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India, Women's Rights

India: Suppression of Women's Rights

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it is attached to the rest of the world.” – John Muir. Connections are all over the world. It could be two objects that correlate with one another; like two people, a person and their passions, or a problem in one part of the world whose true cause is across the entire planet. Whatever it may be, connections are one of the most powerful forces in the world. Everyone and everything is attached to each other in some form. All it takes is one person to stand up and make a change for it to have a domino effect and become something huge. The women's rights movement is one example of an issue initially addressed by a few individuals that has quickly gained global attention. In India, women's rights have been on the rise; and is an issue with a direct connection to hunger.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency (2018):

India is home to 1.2 billion people. It is the second most populated country in the world, right behind China. India is in Southern Asia and is the largest country on that continent. The land area takes up over 3 million square kilometers. 60.5% of this land is used for agriculture. Some main crops that are harvested in India are: rice, potatoes, pulses, and cotton. Some environmental problems in India include air pollution, overgrazing, erosion, and desertification. All 4 of those issues are due to the abundant amount of land that is being used for their agriculture. Among other things found in India is a wide selection of natural resources. It is rich in coal, iron ore, and manganese. These resources are also some of India's largest exports. Hindi is the most common language spoken in this country, and Hinduism is the most practiced religion, with over 79% of the population practicing it. Depending on where in India one is, the climate can vary. In the south, one will find tropical monsoons and warmer weather. In the north however, one can expect to find cooler temperatures and even some mountains.

The average Indian family consists of around 5 members. According to the Statistics Portal 862.37 million Indian families have savings less than 10,000 US dollars. When having children, many families favor boys and will abort or give their babies up for adoption if they have a girl. Sumnima Udas (January 12th 2013); “300,000 – 600,000 female fetuses are aborted each year in India just for the sole purpose that boys are favored.” Parents usually shower their sons with more love and support than their daughters receive. Women are also often fed different foods that are not as good or nutritious because the males in the house get preferential foods. An average diet in India consists of a lot of vegetables such as onions, tomatoes, and garlic. Other foods consumed in India are chicken, fish, rice, makki ki roti (a type of bread), etc. Women are taught growing up that their role in life is to become wives and have children.

50% of girls in India are married before they turn 18; and most of these marriages are forced by their families. Domestic violence in an Indian marriage is not uncommon. Men are seen to have more power; so they receive nicer clothes, are sent to school, are given more attention, and are treated better than women.

The women's rights movement is tackling gender discrimination around the world and helping women gain their rights. The movement looks at a wide variety of problems like equal pay, equal access to education, agricultural rights, letting women be in charge of their bodies, the right to vote, and so many more things. First seen in all the way back in 1848, the first women's rights gathering held in New York; the movement has grown enormously since. Fast forward 171 years and the movement continues. Now spreading across the world; women are gathering, protesting, fighting, and helping one another out in a battle for their lives. The fight can be different depending on where you live. Here in the US we fight for equal pay but across the world some women are still fighting for the right to vote and be a part of their countries, while in another part of the world women are protesting their right to drive cars. It looks different around the world, but the goal is the same; to end gender discrimination and to allow women, and all people, to live

Not only is the movement empowering but it is also educational. Growing up in certain countries, the US being a good example, gender discrimination can be hidden or swept under the rug. Little girls grow up not realizing that they are being overlooked because their gender, and the overlooking does not stop there. It can be something as simple as not getting picked for the kickball team that can turn into not getting the job years down the road, all because a man is "preferred" for the spot. From our young ages discrimination is in play, however many do not realize it. The discrimination is not addressed, putting the idea that these things are normal in our society. The women's right movement calls attention to the problem and teaches us what discrimination could look like even in its smallest form. In other countries the problem is more obvious and is more severe.

It is no secret that gender discrimination is a huge problem in India. Male are looked at as being superior to women. In the Hindu doctrine, people who practice that religion are taught that women were made for men. Their jobs are to keep the men company, comfort them, serve them, and have their children. These beliefs cause many problems across the whole country, not just for women themselves, but also for so many other things that connect to them. According to The Hunger Project: 35.5% of females over the age of 25 attend secondary school in India. Due to the lack of education, HIV/AIDS rates are growing; teen pregnancies are more common; which lead to high infant mortality rates; and women lack access to health care. Women do 70% of the agricultural labor in their country, yet they make up for 60% of the world's population that is hungry. Because women in India are malnourished and unhealthy, it is hard for them to have healthy babies. Babies that are born from malnourished mothers are 20% more likely to be underweight when born and often die. In addition, only 7% of law enforcers throughout the entire country are women. The numbers do not lie. Women have it tough in India, and that is an understatement. However, with any problem, there are solutions.

One thing that could help women reduce hunger and gain their place in the community is microfinance. Microfinance is a process where microloans are given to poor entrepreneurs and small businesses that lack the access to banking and related services. Microloans can range from a few hundred dollars to a couple thousand. In South Asia, it is more common to see smaller loans around \$200. These countries face extreme poverty and are turning to microloans to try and help the problem. Stated by the National Public Radio, “In 2015, an estimated 125 million people worldwide – about 80% of them women – were receiving a total of about \$100 billion in microloans. . .” Women who want to start their own businesses are getting these microloans to help them get on their feet. Once they get a business up and running, they will be able to make their own profit, which they can use to buy food. This can help with not only their hunger, but their families as well. Most women spend all their income on education, healthcare, and food for their families. If they make their own money, they will be able to keep themselves and their families healthy, nourished, educated, and growing. Microfinance can be a big step for women to get out of their homes and fields, making their own mark on the community.

A way to make one’s mark on the community and own a business, which helps with food security in India, is letting women have a fair chance and access to education. Going to school and getting an education is the foundation for the rest of a female’s life. She has the opportunity to learn things that she could use every day. How to read, write, cook, sew, new agricultural practices--all these things can be learned in school and are very important life skills that will be beneficial for girls in their adult lives. Getting more women in India to attend secondary school will also help them obtain a steady job. This can help them make a good salary, which relates back to getting out of poverty and also being able to provide for themselves and their families. This will also give women power and will help them earn respect. Another way going to school can greatly help women and young girls is through sex education. If these women are taught at a young age to use contraceptives and to be smart about sex, they can prevent HIV/AIDS and avoid having kids at such a young age. Education and birth rates have a direct relationship to each other. If sex education is lacking in a part of the world, you will find that these countries are also the places with high birth rates, high infant mortality rates, and high HIV/AIDS rates. *“Let us pick up our books and pens, they are the most powerful weapons.”* – Malala. Giving women access to education will give them a voice. Education can teach women that they too deserve to be treated like humans. They belong out in the work force; they are powerful.

According to the Women’s Political Participation (2012):

An occupation that holds a lot of power is a government official. The Rajya Sabha is the Indian parliament. It has a maximum of 250 members. In 2013, only 11% the parliament’s seats were held by women. India has had one female president in their history. [Pratibha Patil](#) was elected in office in 2007 and served 60 terms (one-month terms). She left office in 2014. Having more women in power in India can greatly affect women’s rights and their food security. Also, voting can give women more power to choose officials who push for policies that beneficially affect them. If more women take part in the government, or the election processes, they will be able to have a say in their own rights. They can vote directly on problems that affect how they are looked at, payed, treated, discriminated against, etc. Having elected and influential women to look up to can also empower young girls to fight for their voice. Role models are very important when growing up. If we have women in powerful, influential positions becoming role models for little

girls, these young girls can grow up believing that they too have power and have a place in the world of politics.

Access to workshops and organizations can also teach women important life skills. Organizations such as The World Hunger Programs set up programs in Southern Asia to address hunger and poverty as well as show the men and women new, innovative ways to do tasks like farming and implementing new developments and ideas. Programs like this can greatly benefit food production in countries where their old ways are ruining their land and agriculture. In India, they are facing devastating problems to their land due to desertification and erosion. Because their livestock overgraze, their soil is degraded, and crop yields are decreasing. Programs can come in and teach farmers new ways to practice their farming techniques that will be better for the environment and more efficient in growing the crops. These kinds of organizations can also help people develop skills that they can use to get themselves a good paying job. Furthermore, these jobs will give them opportunities to afford food, provide for families, and take care of their health. By sending organizations into developing nations, men and women can learn ways to live better lives.

Women will be able to live better lives if they are treated equally to men. Equal access in education and the work force is a key component to food security for women. Another thing that can help women is equal access to agriculture. Having equal access to agriculture can help women's yields go up 20-30%, according to The Hunger Project: Women do most of the agriculture work in India, but still grow less crops than men. This is because they are not trained or taught as well, do not get access to the same equipment as men, and people prefer buying crops from men. Allowing women to have equal access to agriculture while also giving the same amount of support to women as men receive, like buying crops from women not just from men, will allow them to live stables lives and provide for their families. Making money, getting to places to buy food and necessities, being respected--all these things can happen if women are not seen beneath men. We are all humans, we all should be treated fairly and equally.

Overall, women's rights is a very important issue, not just in India, but all around the world. Microfinancing, education, access to equal opportunities, agriculture practices and organizations to teach them skills for a better life are all things women fight for every day. These solutions help with food security, environmental problems, and with everyday living. Women are people. The time to change is now. It takes one person, one voice, one powerful message to change the world. Women will continue to march on, and others will be inspired to join. As long as women are here, there will be a powerful voice speaking to all, fighting for rights and for food security.

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