Overview of India's Gender-based Disparities

Human Rights and Women's Rights: Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. Universal human rights are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the forms of treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups (United Nations).

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reported in 2014 that human rights violations in India were prevalent in the communal violence which took place in 2002, including torture, murder, rape, and other forms of sexual violence. The UN defines gender-based violence against women is defined as impairing or nullifying the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and constitutes a human rights violation.

Education: Women's experiences with India's educational systems have varied from pre-colonial India, to British rule, to national movements, and in response to political and economic forces throughout those time periods. India's contemporary government has shown a commitment to women's education, iterated through the constitutional promise of "free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14." However, as with most governments, there is a clear disparity between legislation, policy, and what is actually being

implemented. Despite large improvements in India's educational system, gender gaps in literacy still exist. As of 2001, the average literacy rate for the whole country was 75.96% for males and 54.28% for females (Nelasco 38). Also, there is a significant disparity between rural and urban literacy rates, with rural women being the most illiterate. Women's grassroots movements have attempted to address educational access issues including literacy, both regionally and nationally. Women's education is important as illiterate women are more likely to have higher infant and maternal mortality rates, poor nutrition, higher risk of violence, and decreased autonomy in the household (Valkoff). Feminists hope to improve those basic living conditions, as well as increase occupational opportunities for women. Because of the work of the women's movement, in states like Gujarat, girls have increased educational access and tuition fees are waived from primary school, all the way to college. Women's advocacy groups have been successful due in part to their philosophy that "if you educate a woman, you are educating a family. If you are educating all women, you are educating the whole world" (Nelasco 36).

Nelasco, Dr. Shobana. *Status of Women in India*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications PVT. LTD., 2010. 36-45. Print

Health: Maintaining reproductive health, mental health and the treatment of sexually-transmitted illness is often a challenge for many Indian women. Numerous pregnancies and closely spaced births are common among many Indian women, and they erode a mother's nutritional status, negatively affecting pregnancy outcomes (e.g. premature births, low birth-weight babies) and also increasing a mother's health risks. 92% of women in India suffer from gynecological-related health complications, including ovarian cysts and endometriosis. 300 women die every day in India due to childbirth and pregnancy related causes…

Statistical Overview

- 92% of women in India suffer from gynecological-related health complications.

- 38% of all HIV positive people in India are women, yet only 25% of beds in care centers are occupied by them.

- 88% of pregnant women have anemia due to nutritional discrimination.

- 75% of the women recommended to use contraception are then sterilized.

Gender-based Violence

Domestic violence, sexual assault, street harassment (e.g. Gopi-teasing, eve-teasing), sex-selective abortion, femicide (dowry-death, bride-burning, honor-killing), forced marriage, child marriage, and sterilization are all forms of gender-based violence occurring across the subcontinent. These issues have only recently gained widespread and international attention. Amidst public outcry led primarily by university student groups, a sexual assault case involving a New Delhi college woman was brought to the Indian Supreme Court in late 2012. Despite increased public concern over gender-based violence, Indian women's safety is far from guaranteed.

Statistical Overview

- 47% of women aged 20-24 were illegally married before age 18.

- Between 2006-2009, there were 60 reported honor killings in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu alone.

- 8,093 dowry murders across the country were recorded in 2007 alone.

- Rape is the fastest growing crime in India with a 733% increase in reported cases since

1971.

- A total of 75,930 domestic violence cases were reported in the country in 2007 with an increase of 20.3% over 2006 and 35.8% over the average of the previous 5 years (2002‒2006). The conviction rate for these charges was only 20.9%.

Sources: UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2009 Report, and Gender Violence in India, a Prajnya Report (2009): http://www.prajnya.in/gvr09.pdfhttp://www.prajnya.in/gvr09.pdf

Women's Rights and Political/Social/National Conflict

Conflict (of varying types and at different levels) negatively affects women's lives globally.

In some conflicts, women are personally and directly involved (for example, conflicts with parents, spouses, in-laws or community leaders). In some cases, women are the indirect victims of violence (for example, when there are conflicts between religious groups, nations, or political factions).

Some conflicts occur at the micro-level (e.g. in a woman's immediate surroundings, like domestic conflicts). Other conflicts occur at a macro-level (e.g. at a larger level, for example political conflicts or wars). In many instances, especially at the macro level, women are used as "weapons" to take revenge on the opposing group. This can happen during civil wars, religious conflicts, and political conflicts.

Sexual assault is used as a demonstration of power during times of conflict, with severe consequences to women's health, well-being and social acceptance. Women suffer when the men of the family are involved in conflict and they cannot bring home any income. They also suffer when jobs are lost, there are extended curfews when they cannot work, or they face added risks

in taking up work.

Conflict may cause severe mental and physical health issues for women (for example bodily injuries, psychological trauma, depression, or anxiety disorders).

Women's role in conflict resolution

In traditional societies of Africa and Asia, older women have played a prominent cultural role in resolving conflict at both the domestic and community level. However their roles are sometimes diminished in formal settings of conflict resolution. Many women-led movements around the world have contributed to peace efforts, conflict resolution and helping women survivors of conflict and their families.

Additional Resources

- Desai, M. (1996) 'Informal Organizations as Agents of Change : Notes From The Contemporary Women's Movement in India' Mobilization : An International Quarterly Volume 1, Number 2 / September 1996
- Ray, R (1998) 'Women's Movements and Political Fields : A Comparison of Two Indian Cities' Social Problems Vol. 45, No. 1 (Feb., 1998), pp. 21-36
- All India Women's Conference: http://www.aiwc.org.in/http://www.aiwc.org.in/
- History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990 (by Radha Kumar)
- Vandan Shiva's Organizational Website: http://www.vandanashiva.org/http://www.vandanashiva.org/
- Organizing For Social Change, Third Edition (A Midwest Academy Manual for Activists): http://www.midwestacademy.com/