



## SOCIAL IDENTITY OF WOMEN PRISONER AND GENDER SENSITIZATION IN MODERN SOCIETY

**Dr. A.V.Ramacharyulu**

School Assistant

English ZP-High School

S.Rayavaram, Andhra Pradesh, India.

**Abstract:** *Gender stereotypes socio-cultural explanations are more appropriate behind development of perceptions of men and women on gender development. We come across experiences where women are not only treated as subordinate to men but are also subject to discriminations, humiliations, exploitations, oppressions, control and violence. Women have equality of status under the country's Constitution. The roots of discrimination against women lie in the religious and cultural practices of India. By and large, all religions have kept their women in varying stages of confinement and restrictions. The position of women depends on their location in the institution of personal survival, life-support, and emotional known as the family. The saga of hurdles and difficulties faced by women are numerous. Faced with stark facts on the abysmal status, caught in vicious circle of sexism, casteism, illiteracy, economic deprivation as well as discrimination in both the domestic and the public spheres, often throw women outside their conventional roles. The very struggle for survival in harsh, cruel world, even more so, for the one who carries the burden of womanhood, is plagued with trials and tribulations. Even though the situations and the causes of crime committed by women vary, the law only knows that it is an offence of the Indian Penal Code and the offender must get the punishment that code sets out as a consequence they are imprisoned for the period of time set by the court where the conditions of living are barely basic, but much worse is the loss of the right to live with dignity which often presumed to lead stress. Gender planning is undertaken with the objectives of achieving gender equity, equality and empowerment through practical and strategic gender needs. Keywords: Dignity, Gender Indian Penal Code, Kanyadan, Praya Dhan, punishment, stereotypes Sex, Stridhan, Tihar, women.*

**Introduction:** The concept of women's emancipation has opened new vistas for progress and development for women but it is a paradox of modern India that women wield power and hold positions at the topmost levels, yet large sections of women are among the most underprivileged. Subordination of women to men is prevalent in large parts of the world.

**Gender:** Sex: Biological differences between women and men, which are universal, obvious and generally permanent but the socially constructed

differences in roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men in a given culture or location and the societal structures that support them. Every society has different 'scripts' for male and female members to follow. Thus members learn to act out their feminine or masculine role, much in the same way as every society has its own language.

**Gender Roles:** The role refers to the activities performed by men and women in different situations and in different times and within the different cultures, classes, castes, ethnic groups etc. The



roles of men and women are shaped by various forces such as social, cultural, economic, environmental, religious and political. The gender roles may change depending on the socio-cultural dynamics of the society.

**Gender Analysis:** Gender analysis is a tool to better understand the realities of the women and men, whose lives are impacted by planned development. These include gender issues with respect to social relations; activities; access and control over resources, services, institutions of decision-making and networks of power and authority and needs, the distinct needs of men and women, both practical and strategic.

**Access to resources:** Refers to right and opportunity of men and women to use the resources as per one's need to carry out his/ her activities. Control over resources: Refers to the rights and power of men and women to decide on the use and destination of the resources. Practical gender needs: Practical gender needs are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles. Practical gender needs do not challenge the gender divisions of labour or women's subordination position in society, although rising out of them. These are a response to immediate perceived, identified necessity, within a specific context. They are practical in nature and often are concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provisions, health care and employment.

**Gender Sensitisation for Strengthening:** The needs that women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. These vary according to particular context. They relate to gender divisions of labour, power control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages etc. Meeting strategic needs

helps women to achieve greater equality. It also changes existing role and therefore challenges women's sub-ordinate position.

**Gender Equality:** Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results. It is therefore the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and differences between women and men, and the varying roles that they play. Gender equity: Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Gender blind: Gender blind is a person who does not recognize that gender is an essential determinant of life choices available to people in society. Gender bias: Perception that both sex are not equal and do not have similar rights to resources. Gender discrimination: Unfavourable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender

**Gender Mainstreaming:** It is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of planned action, including legislation policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's, as well as men's concerns and experiences, an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality Women and development: It emerged from a critique of the



modernization theory. The theoretical base of wad is dependency theory and focuses on relationship between women and development process and examines the nature of integration. It is concerned with women's productive role and assumes that once organizational structures become more equitable, women's position would also improve.

**Gender and Development:** The gender and development seeks to base interventions on the analysis of men's and women's roles. It questions the basis of assigning specific gender roles. Gender planning: Gender planning is done only on basis of gender needs, gender needs assessment is an important aspect of the whole process. Gender planning is undertaken with the objectives of achieving gender equity, equality and empowerment through practical and strategic gender needs.

**Gender and Society:** Gender stereotypes socio-cultural explanations are more appropriate behind development of perceptions of men and women on gender development. Culture prescribes certain activities in a different way for men and women. We often call these as gender stereotypes. On the basis of gender, society expects typical behaviour patterns e.g. Women are stereotyped as being caring, soft, obedient, shy, weak, protection seeking, while men are stereotyped as being strong, aggressive and courageous. The stereotypic views on men and women's role in workplaces are important limitations to growth and development of gender. Women are subordinated not as systematic individuals who happen to be denied rights or opportunities but as a sex that is subject to pervasive oppression

-Heywood: 2003<sup>1</sup>. We come across experiences where women are not only treated as subordinate to men but are also subject to discriminations, humiliations, Constitution. Simone de Beauvoir in 1970 pointed out that women are made and not born. "While sex differences are linked to biological differences between male and female, gender differences are imposed socially or even politically by constructed contrasting stereotypes of masculinity and femininity"<sup>2</sup> These gender based discriminations and exploitations are widespread and the socio-culturally defined characteristics, aptitudes, abilities, desires, personality traits, roles, responsibilities and behavioral patterns of men and women contribute to the inequalities and hierarchies in society. "Within the Indian sub-continent there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights and morals", Thapar: 1975<sup>3</sup>. The nature of control and subjugation of women varies from one society to the other as it differs due to the differences in class, caste, religion, region, ethnicity and the socio-cultural practices but certain characteristics such as control over women's sexuality and her reproductive power cuts across class, caste, ethnicity, religions and regions and is common to all patriarchies. Women have been, for centuries confined to the home and were carrying out work which by a sizeable section of society was considered unskilled. The roots of

<sup>1</sup> Heywood, Andrew, 2003 Political Ideologies: An Introduction, p. 254

<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, 1970 "The Second Sex" p.258

<sup>3</sup> Thapar Romila, 1975, Looking back in History in Devika Jain (ed). Indian women., p. 6



discrimination against women lie in the religious and cultural practices of India. By and large, all religions have kept their women in varying stages of confinement and restrictions. The position of women depends on their location in the institution of personal survival, life-support, and emotional known as the family. According to Gerda Lerner: 1986; Bhasin kamla: 2003; role in creating a hierarchical system as it not only mirrors the order in the state and educates its family plays an important children but also creates and constantly reinforces that order. In our Indian families, the male is considered as the inheritor of the family while the female is considered as paraya dhan expectation of living with the parents is limited to the sons only. The Indian joint family is the "patriarchal family" and it was constituted by a group of persons related in the male line and subject to absolute power of the senior most male member -Maine in Uberoi: 2005: The ideology of motherhood subjugates women and perpetuates patriarchy, which not only forces women to be mothers but also determines the conditions of their motherhood the birth of male child is preferred to that of a female, Bhasin:1993<sup>4</sup>. The boys learn to be dominating and aggressive and the girl is indicated into housekeeping roles only. She is discouraged to show aggressive modes of behavior and the feminine model of grace, modesty and self-effacement is frequently reinforced. She is expected to go through the roles of discipline daughter, submissive daughter-in-law, sacrificing mother and dominating mother-in-law. Once the daughter marries, it is expected that her husband's family will be her first priority

in every respect and her own parents and siblings become secondary. In general, from birth to death, through each and every life cycle, women are socialised to adhere to these accepted norms of social behaviour. Women experience discrimination and unequal treatment in terms of basic right to food, health care, education, employment, control over productive resources, decision-making and livelihood not because of their biological differences or sex, which is natural but because of their gender differences which is asocial construct. Geetha: 2002<sup>5</sup> "Sex is considered a fact - one is born with either male or female genitalia. Gender is considered a social construction - it grants meaning to the fact of sex. Conversely, it could be said that only after specific meanings came to be attached to the sexes, did sex differences become pertinent". Even though a home maker and a mother and nurturer of the offspring's she Remained in the shadow of the practical value system which provided her little or no identity of her own.

**Women and Crime:** This control has developed historically and is still deeply entrenched in India. It is because of these gender stereotypes that women are at a disadvantage and are vulnerable to violence and other kinds of discriminations and injustices. There are several clear indicators of the fact that Indian women continue to be discriminated against: the sex ratio is skewed against them; maternal mortality is the second-highest in the world; more than 40 per cent of women are illiterate; and crimes against women are on the

<sup>4</sup> Bhasin: 1993; Kamla, What is Patriarchy?, Kali for Women, p. 8

<sup>5</sup> V, Geetha, 2002, Gender-Theorising Feminism, Stree p.: 10.



rise. Delphy: 1977;<sup>6</sup> argues that the basis of gender relations is the domestic mode of production in which the husband Expropriates the wife's labour. Though the government has amended several laws that affect women, including laws related to dowry, rape, cruelty, maintenance, prostitution and obscenity. However, many anomalies remain under different laws. The discriminatory practice of 'dowry' is still prevalent and legal, and violence against women in the domestic sphere is pervasive. Ideally, the new bride is supposed to be treated like a new daughter in her new home, but in reality, it is often not so. The ancient Hindu customs of Kanyadan and stridhan were voluntary practices which eventually got transformed into rigid dowry system failure of which results in physical abuse of young bride and in extreme cases life threatening situation. Today dowries are offered for women and demanded for men, often irrespective of the fact that women are employed. No law exists to prevent wives from being thrown out of the matrimonial home. Dobash and Dobash: 1977;<sup>7</sup> observed that it is in marriage and family that women are most likely to be slapped and shoved about, to be severely assaulted, killed or raped. It is in the exercise of male power that wives get beaten. Crime against women has been rising with each year. "Systemic deprivation and violence against women: rape, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, female foeticide, infanticide, which killing, sati, dowry deaths, wife-beating, high level of female illiteracy, malnutrition, undernourishment and continued sense

of insecurity keeps women bound to home, economically exploited, socially suppressed and politically passive"<sup>8</sup>. Women suffer from the lower status generally, without possibility of legal recourse and protection or even awareness that such recourse is possible, abuse of women within the family is probably rule rather than the exception. Indian woman into a sign of inherently oppressive and un free nature is the entire cultural tradition of India. Violence, both outside and within the household, is a grim reality of women's lives. Violence of men against women is well known and cuts across all classes, religious affiliations and ethnic groups but the discriminatory practices mostly affect poorer, relatively less educated women from lower classes.

Women-headed households in India is another major problem which include widows, deserted and divorced wives and single women face major hurdles in claiming maintenance for themselves and their children. Because of Urbanization the rate of divorce and desertion are increasing. The social status of deserted and divorced women still continues to be quite wretched. They tend to be among the poorest households in the country. Poverty creates severe economic strain on women on the one hand; they are expressed to share economic responsibility of family and at the same time have to shoulder almost all households' responsibilities. It is improbable for women, with optimum potentialities, to bring about an equitable balance between the responsibilities which she has to share within and outside a house. As a consequence, when women of the marginalized sections in particular, with heavier familial

<sup>6</sup> Delby Christine, 1977, 'The Main Enemy', p. 37

<sup>7</sup> Dobash, R.F. and Russel, Dobash, 1977. 'Violence Against Wives', P-75

<sup>8</sup> Bhasin, 1993, op. cited, p.13





liabilities, rearing children and financial difficulties are not able to bring about a balance between the household and outside responsibilities, the anxiety-ridden situation may be created for them. This anxiety may be a stimulus to crime. The saga of hurdles and difficulties faced by women are numerous. Faced with stark facts on the abysmal status, caught in vicious circle of sexism, casteism, illiteracy, economic deprivation as well as discrimination in both the domestic and the public spheres, often throw women outside their conventional roles. Thus together with other changes in our society, patriarchal family structure, economic marginality, spousal abuse and the women's emancipation movement may have helped to break the barriers of opportunities to crime.

**Identity of Women Prisoners:** The very struggle for survival in harsh, cruel world, even more so, for the one who carries the burden of womanhood, is plagued with trials and tribulations. Even though the situations and the causes of crime committed by women vary, the law only knows that it is an offence of the Indian Penal Code and the offender must get the punishment that code sets out as a consequence they are imprisoned for the period of time set by the court where the conditions of living are barely basic, but much worse is the loss of the right to live with dignity which often presumed to lead stress. Though Tihar Jail prison administration following the recommendations of various committees with the help of Non-governmental organization has come up with variety of methods on scientific lines to bring about reformation and gradual social reintegration of prisoners still there were the moments of anguish, visible shades of remorse, but never a trace of excitement,

enthusiasm, expectation, that once was but never will be theirs again. In between tears and the distress, the uncertainty of punishment, the incessant worries about the plight of their children and family left behind, rejected by the society, ignored by the relatives, and the stigma she will now carry sap their energies and almost make them astringent. The role that various agencies (Mulla committee, Supreme court, Ngo, etc.) played in regard to the reform and rehabilitation of women prisoner had some positive consequences but the role media played had some very negative consequences. (a) It made the community distance itself from the system in general and individuals in particular; (b) It made the prisoners inside the system subconsciously mould themselves in the image of incorrigible outcasts; (c) It referred prison to an humiliating position, branding it as an agency only for punishment, in which no individual with a choice would serve. However, a tranquil and congenial ambience had to be created before such an expression could manifest itself.

**Women Imprisonment:** Women imprisonment is dysfunctional to family specially children imprisonment causes considerable distress to mother and child if child is brought up in the prison it can have damaging effect on its social and psychological development on the other hand if separated from mother it results in breaking of mother child bond women's relationship with spouse also get impaired. The most pathetic situation is of the children whose both the parents are in prison. On the top of it is highly inflammable if the sufferer is girl child. There is no one for their safety and security. It is indeed a great apathy rather than showing sympathy during this miserable time. In a study of women in California prisons (where the largest



number of incarcerated women reside), Bloom and her colleagues Chesney-Lind, and Owen 1994 found that 80 percent of their respondents were mothers. Bloom et al. concluded from their evaluation of programs in women facilities in California that even though 80 percent of women prisoners are mothers." There is dearth of programs which address the critical parenting and family reunification needs of inmate mothers and their children"<sup>9</sup>. A conservative estimate extrapolated from the number of incarcerated women in 1998 suggests that at least 195,000 children younger than age 18 are impacted by their mother's incarceration (Young and Smith 2000)<sup>10</sup>. These mothers have to deal with the trauma of separation from their children that is usually compounded by the difficulties of maintaining their relationship via letters, phone calls (when available) and visitation, depending on the distance of the facility from the children, the willingness of the caregiver to allow visitation, and the availability of transportation. Regaining custody of her children and reconstructing mother-child relationships severed and damaged by her absence (Baunach 1985; Bloom and Steinhart 1993; Dressel, Porterfield, and Barnhill 1998; Fessler 1991; Johnston 1995)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Bloom et al., 1994, Women in California Prisons: Hidden Victims of the War on Drugs ` p. 14

<sup>10</sup> Young, D.s.and Smith, J.,2000, "When Moms are Incarcerated: The Needs of Children, Mothers and Care givers", Families in Society, pp.130-47.

<sup>11</sup> Baunach 1985; Bloom and Steinhart 1993; Dressel, Porterfield, and Barnhill 1998; Fessler 1991; Johnston 1995 cited in O'Brine, Patricia, 2001, Making it in the free world: women in transition from prison p.2

**Gender Sensitivity in The Modern India:** Sexism exists in the modern India & it has affected both the genders equally; with least respect for individual aspirations, potential or abilities. It is a big hurdle in the development of the nation and the critical point is the absence of felt need to curb this problem. Therefore, the concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce barriers to personal and economic development created by sexism. Gender sensitizing "is about changing behavior and instilling empathy into the views that we hold about our own and the other genders. It helps people in "examining their personal attitudes and beliefs and questioning the 'realities' they thought they know.

**Women- Key to Future:** The connection is made between women's empowerment, i.e. liberation from the constraints of gender-based discrimination, and their potential for furthering the development objectives of the communities and countries in which they live. As their very last activity together, the participants are asked to envision, define and describe the fully empowered woman - she who has been transformed by education that respects, entitles and strengthens her.

**Identifying Gender Gap. Societal Views & About Women's And Men's Roles In Modern World:** In some countries, girls who enter non-traditional fields are unemployed because of employers' bias, and/or parents and societal views that women should not work outside the home or in inappropriate fields. Intimidated, most girls shy away from science and technology. This occurs in developed as well as in developing countries & they tend to restrict & prepare for their Family and Maternal Duties.



### **Gender Inequality At Two Extremes Of The Society- Its Implications:**

Different perspectives will be highlighted that depicts the problem statement & thus the need to address this issue.

**Teachers' Attitudes:** The issue of young children's education goes well beyond educational resources. Teachers play a significant role in influencing the success and failure of their pupils. Their interpretation of the contents of learning materials, their attention to and interaction with learners, the way they assign duties and homework are all determined by the broad patriarchal vision of the universe that keeps intact the hierarchy of the sexes.

**Methods For Improving Gender Sensitivity:** There may be a need for affirmative action to ensure that more women take on the challenge of administration and management. Training programmes for women professionals and their male counterparts should be de rigueur, while the system itself must be prepared to nurture them to realize their potential as managers and make appropriate positions available to them.

### **Gender-Sensitivity-Not for Women**

**Alone:** In recent years, an increasing number of people have come to understand that, with the exception of tasks that require excessive physical exertion women can excel in all the fields men can. Conversely, except for childbearing and breastfeeding, there are no tasks that men cannot perform as well as women. The fact that there have been female scientists, electricians, auto mechanics, pilots, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs and managers and male designers and couturiers, chefs, hairdressers, nurses, kindergarten teachers in great numbers attests to the fact that the demarcation of roles along

sex lines is arbitrary and entirely invented by societies It follows therefore that societies can also dismantle this artificial demarcation that can now be considered as being discrimination against women.

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