



Customs Dominated Society: Specifically Custom's domination over women

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Abstract

The status of women in India has been subject to many changes over the time of recorded India's history. Their position in society deteriorated early in India's ancient period. The cultural construction of gender is conducive to generalized discrimination against women in all cultures. In present time discrimination against women and girls is not fully finished. This present study highlights how customs dominates women in Indian society.

Introduction

Custom can be defined as a crucial part of society which regulates our way of behaving. Every Society has its own customs to deal with. In other words, we can say that, it helps us to differentiate between different cultures and societies. It prevails from generation to generation. No one actually knows from where it originally originated. We can have some assumptions only regarding this. Some believes that it originated from the common consciousness of people. Many believes that they came into existence because of necessity, some said that it came into force because of imitation. A man's nature to imitate the action for a long time become a custom. Sometimes it connects with morality or the moral, the mean values which need to be followed to declare ourselves as a perfect being.

Meaning of Custom

Custom on the other hand, refers to the habitual or traditional practices and behaviors that are prevalent within a specific group or society. It encompasses the unwritten rules, norms, and conventions that govern social interactions and guide individual behavior in a given cultural context. Customs are often considered to be the collective habits and practices that have evolved within a community over time. They can encompass a wide range of activities, from etiquette and manners to social rituals and customary laws.

It's a whole way of living. It persist in every culture which actually guide the people, that how they should live, or the way they should behave within the society. Customs are an integral part of our society. You can

say that, it act as a set of rules which guide us to make us fit for the society. As no one knows from where it emerges, as the society develops the set of customs too increases. But the question is why almost all the customs are meant for women only? Why is it their duty only to carry the burden of it throughout generations? Customs are meant for us, but sometimes it feels that we are living for customs. Now a days, it appears that it start dominating us in someway. It starts dominating our mindset as well as besides our way of living, which actually hamper our critical thinking, which unable us to think the difference between right and wrong.

Sometimes our society use the tool of custom to dominate or to control the lives of women. Stories are build up to make women suspicious about their way of living. For instance, Vrat System. Why is it made for women only? Why in almost every Katha which suppose to be part of our custom, it is mandatory for women to bear the burden of it? Why these Katha's are not meant for men too? It like to encourage a sense of fear or doubt within a women mindset, if they will not follow the prevailing customs then they will have to face some bad consequences for that. It actually shows the orthodox mindset of people which still persist. We are thinking that we have developed, but still this chain of customs has bound us. We are still afar from the concept of social development.

Every religion has its own customs. Sometime we connect religion with custom to make it more authentic. We take the help of religious scriptures to prove our point that our customs which actually are man made are made up by God itself. We cannot doubt our customs because if we will do that, we will face God's fury and specifically for women, they have no right to put question mark because if they will do so then according to society rules she is unfit according to any social norms. If customs are of dire importance than how a man could be fit for all without following them? Although we are agree that, these customs actually bound us together but if it becomes a burden, which you need to carry, although you do not want to then you should leave it as soon as possible, otherwise you will have to carry it unwillingly throughout your life and its cycle will go on forever without any end.

C.K. Allen, **“Legal and Social Phenomenon growing up by the forces inherent in society forces partly reason and necessity and partly of suggestion and imitation.**

J.L Austin, **“Custom is a rule of conduct which the Governed observes spontaneous and not in pursuance of law settled by a political superior”.**

John Salmand, **“Custom is the embodiment of those principles that have commanded themselves to the national conscience as principles of Justice and Public Utility”.**

Literature Review

Vera (2023) reports on The Cultural Roots of Violence against Women: Individual and Institutional Gender Norms in 12 Countries. This study concluded that rigid traditional gender roles combined with a strongly patriarchal culture in legislation and institutions, supported by moral views legitimizing violent behavior, appear to be the fatal mix generating, maintaining, and reinforcing the cultural roots of violence against women.

Experience of childhood abuse or having witnessed marital abuse during childhood

Ajayi, C. E., Chantler, K., & Radford, L. (2022) in their study highlights The Role of Cultural Beliefs, Norms, and Practices in Nigerian Women's Experiences of Sexual Abuse and Violence. This study aims to explore if and how cultural beliefs, norms, and practices might contribute to Nigerian women's experiences of sexual abuse and violence.

Abramsky (2011) argued that alongside the frequent use of alcohol are considered key potential predictors of violent behavior against women at the individual level.

Indian Custom System

The structure of Indian society is known as "Pluralistic Society" because it consist of various languages, ethnicities, Caste Division and religions. This variety has a huge impact on the customs too. We are having variety of customs too. Every religion has its own personalized customs. These individualized customs helps us to differentiate between societies. We can relate customs to Etiquette too. As in Indian culture from touching the feet of elders to giving blessings to all are the part of customs which teaches us the etiquettes of behaving. It teaches us discipline etiquettes and moral value whenever we are exposed to the world.

Indian Vs Western Custom

Though western Custom are not bad but still we can find some contradiction between Indian and Western Customs from the very start. Western culture is more open in some regards in comparison to Indian customs. Indian Culture places greater importance on collectivism, family values and hierarchical relationships, whereas Western Culture emphasizes individualism, personal freedom and equality. For instance, an aspect of greeting someone, it is said to do Namaste or to touch elders feet but in western culture, they shaking hand or hugging each other is considered much appropriate.

But we must agree that despite of variety of customs and cultures, we all are together by the thread of customs. But we cannot deny that as the time passes our present generation is much impressed by the western customs. But we must keep in mind that it is not wrong to follow the right customs, no matter from what culture it belongs, but we must also be aware about the negative customs, which should not be followed. As every culture have good as well as bad customs too.

Domination of Customs on Women

It has been witnessed through all over the world that women are victimize on the name of customs and rituals. The Devadasi system, Sati and Niyoga (for the want of male child), Kanya Sulakam etc. were the part of customs which followed to oppressed the sound of women. Apart from these, there are more which still prevails.

1. Sending girl to in-laws after marriage and Dowry system

Right from the womb she has to face infanticide, as most parents in India prefer a male child for their family. It is because of the customs which said that daughter is not parents property from the very beginning of her birth,

specially in lower middle class Indian Parents think that it is useless to spend too much on girl because after all they have to send her to her in-laws house. They saw her as a financial burden because they have to give dowry too. That's why in most of the Indian Family, it is not a matter of happiness where a girl born.

2. Sexual division of labours

In Indian culture, from the very childhood they are mentally prepared that a women has to look after the household work and children while men would earn a living. Thus education is of no importance for women, though they perform well if they get opportunities.

3. Should be less educated

It is believed in some societies that if women will get education then they will start dominating men. And if somehow a women get job at sometime in their life then they have to decide to quit or to continue their job after marriage and child birth.

About a quarter of Indians say women in the country face a lot of discrimination

% of Indian adults who say there is a lot of discrimination against _____ in India today



Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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4. Purdah System/custom

It were originally Mughals who bought Purdah custom which later was adopted by Hindu and Muslim culture. It involves the seclusion of women from public observation by means of concealing clothing (including the veil) and by the use of high walled enclosures, screens and curtains within the home. Even in today, this custom prevails in almost every caste or creed of India. The Question is why is it meant for women only if it is consider as a veil of protection from public observation? Women too are the part of Society then why is she treated differently?

5. Marriage to elder men

In Indian marriage custom the bride should be younger to the groom. It is consider shameful if a woman married a man younger to her. But as far as man concern, there is no any compulsion for him. He could be double of age at the time of marriage.

6. Polygamy in Muslims Customs:-

According to the Sharia law, Muslims are allowed to practice Polygamy. According to the Quran, a man may have upto four legal wives only if there is a fear of being unjust to non married orphan girls. Some men only misusing this law just to fulfill their sexual needs. These polygamous marriages cause emotional breakdown as well as create economic and other hardships for women. It effect women's sense of self respect, self esteem and dignity as a human being.

7. Triple Talaq

It is a practice that prevalent in Muslim community that gives a free hand to husband to give divorce to his wife instantly by simply uttering "talaq" three times. Although the central government enforced the " triple talaq" law on August 1,2019. But still, such practices exist and being practised, which left no other choice to woman, but to only live subordinate to men.

8. Halala

Practice of forcing girls to sleep with another man in brief marriage before she can return to the husband who regards divorcing her. It is directly a sexual exploitation of women, in the name of custom. Why the woman need to pay the price for her husbands fault?

9. Sati or Suttee

It means " good woman" or "chaste wife". An Indian custom in which a wife immolate self either on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, or in some other way after his death. It shows the women devotion towards her husband. This custom is nowhere mentioned in Hindus Vedas, but still it was prevailed and practiced. On the other hand, if a married woman died, her husband was free to marry again. What kind of custom is it?, In which one human is bound to show her faithfulness towards her partner and the other one had no such rules to follow. It is a severe case of injustice to humanity. This custom was banned by Lord William Bantick, who became governor general of India in 1828. He helped Raja Ram Mohan Roy to suppress such practices. The act was made illegal and punishable by the court Sati regulation XVII A.D 1829 off the Bengal code:

10. Periods and untouchability

The score of untouchable in Hinduism is very vast. Women too comes under this category during her periods. According to the Vendidad (1604), in her periods ' should keep fifteen paces from fire,fifteen from water and three paces from a holy man'. Visiting a holy place is strictly prohibited during these days. Such stigma was explained in parts by Bhagavad Puran. The origin of this myth is often been linked to Indra's slaying of Vritras. It has been declared in the Veda that guilt of killing a brahmana , appears every month as menstrual flow as women had taken upon themselves as a part of Indra's guilt.Many girls and women are subject to restrictions in their daily life simply because they are manstruating. apart from that Vedas does not describe any terms or conditions for women to live during their periods.But still they are subjected to this forcibly.

11. Child marriage

The custom of child marriage was prevalent and still prevails in India. According to Indian law, child marriage is a custom where either men or woman below the age of 21 got married forcibly. According to UNICEF (2015-2016) report, Indian child marriage rate is 27%. According to our research conducted in 2009, rural rate of child marriage is three times higher than urban India. However, child marriage was outlawed in 1929, but still it exist in most of the undeveloped rural areas of India, in which small girls are forcibly married and are more likely to remain uneducated. They are more likely to experience domestic violence and become infected with HIV/AIDS. She is more likely to have children when she is still a child.

12. Widowhood

It's an another social evil, which was made to held women responsible for her husband's death. The effect of this custom was so severe that even the shadow of a widow was believed to brought ill luck. It was also believed that after her husband's death, the wife should pronounce all comforts of life and should wear a plain white sari as a sign of lamentation.

13. Devadasis

It is a Sanskrit word which means "female slave of God". Devdasis are usually young girls of 5 to 6 years of age. In this custom, it is supposed that these girls are married to God and they could not marry any being for their entire life. It was believed that Deva Dasi are dedicated to Goddess Yellemma. The older Devdasi duty is to convert the girl into a Devdasi before her puberty. Soon when the girl attends her Puberty, anyone from the community could come and take the child away. In return for sexual favours, the person will take care of the financial needs of the family. It is non another than the vicious face of this custom.

14. Last Rites, the Rights of men only

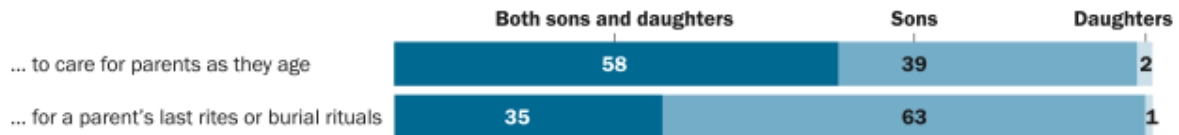
Last rites in Hindu traditions is the process of honouring the deceased. As Hindus beliefs in the cycle of life through reincarnation, this ritual also prepare the deceased for the life to come. Now, the question is who will perform these rites? It is observed that in Indian culture it is son's duty to follow this ritual. A daughter is totally excluded from this process because it is believed that if a daughter will do this, then the deceased will not acquire eternal freedom from the earthly duties. Although there is no such rules in Dharma Shastra. These were created by Brahman Dhama only. Daughters too can do the last rites for parents. This rule has always been present in our country, but Brahmanas Dharma do not allow this for their own interests.

In India, nearly two-thirds of adults say sons should handle their parents' last rites

% of Indian adults who say ____ to inheritance from parents



% of Indian adults who say that in a family, ____ should have the primary responsibility ...



Note: Daughters-in-law/Sons-in-law/Other/Neither/Depends/Don't know/Refused responses not shown. Muslims and Christians were asked about "burial rituals," all other respondents were asked about "last rites."

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India. See Methodology for details.

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Impact on women

Evil customs are problems that impact our societies members, specially women, either directly or indirectly. In the name of customs, there are many social evils or traditions that are in practice. Like everyone have the right of freedom to live their life to fullest, women too should have the privilege to do so. But some customs were made and still prevails to bound the women in the shackles of customs. It shows the inferior and subordinate thinking of society which consider women as inferior to men in some or another sense.

Suggestions

The scenario should be changed to uplift the status of women as well as give her a voice of herself in the prevailing world. For this purpose, we can have some suggestions like -

1) Education

Education can be proved as a crucial tool for this purpose, because it has the ability to change the rational thinking of a man. Through it, we can educate people as well as the women could be aware about her rights and could know the way by which they can protect themselves.

2) Financial Independence

It has been experienced that the division of labour on sexual basis is a part of injustice for women. Through educating themselves, the women can be financial independent, as well as can participate in the sustainable development of the society too.

3) Support of society

It can play a vital role in the development of women. If the society will stand altogether with a woman, then it can uplift her spirit to do something which can be beyond to anyone's expectations. It can give a boost to women empowerment.

4) Women empowerment programmes

The government should make some policies in this purpose. Side-by-side, it should process some programs too in favour of woman. Like Beti Bachao ,Beti Padhao scheme, working women hostel scheme, one stop centre scheme, women helpline scheme, Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK) etc.

5) Women in leadership

It has been proven by so many instances that a woman has a calibre to do whatever she wants to. But in spite of having the ability to lead, in some sectors still the women are subordinate to men, only on the basis of physical differences. This orthodox thinking needs to be changed.

6) Strict laws

Strict laws should be made so that a woman could feel safe and secure. Still some evils are prevailing in society which do not want women to gain her freedom. Some women specific legislation's are made for this purpose like 'The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act ,1986).

The criminal law (Amendment Act 2013),The sexual harassment of women act, workplace(prevention, prohibition and redressal act,2013),Protection of women from domestic violence act,2005.The commission of Sati (prevention act 1987) The dowry prohibition act,1961(amended in 1986),The immoral traffic(prevention act, 1956) and many more.

7) Asses to information

The women should be assessed to proper information about her rights, so that nobody can harass her in any form. In our society, the women suffers the most due to limited asses to information. And it is because of this some vulnerable elements of society gain the right of using her, in every sense. This scenario can be stopped by a proper assistive information.

Conclusion

Continuing failure to engage in gender, sensitive policy making,entrenched traditional, cultural mores, lack of engagement from women's civil society organisations, information assess and flows that actively exclude women and long-standing obstacles such as illiteracy, overwhelming household responsibilities, and immobility, all have played a role in creating gender bias in society which should be tackled properly. As far as customs are concerned, they were made for us so that we can learn the way of behaviour in regards to society as well as for themselves too. But if these customs start to become a burden and begin to dominate our rational thinking in which we find ourselves unable to think the difference between right and wrong, then custom should be replaced or demolish completely.

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