

SOCIAL RULES AND SELF ESTEEM OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

There is a quote from Elizabeth Gilbert's Eat, Pray, Love; "You are, after all, what you think. Your emotions are the slaves to your thoughts, and you are the slave to your emotions." Expanding our personal boundaries and breaking gender stereotypes can surely enable us to be examples of positivity and confidence. The women of the present generation have generally received higher education than the women of their preceding generation. There have been far reaching consequences in the economic status of their families. Self-esteem refers to how you feel about yourself overall; how much esteem, positive regard or self-love you have. It's not a quality that changes very much since it is related to a broad sense of personal value or self worth. People with high self-esteem tend to see the universe as a pretty friendly place. Self esteem adversely affects physical and mental health. The clinical literature suggests that low self esteem is associated with depression, hopelessness, and suicidal tendencies which can further lead to attempt of suicide.

INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained and deep-rooted. Most Indian parents even today expect boys to be successful in the material world ('taking the family name forward') and girls to 'dutifully' meet role expectations of being a good daughter, the perfect wife, giving mother and sincere team member. As an outcome, Indian women tend to seek approval from significant people in their lives and suffer from self-induced guilt on claiming their space. Only a few women network, experiment with new behaviours, proactively seek opportunities and negotiate salaries all of which are associated with being confident. The study by the American Association of University Women was refuted by subsequent studies using large samples and better measures of self-esteem. One study of over 100,000 individuals found that girls' self-esteem does not fall precipitously at adolescence. And although girls are more anxious about their appearance than boys, there are no differences between girls' and boys' self-esteem in academic matters, and girls have higher self-esteem than boys in moral-ethical matters, or how they feel about their behavior. Society generates self-views and opinions based on the feedback from others in their interactions or relationship. It is stated that positive interaction leads to high-self esteem and negative interactions are judgmental; therefore, self-esteem suffers. Women are less positively appraised in comparison to men. Women are usually expected to adapt various qualities like tolerance, flexibility and socially ascribe submissive gender role, which led to reduce self-esteem. Indian

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A 1991 study by the American Association of University women announced that girls "lose their self-esteem on the way to adolescence." In 2002, the Girl Scout Council launched a program to "address the critical nationwide problem of low self-esteem among adolescent and pre-adolescent girls." Popular books claimed that before adolescence, girls have a range of interests and strong opinions about the world. As they enter dating age, however, girls lose their "voice" as they confront demands to become subservient and silent in order to be attractive to males. They stifle their opinions, personalities and interests and instead pretend to be what they think boys want them to be. This causes low self esteem. Other reasons for low self esteem are;

NOT LIVING UP TO EXPECTATIONS

We have grown up with stories of Sita and Savitri, that applaud the self-sacrifice made by women for the greater good of others. A recent research study published by AC Nielsen, titled 'Women of Tomorrow', reports that women in India (87%) are most stressed/ pressured for time.

SELF-BLAME

Women have a propensity to internalize these situations and attribute it to their inability, lack of skills or something that they could have done better in the context.

While on one hand, India has seen an increased percentage of literacy among women, and women are now entering professional fields, the practices of female infanticide, poor health conditions and lack of education still persisting still continue. Even the patriarchal ideology of the home being a woman's 'real domain' and marriage being her ultimate destiny hasn't changed much. The matrimonial advertisements, demanding girls of the same caste, with fair skin and slim figure, or the much criticised fair and lovely ads, are indicators of the slow changing social mores. If one looks at the status of women then and now, one has to look at two sides of the coin; one side which is promising, and one side which is bleak. The Government of India has taken up the problems of divorce, dowry, rape, etc., with a view to find solutions, which will ensure equality of women with men. The latest legislations and actions are not only stringent and effective, but court decisions and police actions are also in favour of the women victims. Now Women themselves have to build up their confidence and self-esteem. They can do this by few tips like:

Discovering psychological passion: The simplest way is to find the one thing you love doing and investing time and energy in it.

INVEST IN THE PERSONAL SPACE

In keeping with the demands of the various roles that women perform, stress inherently gets built-up impacting our sense of well-being. It is essential to indulge in things that give you little pleasures. Working out, finding a hobby, the occasional pampering and spending 'me' time with friends could be some simple ways to experience well-being.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

It is very important to celebrate past successes. Somebody has well said, *"When I am faced with a new situation, I reflect on similar problems that I have dealt with in the past and take some of those learnings forward"*. It's essential for women to be on a continuous learning curve, find a mentor who can act as a sounding board, have women role models who inspire us to be successful despite all odds. All these would help strengthen the 'I can do anything mindset' to deal with new / ambiguous or difficult situations with panache. Apart from this the law, judiciary and police is also ready to support women.

The rights available to woman (ladies) in India can be classified into two categories, namely as constitutional rights and legal rights. The constitutional rights are those which are provided in the various provisions of the constitution. The legal rights, on the other hand, are those which are provided in the various laws (acts) of the Parliament and the State Legislatures.

In 2013, the Indian government took positive steps to improve the lives of women and girls. Between 2011 and 2013, India improved its ranking from 113th to 101th in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report. However, inequality, discrimination and domestic violence are still pervasive, particularly in India's poorest states. Indian government data indicates that 35% of Indian women between the ages of 15-49 have experienced physical violence.

Following the Justice Verma Committee recommendations (established by the Indian government to review the capacity of India's institutions to deal with crimes against women), the Indian parliament passed the Criminal Law Bill, which aims to strengthen India's laws on violent crimes against women. The bill seeks to penalize public servants who fail to discharge their duty relating to sexual offences, and contains new penalties for acid attacks, stalking, groping and voyeurism. However, a number of provisions under this new legislation carry the death penalty as a sentence so, while we welcome a tough approach for such serious crimes against women, we continue to oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. The new law states that an offender can be sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than 20 years, but which may extend to life, meaning imprisonment for the remainder of the convict's natural life and fine. It has provisions for handing out death sentence to offenders who may have been convicted earlier for such crimes.

The law, for the first time, defines stalking and voyeurism as non-bailable offences if repeated for a second time. Perpetrators of acid attack will attract a 10-year jail. It also defines acid attack as a

crime besides granting a victim the right to self-defence. It also has provisions for imposing a minimum 10-year jail term for perpetrators of such acts. The President of India has accorded his assent to the Bill on April 2 (Tuesday) and it will now be called the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013."

The Indian authorities have continued to introduce fast-track courts and expand public safety measures, including the introduction of help-lines and the installation of CCTV on public transport. In addition, special police stations, staffed only by female police officers, have been set up to encourage women to come forward and report crimes.

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." — *Swami Vivekananda*

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