

A Reaction to Some Children and Women Concerned with Social Evils

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Abstract

Social evils are such cases for which the moral fabric of the society and its cultural growth is affected and checked seriously. It harms the society both directly and indirectly. India, thickly populated by economic and literal back world people has taken the burden of number of the common evils like caste supremacy, dowry system, gender inequality, child marriage, child labor, etc. Times to time social reforms are essential for the growth of the society which is possible by finding some means to get rid of such evils. In the past many attempts have been taken in different ways. Though some improvements are witnessed in some corners but yet many more changes are required. The paper is an attempt to analyze a few such the cases of evils concerning women and children focusing on a fresh method of bringing reform on those fronts.

Keywords

Child marriage, Child labor, Gender inequality, Sati, Dowry System, Human Rights.

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Social evils are problems that both directly or indirectly harm a society and its citizens and are seen as morally dubious or problematic. India, thickly populated by economic and literal back world people has taken the burden of number of the common evils like caste supremacy, dowry system, gender inequity, child marriage, child labor, etc. are examples of common societal ills. Social reforms are essential for the growth of society and the people because of the social ills and superstitions that have affected the society for millennia. Additionally, in the past, religious penalties were placed on the socially backward aspects of Indian cultures, such as the caste system and gender inequity. As a result, reforming religious practices is also important.

Men and women in India are granted equal rights under the constitution. But certain social ills that are pervasive in the society tend to hinder the prosperity of the nation. India is a country rich in customs and civilizations. Because of the societal ills, many traditions that were established with good intentions now have assumed a worse shape. Eliminating all social ills is crucial for the growth of the nation. Many reformers and socialites, including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, and others, have battled against them. All of them have successfully worked to eradicate several social ills from society, like the sati system, child marriage, etc.

Social Evils Relating to Children

Child Marriage

Child marriage is the social ill that endured throughout society. The Hindu tradition of marriage seems does not exist in anyplace else in the world. Girls were often married between the ages of three to ten, which prevented them from having the chance to enhance their physical or mental health. One misuse of this tradition occurred when the woman was ignorant about marriage and its obligations. Due to the mother-in-law's and other relatives abuse, her life in the new setting became terrible. As a result, the girl child experienced pain from the moment of her birth. She suffered as a female child, as a child bride, as a child mother, and often as a child widow.

Child Labour

Our civilization is cursed by child work, which is also a crime against humanity. Child work is mostly caused by poverty across the globe, however in India, society, parents, the government. Children who are below the age prescribed by law if work is taken from them, then it will be considered as child labour. If we speak of child labor in the common language that the wages which are made to the

children. The work that is done by the children comes under it. The age of children has been fixed by Article 24 of our constitution. In which it has been said that if any work is taken from children below the age of 14 years in a hotel or in a tea shop or in any factory, then it is a punishable offense and whoever does this work. Despite the fact that the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act of 1986 recommended fair working conditions for children engaged in dangerous employment, there is no improvement in the matter.

Child labor affects the health of children. This in itself is a curse. A child has a dream that he should go to school, do sports, do a lot of events, etc. But if instead of all this, he is left to work in a factory, a shop, etc. what would happen to that child's dream? Child labor remains a stigma in our country even today. Even after so many years of independence, today the children of India are not able to live well. Working in childhood is a very frightening situation for any child.

Reasons behind Child Labour

Poverty: Poverty is a very important reason for promoting child labor. When people are poor, they feel that somehow the family gets minimum food by some means.

Orphan-hood: Orphan children who do not have parents to look after their lively hood. It becomes their compulsion that they can go somewhere and do some work to meet the need of the stomach.

Population Growth: If we look at the population growth, then this is really a reason for promoting child labor because the huge number of members in the house need a huge amount of food materials to consume. If it is not there then the requirement is fulfilled by the labor of the children of the family also.

Lack of free education facilities:- Due to the lack of free education facilities, children are forced to work.

Social Evils Relating to Women

Gender Inequality

In India, gender discrimination is not a particularly recent occurrence; it was present throughout the ancient period as well. In contemporary culture, prejudice against women comes in many forms. They continue to feel unsafe in our society. Gender discrimination also includes the denial of equality, rights, and opportunities as well as any kind of repression based on gender. Women make up half of the world's population. And of those women, two-thirds are illiterate.

Men and women were seen to have quite distinct roles in society; a woman's place is in the house as a wife and mother, while a man's place is in the

public realm. It is true that by the end of the 18th century, intelligent opponents of patriarchy—the dominance of males over women had surfaced, and by the end of the 19th century, the fight for women’s right to vote was well underway. Only a tiny fraction of individuals still believe that women should be submissive to males in the twenty-first century. There are still many various types of gender disparities. Sons are preferred above girls in Indian culture. In a family, the birth of a boy is often celebrated with joy; in contrast, the birth of a girl is widely lamented and seen as a burden in life.

Inequality between men and women is prevalent in the workplace, in education, in food distribution, in health care, and in decisions about reproduction. There is gender imbalance in education, work, and health in many emerging nations, including India.

The Major Reasons

Adoption of Patriarchal System: In Indian culture, a woman’s place is primarily at a low profile because of the adoption of a patriarchal system from the very beginning. As a result, women were oppressed and subject to discrimination in numerous facets of social life. The issues that women confront, including dowry, mistreatment of the daughter-in-law, beating the wife, illiteracy, employment discrimination, and social exclusion, are significant in the patriarchal system.

Illiteracy and Education: In India, the patriarchal system is supported because of the dominance of the illiterate and uneducated masses. The rate of increase in literacy has helped in diminishing the inequality in a gradual process.

Sati Pratha

No more it is an important issue. But it had a very tragic past. The Sanskrit word “Sati,” means “virtuous wife” in its literal sense. It leads to the understanding that widows are to commit suicide by setting themselves on fire on the death of their husbands. The widow has no right to live life after her husband’s death. Before the British government banned sati by legislative action, Sati was not treated as a murderer. Luckily no more news of such occurrences after 1983 (three instances recorded) in India.

Dowry System (*Jautuka Pratha*)

The tragedy linked with the dowry is still a very powerful social evil in India. Dowry deaths are alarming news even today. According to patriarchal ideas and conceptions of women’s status in Indian culture, dowry and violence associated with it are all intimately linked. Marriage was reduced to a basic business transaction where making money becomes easier. In this process, while the female kid became

a financial burden, the male child became an additional source of income for the family. It is one of the most unfortunate treatments to women class and such evil should be wiped out soon.

These social evils are very old in our Indian cultural tradition. After the consciousness of human rights, the fight against the social evils is seen in the light of the violation of the human rights of children and women. Many steps have been taken both by the international bodies, the Governments and N.G.O.s to check the violation of human rights of all sorts.

It is seen that the Government of has passed several laws prohibiting child labour including and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986. The Act prohibits any type of employment of children below 14 years of age in specific hazardous occupations. The Juvenile Justice Act (1986) superseded all existing legislation related to children in different states and Union Territories. The Act suggests the creation of Advisory Boards and the establishment of State Children's Funds. The objective of such a fund was to protect the ill future of children and to provide educational and rehabilitation facilities for neglected children. "In 1993, the Union Government set up a National Authority to eliminate child labor and provided rupees 850 crores (US\$ 185 million), which aimed to benefit two million child laborers, by undertaking measures on education, poverty reduction and awareness creation."¹ It is not my purpose to present the list of the steps that have been taken to check the evil of child labor but to say that even if such steps are taken the evil that exists may be with lesser magnitude.

More sensitive is the case with the evils concerning women. With the dawn of the nineteenth century in the Western world strong voices were raised against the oppression of women in various ways. The popularity of feminist programs gathered much momentum in the form of several waves. With two significant goals, namely, the women's equality movement and women's liberation movement feminism advocated in support of the rights of women and of their social, political and economic equality with men.

It was claimed that the biological distinction of sex has nothing to do with the political and social life of women. In the second wave by the influence of American writer, Betty Friedan through her writings,² the emphasis was attached on women's liberation from their domestic confinement. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) came up against many evils against women to safeguard their rights. The distinction on the ground of sex is found in the Article 2 of the UDHR. Subsequently, seven primary treaties have been adopted on human rights

based on which seven committees have been formed. CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) was formulated to prepare reports to fight against the evils. Full status to women's rights as human rights was given in 1993 through the Vienna Declaration (The World Conference on Human Rights Vienna). India's admittance of such a declaration is very much clear. In spite of all these a survey report reflected in a newspaper, after fifteen years of Vienna conference, in India that the percentage of girls who are forced to marry between 15 to 19 was 46%. Out of those married girls in their minor stage, 16% are also forced to become mothers soon after their marriage. In the past *sati pratha* has taken many valuable lives and *jautuka pratha* is still taking lives. The tragedy is that in the evil of *jautuka pratha* women are found to be very much involved. I am very much in agreement with the suggestion of Singh that "A comprehensive movement has to be activated to transform the cultural values and institutions that negatively affect girl children."³

Epilogue

While thinking about the removal of the social evils from the society we are always highly dependent on the administrative sources of the state or the center. It is usually taken for granted that there are several laws to check such evils. It is the lookout of the state authorities to safeguard the laws. Out of this line of thinking the consideration follows that:

If someone violates the concerned law then he/she will be punished by the court of law. So it is expected that people will refrain from such acts fearing being punished by the court of law.

But if such an attitude would have followed sincerely then long since the society would have been a good society being free from the evils. Of course, it cannot be said that there is no effect of the laws or depending on laws is not the proper attitude. There have been some effects of the laws for which the repetition of evils or the increase of evils might have been checked to some extent. Say, for example, the evils like child marriage and *sati pratha* have been reduced to considerable extents. But the Govt sources have failed to check the evils like child labor, female foeticide, caste gradation, etc. Here a question may be raised that why has remarkable success has achieved on some fronts and why there is a horrible failure on some other fronts? A satisfactory answer cannot be possible, because for the success or failure Govt, sources are not responsible. It is the realization of the mass from the standpoint of practical utility which is controlling the occurrences of the evils. So the rational conscience and the utilitarian considerations play a vital role in the prohibition or promotion of the evils.

The humble suggestion is that the issue can be better approached from the standpoint of practical morality. The necessary steps should be taken to bring refinement in the use of the moral sense or the right conscience by the people en-mass. The curriculum in the educational institutions should be designed keeping this idea in mind. Now a day it is seen that instead of educationists the political authorities are coming forward to suggest reformations in the curriculum of the university education also. Their motto is to safeguard the long life of their administration and win in future elections. Social interest is always secondary for them. So the expectation of the fear of the law by the general mass that to going against their utility becomes the hope against hope. In this respect in the past, the roles of social reformers are always found to be helpful. Let the educationists come forward to take the place of social reformers helping to develop a rational conscience of the mass so that in the long run there would be less of evils in the society.

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