Abstract

Women are the basic pillars on which rest the entire society. However if the pillar is weakened due to negligence and mal treatment then it would take no long a time for the entire superstructure to collapse. In the patriarchal society of India where everything is divided on gender basis and inequality bases itself on race, culture, sex and standard, women have been subjugated to the subject of commoditization. This attitude and approach towards women as a commodity has led to an increase in the rate of violence against them touching the lives of both the urban and rural women folk. This paper looks into the condition of the tribal women of Satali tea garden who face the challenges of unemployment, trying their level best by migrating to the other developed parts in search of job opportunities whereby they get subjected to exploitation and domestic violence as well as gender violence. It also tries to look for an alternative measure to curb gender violence and bring about equality between the two sexes.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era where man boasts himself to be the most civilized animal on earth with the finest of electronic and mechanical equipment’s at his service, one must not forget the condition of the other 50% of the population termed as women. It does not require the eye of a specialist to study and understand the status of women in Indian in comparison to that of men. This does not mean the women of the western countries are and were highly better off right from the very
beginning. If we look at the suffrage rate, right from the Greek age, women were never considered to be equal to that of men. Plato’s concept of Communism of wives, if studied in the context modernity, would only mean the direct commoditization of women as an article to suffice the voracious thirst and lust of the men-folk and in particular of the wise rulers. Aristotle was no different to it. The relationship between men and women was seen by Aristotle to be that of master over slave with obviously the men howling themselves to be the masters over the women. Rousseau in his work Emile holds “women by nature to be inferior to men, but nature have made them cunning to compensate for their weaknesses. He favours complete subordination of women to men to avoid becoming emotionally dependent on women” which means that somewhere or the other men were and are dependent on women. The soft skills and gentle nature of women were taken by the men to be their weakness and the egoistic nature of the latter confined the former within the four walls in isolation.

2. Objective of the present article
The main focus of this paper is on the violence against rural women constantly struggling for their survival facing the brunt of the orthodox, conservative, male dominated society and yet searching for an equal platform for a decent living. This paper seeks to interpret violence of not just the larger scale such as murders and rapes but right from the grass root level. Gender violence means the denial by the society the basic right to equality between men and women. When the society fails to grant equal status to the two sexes in the practical sense of the term, then this would be the root cause of violence because here itself the society gets bifurcated on the basis of the biological difference between men and the women, failing to give due recognition to the fact that though physically unequal, men and women are mentally equal beings. There is in fact a strong chain of patriarchy that functions within a society to utilize and at the same time dominate women where sexual violence is used as an instrument to instil fear among women and control their activities. At the hierarchical apex the men stay at the top and enjoy power and command over the women.

3. Socio-economic condition of the location chosen for the present study
Satali Tea Garden happens to be one such case taken up in this paper that highlights the issues of exploitation of women, subjugation to violence in all degrees. Now, when we talk about violence it may not be interpreted just issues of bloodshed. Introducing the field, Satali Tea Garden is located in Hasimara in North Bengal, a zone very close to the neighbouring country Bhutan. Tea garden happens to be the primary occupation of the local people of the region, not to forget that it is not the only source of income. Satali Tea Garden is a fully operating and running tea garden where the workers get a daily remuneration of Rs. 95. The tea garden is a home to the tribal workers with a hand few of Nepali and some Bengali families living in the garden occupying a higher rank posts in the garden itself. This garden can be considered to be basically a tribal village. In spite of the tea garden being open, yet it must be noted that the tea garden alone cannot be the only reliable source of income. Unemployment happens to be a chronic problem in the area. Survey report indicates that from every family usually one member work in the garden. The job offered to them is that of Tea Garden labourer with a job hour of eight to ten hours. Usually during seasonal months the garden may offer job opportunity to some more people but usually it has a seasonal tenure and that too on contractual basis. In the practical sense of the term the meagre amount of 95 would be almost meaningless to feed a family of generally five to eight members. The day to day cost of
survival with extremely high price of the grocery items is beyond their affordable level. Though the company does supply a stipulated amount of food items to the workers at a comparatively subsidized rate, it must not be forgotten that the quality of the distributed items is very bad and that too the stipulated amount is too less to feed the stomachs of a family. Massive poverty is witnessed in the garden and the living condition of the workers is extremely painful.

4. The transformation of sex into gender
The attitude and approach of humans is not moulded and shaped in a single day and neither can it be considered to be natural to human instinct. In fact, it is a long process which begins in the family and affects an individual right from his childhood. It is a common scenario in an Indian family having a daughter and son to have completely two opposite types of toys. The son is showered with objects such as guns, robotic machines, masculine toy motor bikes, helicopters and road rollers etc. to imbibe the so called tough man like features in him. On the other hand the daughter is generally given dolls, teddy bears, cooking vessels, skipping ropes etc. to make her tender, submissive and fragile which according to the society is the typical nature desired out of a daughter who would later on grow up to be a daughter-in-law. The boy is infused with visions and ambitions of a doctor, pilot, engineer or a soldier while the girl is encouraged to aspire for tender jobs like that of air hostess, receptionist, teacher or nurse and knit dreams of getting married to her imaginative prince charming. This is the very first stage yet the most important one where sex is transformed to gender that is perfectly desired and designed by the society.

5. Violence against women
Talking about violence against women is indeed a critically responsible task. The word violence has different connotations and perspectives. Generally as each us is aware of, violence refers to misery, bloodshed, pain and atrocities inflicted upon a weaker group by a stronger group. Violence against women in the present hour has become a very common phenomenon. Newspapers and television channels are loaded with cases highlighting on the atrocities on women with various stages of violence against women usually rotating around molestation, rape, murder, dowry killing, honour killing, ousting of old women from the village on charges of witch craft etc. The rate of such violence are increasing day by day not to forget the fact that what we get to read, see and understand from the media is just a small percentage of crime that is taken up where more than 80% of the crime rates fail to get heard. An interesting phenomenon which has failed to find an explanation is that the stricter the laws against such crimes and the more such crimes get highlighted in the media- the more such crimes get increased. The 16th December Nirbhaya case stands to be an example of this as it was reported that the number of cases of violence against women increased after this particular incident. A prominent sociologist R.S Mukherjee has stated, “the more civilized man may claim himself to be, the more savage like are his activities.” The increasing crime rates against women definitely support this stand.

6. The role and condition law enforcement and media
If we take a close look on the issue of violence against women, then we get to see the hypocrisy and the politicization of the subject. It is usually the urban cases that find a place in the news columns and media attention, followed by candle light processions and the pretention of prompt action of the police to investigate the case. However the crime against women of the same degree
of violence or even more fail to find any place in the heart of the civil society or the pen of a journalist. More than 80% of the cases remain unheard of and unattended to because of the conservative society, negative role of the police and the victims’ inhibition and unawareness. Such news may be spotted in the newspaper but they fail to find a constant follow up which then get dissolved in the air leaving no traces of its presence.

7. The relation between gender and economic opportunities
Looking at the condition of the workers it would obviously strike the mind of a researcher that if the condition of an open and comfortably running tea garden is of this standard then what would be the condition of the people of those tea gardens where the management has stopped functioning. The best answer to this question would be to visit one such garden and understand it by oneself. Talking about Satali T.G., it is seen that women are equally active as the men folk in terms of hard work that they offer. Since Rs. 95 is too little to run a family, women generally move out of the garden, cross the Jaigaon border and sell their labour in the construction sector of the Bhutanese land. It would not be wrong to state that comparatively, in Bhutan, there are more Indian labourers than the native citizens. However, it would be wrong to expect equal salary for men and women where men are paid Rs 180 per day, while women in spite of delivering the same labour and effort fetch only Rs.130-150 per day. So the distribution of salary is also based on gender biasness. Women here do not take it seriously because here the issue of sustenance is much more important than the high ideals of equality. When enquired, Jhumam Ekka, one such labourer replied with sarcasm: “Yes, I have heard about these issues in the Television but they seem to look better in text books which are not for us, the commoners.”

8. Effect of the alcoholic patriarchy on women
The life of these ladies working as labourers is very hard. They usually get up in the early hours, prepare food for their family, clean, feed and then leave for job. After working the entire day they then get back home, complete their routine chores i.e. cook, feed, clean and after completing all these stuffs go to bed. However things are not so simple. The entire area suffers from a chronic problem of alcoholism. Though the tribal communities are well known for their rice brews and beers as a part of their culture, but if not controlled, these things may turn evil and ugly. The village suffers from the sickness of alcoholism, constant altercations, violence, theft, robbery and disgrace. A complete wastage of human life is witnessed in the area. Though the number of school goers is increasing day by day yet the majority of the population remains uneducated. It is interesting to see that young women with comparatively good educational degrees are heading the Panchayati Raj bodies, but still to what extend would they be able to control the socio political menace and bring about a change is itself a big question mark. The local women have staged their protests against the making or the sale of liquor in the area. However the menace has not stopped. Though the villagers do not prepare alcohol, but still it is found in plenty in the area. It is seen that the people of the close by villages generally inhabited by the Nepali community prepare local brews and then supply it to the tribal belt with the majority being addicted to liquor. The supply hour is also quite odd. They do not supply it during broad day light but instead chose the dead night hours of 2-4 in the morning and then silently get away without coming to notice. This addiction to alcohol has caused a lot of problem. Mention must be made about the fact that massive consumption of liquor right from the early morning hours by the men folk has destroyed many
families and if the problem is left unattended then very soon the identity of the tribal people of the area would be lost. This has affected the lives of each and every women of the area as it has invited pain, misery and hardships in their lives. Whatever they earn get drained away in alcohol as the physically strong men if denied money spare no chance in snatching it away. They have no choice left but to get subjugated to the decision of their men. If one closely studies the reason behind the habit of alcoholism then it would be wrong on their part to blame the universe alone for their condition. Frustration happens to the primary cause behind their habit. It is seen that psychologically, the people are incapable of expressing their opinions and view points with the inner voice of demanding proper treatment as individuals, because of which they resort to alcoholism where women are the primary sufferers. In spite of their efforts to earn they do not get the required respect in the family. Cases turn ugly when they deny their husbands their hard earned money to be spent in alcohol. Women of the area have been subjected to domestic violence and beatings, sometimes due to anger and at times due to frustration. It is here that women are subjected to commoditization. When they resort to police action, instead of getting a welcoming response, the police first and foremost explain the pros and cons of filling a case in the police. In fact it is seen that the police generally discourage the victim from doing so by stating that if a case is registered then the victim must run to the police station many times, as and when desired by the court, followed by the possibility of breaking up the marriage. This instils fear among the victims because the breakup of a marriage would mean a social stigma. Without understanding the real issues they come back home making it even more comfortable for the husband to flaunt off his tantrums. Hence the police are equally involved in de empowering the women of the area. Though at times the Panchayats may interfere yet usually they stay out of such issues considering it to be a personal issue between the husband and the wife. Hence, the violence against women of the area is increasing day by day.

9. Lack of awareness and literacy
Illiteracy happens to be the other important cause behind the backward condition of the women of the area. Women move about being exploited from all degrees and fail to realize their rights and duties because of the lack of education and awareness programmes. In spite of being a very sensitive zone with strict army and BSF vigils it is quite interesting to note that there is a complete lack of Non-Governmental Organisations and other voluntary organizations who could work for the betterment of the people of the area.

10. The probable way out:
Vocational trainings should be started in the area so that both the unemployed men and women can find job opportunity to sustain their livelihood. This would definitely decrease the level of frustration amongst the people and help improve the condition of women.

11. Conclusion
The government through its organized bodies should, in my humble opinion, initiate constant and powerful counselling courses so that the people get an opportunity to improve their condition and in turn save the community itself engendered by alcoholism. The most vital step that the government must take in this course is to increase the wage rate so that the economic condition of the plantation labourers irrespective of their geographical location gets improved. These issues
should have to be redressed as soon as possible, and if they are left unattended to might eventually fuel socio-political unrest, the beginning of which we already are bearing witness to throughout the nation.

References