physical satisfaction to some wealthy socialite and earn money for the family or simply keep the family alive through whatever she earns in exchange of her beautiful body.

Until and unless, the humanitarian attitude is cultivated and sexual perversion is attempted to be erased from the minds of the male fellow beings existing side by side in the society, the business of trafficking and sex workers would never be discarded from the society itself.

Quite understandably, women in the society will also have to ultimate that strong attitude of striking back, protecting their children against sexual abuse and give up the attraction of easy money.

Reference can be made here to the United Nations Commissions on the status of women, which is the only international body that specifically addressed women's rights.

Protection of Women's Human Rights, achieving substantive inequality in the society, modification of cultural patterns perpetuating inequality in social and private life are the few focal points of the CEDAW (convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women) drafted by the body itself.

## **Findings**

Therefore, we can here make it a point to be noted that the methodology for grasping the concept of 'Prostitution' should be a combination of both practice and theory.

What actually happens is that although the women's organizations from all over the world has attempted to have an important impact on human rights discussions in the context through solidarity the solidarity gained over the same for some time, women's human rights are not a reality for most women round the world.

For this purpose, the cultivation of humanitarian attitude is required and with this end in view, theoretical discussions along with practical examples are necessary to expose the hard-core profit-making, materialistic and prevented attitude of the privileged members of the society as well as the governments themselves. In fact, all the members (male and female) of the society alike are to work in unison for the abolition of the sex-trade and cultivate the attitude of respect towards women.

## **Conclusion**

Our discussion would lead to questions posted as significant ones from the humanitarian background—

(A) Should women, the mother, the sister, the innocent daughter in a family be converted to sex-workers because of some unfavorable circumstances?

Economic dependence, low social status, gendered sexual double standard are the common reasons that compel women to sell their sex. Women, who are outside domestic confines and thereby outside male control, often are suspected to be in the profession of sex-workers, irrespective of the fact that it is not known actually whether they are really selling sex.

If this the picture of the normal social make-up, where should the women turn to for relief? The financial instability of the family forces her to go out as wage earners. If this is the case, doesn't she deserve a little more respect? Dignities, self-respect—are these mere token words for her? Unfortunate women who are forced into the business undergo unbearable mental, physical trauma while being deprived of the secured shelter of the family as well—don't they deserve a little more kind attention?

(B) Business of sex-workers or the institution of Prostitution and Human Rights violation—Aren't the two inter-related?

The experience of being hunted, humiliated, dominated, harassed, assaulted and battered—are instances of Human Rights violation.

Although mention can be made here of 'sacred' prostitution detected in the history, mostly the institution has been stigmatized by the respectable and privileged members of the society as sinful, devoid of moral conscience, addicts, intellectually weak, rape victims or even as victims of the business of sex-trafficking.

However the above picture is mostly false as sex workers always do not fit into any of the above mentioned negative stereotypes and like all other professional people possesses average intelligence, education, morality, and respect for religion, work from some or other ethnic or racial background and sell their time and expert service like the others.

In the context of the above discussion certain social factors need to be highlighted.

In fact, women working as sex workers are like any other women in the society.

Question is why should a woman leave her sheltered life and sell her sex which is very much personal? Is it our social conditions which compel her to lose her dignity and self-respect constituting her basic human rights?

Secondly, why a woman in profession should be battered, assaulted, tortured and stigmatized when her human rights demand full respect?

We can conclude by referring to Hillary Clinton's message in the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995—

'If there is one message that echoes from the conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights.'

Last, but the most important call to all should be—let us pledge to prevent violence against women and raise our voices as one to bring about that change. Let us focus on what can be done to improve the status of women in society and fight the injustices and sin committed against them.

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