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Empower Women: Empower the Nation

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Introduction

"To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior: Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?"

Mahatma Gandhi

Nation building requires commitment. In his Convocation Address at the 32nd Convocation of Shri Satya Sai Institute of Higher Learning Anantpur on November 22nd, 2013 Sam Pitroda Advisor to the Prime Minister said "Building a Nation is very complex, very different. It requires different kind of parameters, a different mindset." For India to be a powerful nation it is necessary that all its peoples are empowered. All of them should get equal rights, opportunities and importance. Nation Building with reference to India can't be achieved if we ignore 48.46 % of its female population. We cannot dream of Jabalpur being a developed city if we ignore the female population which is about 48 % of its overall population. According to National Population Register data of Census 2011 in India our population is 1,210,193,422 of which 623,724,248 are male and 586,469,174 are female. Thus in India 51.54 % is the male population whereas 48.46 % is the female population. According to official census 2011 released by Directorate of Census operations in Madhya Pradesh, Jabalpur has a population of 2,460,714 of which 1,278,448 are male and 1,182,266 are female. Thus in Jabalpur 51.95 % is the male population and 48.01 % is the female population.

In the 21st century we talk about equality between women and men in all fields, but it exists in papers only. If India is to be a developed Nation by 2020 as our former President envisaged we need to understand the need of the hour that is empower nation by empowering women. "Gender inequality holds back the growth of individuals, the development of nations and the evolution of societies to the disadvantage of both men and women. Gender issues are not simply talking about women's issues.

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Understanding gender means understanding opportunities, constraints and the impact of change as they affect both men and women". Sen (1993) defines empowerment as "altering relations of power...which constrain women's options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being." For Batliwala (1994) empowerment is "how much influence people have over external actions that matter to their welfare." Kabeer (2001) defines it as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." Hence, control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial, Kabeer 1994) and ideology (values, beliefs, and attitudes, Batliwala 1994) is one of the most important dimensions of most definitions. The second dimension shared by most definitions is women's agency, i.e., that women themselves have a right to make choices and should be involved in determining which choices make the most sense for them and their families (e.g., Kabeer 1999). Third, since empowerment implies a move from being without power to having power, most definitions also imply that it is a process that involves change over time. Finally, empowerment is also understood as outcome, such as improvement in education, health, and economic and political participation. Very often, however, women's empowerment and gender equality are used interchangeably. While they are related, they are not the same. Gender equality is about women's status relative to men while women's empowerment is about women's ability – in an absolute sense - to exercise control, power, and choice over practical and strategic decisions (Grown 2008). But then gender discrimination and all the issues that affect status and wellbeing of women in the society will thereby affect all the factors of women empowerment.

Strategy of the Study - Survey

In order to understand the views of youth and the factors responsible for gender discrimination and the wellbeing of women in the society at large; and to reveal the need of women empowerment, a survey was conducted. The survey work was based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that situation based questions were framed, these questions were from four different areas of life situations i.e. Gender Discrimination- in the family situation , Gender Discrimination- A Result of Culture and Belief System, Security of Women- Public places and Women – in Society.

The questionnaire was answered by 208 students of both genders i.e. male and female at the undergraduate level (age group 17-21 yrs) and at the postgraduate level (age group 21-23 yrs). Students of two institutions of Jabalpur namely - St. Aloysius'(Auto.) College and Govt. Model Science College participated in the survey. The questionnaire was circulated among students of different sections of the society. The collected data was tabulated and analyzed.

Questionnaire -

Gender Discrimination: Family situation

Question number 1, 2 and 4 were based on prevalence of gender discrimination at home. Questions were based on situation in which priority is given to either girls or boys at home. An average of 168 students expressed their views.

Gender Discrimination: A Result of Culture and Belief System

Question number 5 and 7 were based on the theme that our culture and belief system is the root cause of gender discrimination. An average of 203 students expressed their views.

Security of Women: public places

Question number 6 and 8 were based on how secure girls are in crowded public places and in public tranports. An average of 198 students expressed their views.

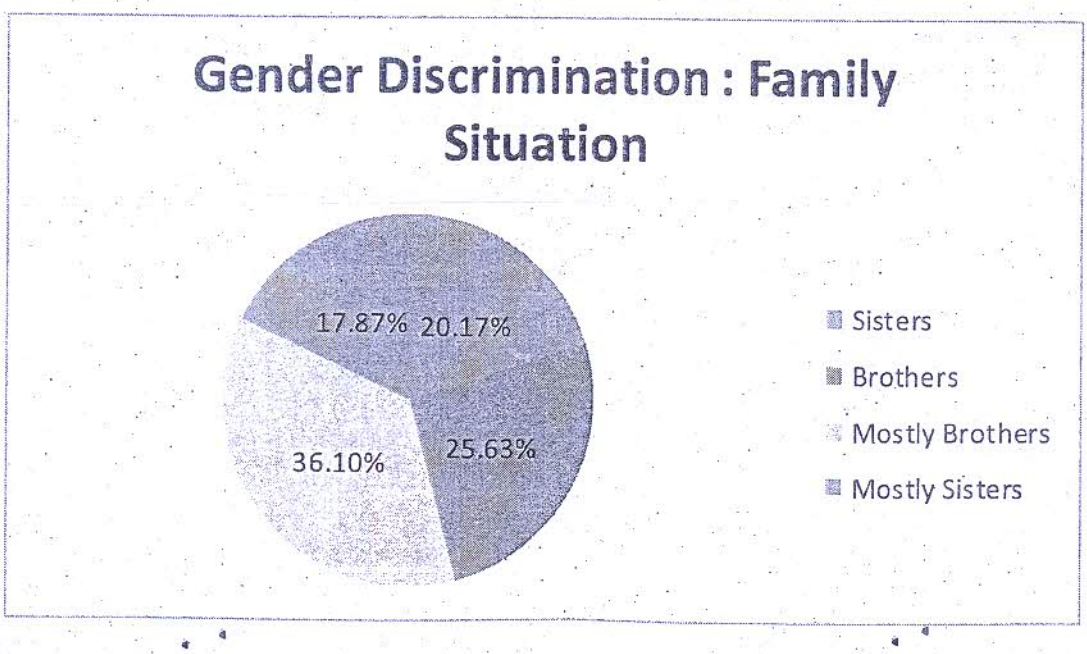
Women in society

Question number 9 and 10 were based on how secure girls are in our society. An average of 171 students expressed their views.

All these data collected were tabulated and graphically represented as –

Table 1: Student's Views - Gender Discrimination: Family situation (Q1, 2 and 4)

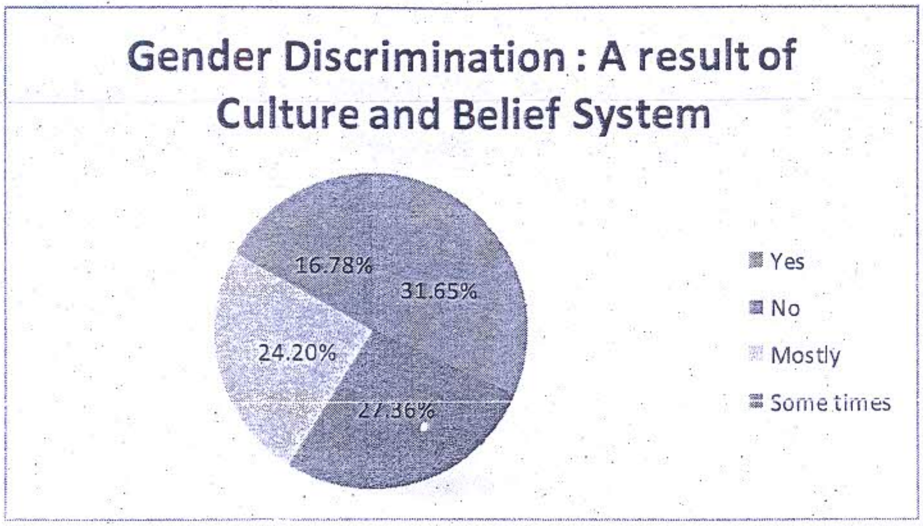
Sisters	Brothers	Mostly Brothers	Mostly Sisters
20.17%	25.63%	36.1%	17.87%



Graph I: Gender Discrimination: Family situation

Table 2: Student's Views - Gender Discrimination: A Result of Culture and Belief System (Q5 and 7)

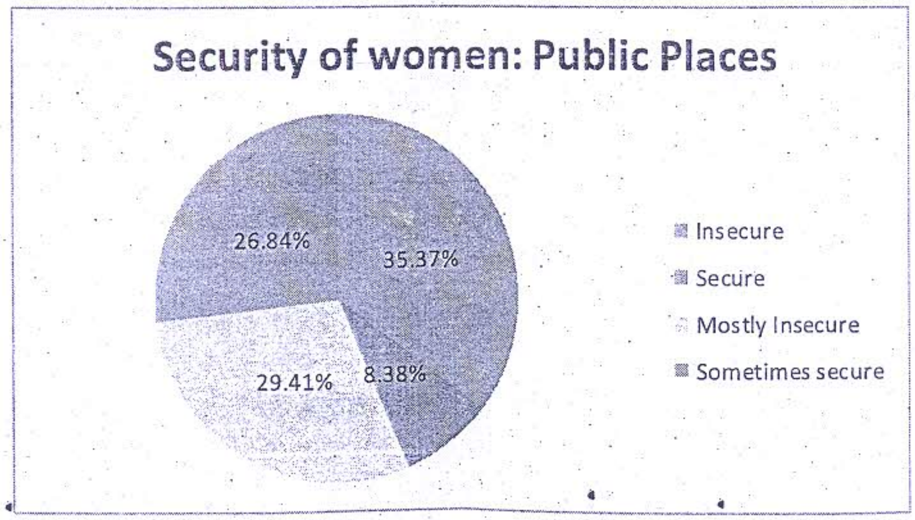
Yes	No	Mostly	Some times
31.65%	27.36%	24.20%	16.78%



Graph II: Gender Discrimination: A Result of Culture and Belief System

Table 3: Student's Views - Security of Women: public places (Q6 and 8)

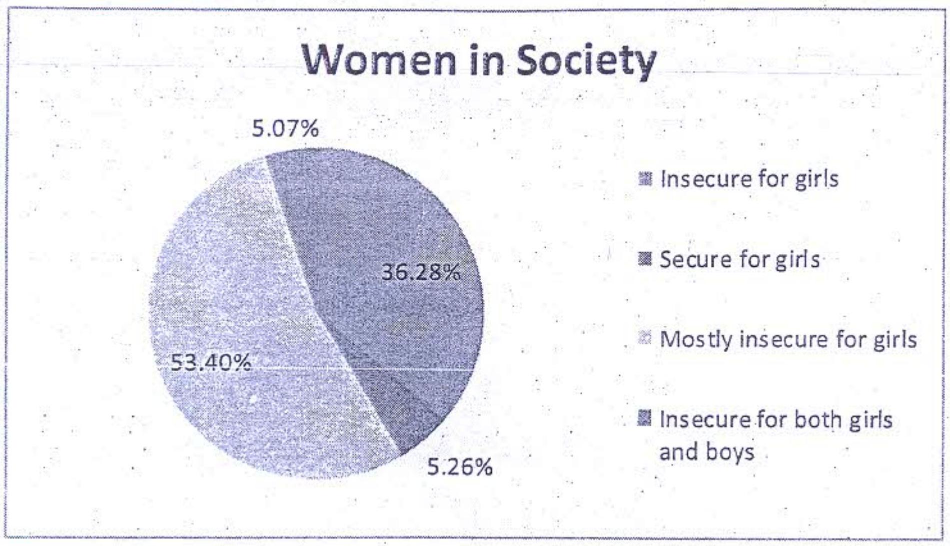
Insecure	Secure	Mostly Insecure	Sometimes secure
35.37%	8.38%	29.41%	26.84%



Graph III: Security of Women: public places

Table 4: Student's Views - Women in society (Q9 and 10)

Insecure for girls	Secure for girls	Mostly insecure for girls	Insecure for both girls and boys
36.28%	5.26%	53.40%	5.07%



Graph IV: Women in society

Analysis

The analysis of the data clearly reveals that though India is on the threshold of being a developed nation, yet nearly 50% of its population (female) feels that they are discriminated are not free to do what is constitutionally their right, and still does not get the due which is rightfully theirs.

Graph I- reveals that women at home are the second citizens and are visibly there only for the smooth running of the home whether at the financial front, raising children, providing physical and emotional stability to all the family members. Yet when it comes to taking important decisions she is excluded, the fact may be because she does not know how to. The question is why? Is she confident if not why?

Graph II – clearly shows that one of the reasons for the discrimination is our belief system. Not that there is any thing wrong with it, but what we forget is that we are in the 21st century where the woman is not confined to the home but is out there competing, complementing and collaborating at every step with her counterpart. Beliefs are made by happenings; happenings are not the same and therefore a need to reorient our belief system. Culture is what we make which leads to prosperity, peace and development of all.

Graph III – the divine has created man

and woman in his image and so any thing in nature of divine is to be revered. But the fact is that the woman is exploited, used and manhandled. The country of goddesses finds woman feel insecure and scared at public places, which de-escalates her confidence and dignity.

Graph IV- The position of women in the society is not enviable. From Sita of Ramayan to Jyoti (victim of 16th Dec) finds any commoner humiliating, exploiting and defaming her.

Views and suggestions of students

1. People think that only boys can look after their family and lead the generation forward. So boy child is preferred by most of the parents in our country, but both girls and boys have equal chance to live. Now a days even funeral pyres are being lit by elder daughters. Society should not create discriminations. Both the genders are equally important and they should share equal rights.

2. Earlier Indians considered a girl child as a burden but now their views are changing. Girls stand at par with boys in every field, so they should also be equally respected and loved as boys are.

3. The cultural rituals and rules are made to inculcate love, respect, equality and sense of responsibility. So the way we understand them are not always true. It's not the culture and ritual but Good Work and Character of a man that leads to the path of heaven. As you sow so shall you reap. Children are part of their parents so a girl and a boy should be equal in eyes of parents. God is father and mother of mankind he will also think the same. Urban society understands it but middle class families and rural society still misunderstands the fact. Education is the only way to bring uprisings and change the mind set up.

4. We live in a male dominating society "The main stream is the male stream". The system should be changed; it's the need of the hour. Instead of words we should practice the gender equality.

5. It's a common belief rather a myth that female are not emotionally strong and courageous enough, they cannot handle situations and responsibilities as males can. It has been seen that boys leave their parents but girls always care for their parents even after their marriage at the same time they also care for their own family.

6. India is a country whose population of women alone is more than the total population of many other countries, but it fares low where their treatment is concerned. The number of sexual abuse and domestic violence cases against women clearly shows that women in

india do not enjoy even basic human rights. Girls are not allowed to go for higher education instead they are forced to get married. They are even not allowed to go where they like or make their own choices. Girls are sacrificing their desires. Both the genders need to share equal opportunities, rights, education and freedom. But then some restrictions imposed on girls in such a country is a must for their own welfare. Strict government laws and regulations should be made to stop violence against women. Programs for public awareness and self-defense should be conducted in schools as well as colleges.

7. The younger generation has forgotten their culture and etiquettes so certain boundation on both girls and boys are needed. We need to correct and guide both the genders to save the future of our country.

8. To change the society, changes should be made in our own families by treating girls and boys equally. Boys should be taught how to respect women. Women should come out from the protective environment of their near and dear ones else they will not learn to cope with different situations and this will rather complicate the situation. Women should learn to speak out the injustice done to them. Lady police should be there in public transports and places.

9. This survey is a good social act that will make people to think about current situations and discriminations girls are facing.

Conclusion

Rights and privileges of women in India according to Indian constitution are - Equality before law for women (Article 14), The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)), Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16), The state to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39 (a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39 (d)), To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A), The state to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitations (Article 46), To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51 (A) (e)). But the above data reveals that women are still deprived of these basic rights.

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