EMPOWER WOMEN TO MAKE INDIA TRULY INDEPENDENT

By Vani Agrawal

Since Vedic times, women are worshipped as Goddess Durga and Goddess Sarasvati in our Indian society but it’s so perturbing to see the condition of the women in India even after completing 71 years of independence. There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in almost seven decades of Independence, but they still have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male-dominated society. It is ironical that a country, which has recently acclaimed the status of the first Asian country to accomplish its Mars mission in the maiden attempt, is positioned at the 29th rank among 146 countries across the globe on the basis of Gender Inequality Index. There has been amelioration in the position of women, but their true empowerment is still awaited.

We have come a long way since our independence. A lot has changed in our country, whether it be technology or economy but one thing that has been the same is the gender inequality. While on one hand, India has seen an increased percentage of literacy among women, and women are now entering into professional fields, the practices of female infanticide, poor health conditions and lack of education still persisting and continues. Even the patriarchal ideology of the home being a woman’s ‘real domain’ and marriage being her ultimate destiny hasn’t changed much. If one looks at the status of women then and now, one has to look at two sides of the coin; one side which is promising, and the other side is bleak.

Women are the backbone of the society. They carry the future of our country in their bellies. They nurture them, give them values. If a women is educated, a whole family is educated. Empowering a woman means empowering a whole family. Many people think that educating a girl child is of no use because one day, she has to go to someone else’s home then why to spend so much of money on her. If everyone has the same thinking, then all families will have uneducated woman as their daughter or daughter-in-law.

The safety and security of female is yet another major problem that comes in the way to women empowerment. How can we expect women to be safe on the roads when they are not safe even in the privacy of their own homes? Last few crimes against women, especially frequent rape cases were very dread and fearful. There is an urgent need to understand and solve this problem of women safety so that they can also grow equally like male counterpart in their own country. Everywhere around us, we can see many problems that are barring women from rising up.

Even after so many programs of awareness, there are still many backward areas where women don’t have any access to proper sanitation. They still have to go to open spaces for defecation. The big difference in sex ratio has paved way for girl child trafficking. Many inhumane parents sell their own girl child for money. Social evils like dowry, domestic violence, triple talaq and female foeticide are adding fuel to the fire. Though a number of constitutional amendments were made to avail social, economic and political benefits to women, yet they have not been completely effective to bring a radical change in the situation.

Women are generally supposed to play the role of a ‘good wife’, and if a woman ventures out to work, she is seen with a biased mind, going against societal norms. Women are expected to fulfill the household responsibilities and follow the old age tradition. In poor families, females keep themselves half fed or starved to feed the other family members. This has led to rampant malnutrition among women, and an extremely poor health status. Many women are still reported to die due to pregnancy related problems, malnutrition and early marriage.

With time, a lot has changed since those dark ages of the 1950s for the women. Though at some levels like dowry, crimes like rape, sexual harassment at office or public places, and molestation, eve-teasing, even after seventy one years of independence, women are still exploited, which is the shameful side of our country. Yet one can’t deny that the situation has improved since the earlier times. Women, who now represent 48.2% of the population, are getting access to education, and then employment. From 5.4 million girls enrolled at the primary level in 1950-51 to 61.1 million girls in 2004-05. At the upper primary level, the enrolment increased from 0.5 million girls to 22.7 million girls. The result of this is that India has world’s largest number of professionally qualified women. In fact India has the largest population of working women in the world, and has more number of doctors, surgeons, scientists, professors than the United States. Today names like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shobhaa De and Jhumpa Lahiri can put any other writer to shame. In the field of cinema, women like Rekha, Smita Patil, Shabana Aazmi, Vidya Balan and Konkona Sen are such names who don’t play feminized roles, but have asserted themselves over this male-dominated realm. In the field of Politics, from Indira Gandhi to Sheila Dixit, Uma Bharti, Jayalalithaa, Vasundhra Raje and Mamata Banerjee today are making their presence felt.

Today, the modern woman is so deft and self-sufficient that she can be easily called a superwoman, juggling many fronts single-handedly. Women are now fiercely ambitious and are proving their metal not only on the home front, but also in their respective professions. Women in India are coming up in all spheres of life. This point of view hasn’t changed much. There is still a large section of women who are uneducated. Also very few women are actually employed in good-paying jobs, and hence parents are reluctant to provide better education to girls. Statistics say that close to 245 million Indian women lack the basic capability to read and write, which is a large number. Only 13.9% women are employed in the urban sector, and 29% in the domestic and agriculture sector, where too, a majority of women are exploited by the men.

The sex ratio of India shows that the Indian society is still prejudiced against female, and a lot is yet to be achieved in this arena. The Indian woman has to make her way through all the socialized prejudices against her, and the men yet have to allow and accept the women to be equal counterparts for the country’s development. Then only our country can be truly independent because then our minds will be free from the slavery of the thought that women are inferior to men.