

Invited Interactive Seminar Series “Human Rights and Women Empowerment” 06.07.17

Department of Women's Studies, Bharathidasan University organized an interactive seminar on “Human Rights and Empowerment of Women” for the students and research scholars on 06.07.2017. Prof. N. Manimekalai welcomed the gathering and explained how patriarchal system oppresses the women and girls, and how women are put to vulnerability from womb to tomb, right from denial of their rights to be born in the form of feticide to harassment and ill treatment in their old age. She insisted that the women must come forward and volunteer for, to recognize the changing genders be accompanied with changing gender values, which is missing. She introduced Ms. Mhairi from Bristol University UK. Mhairi showed a keen interest on understanding the impacts of **Human Rights** and **Women Empowerment** in an International Perspective, and the Status of Women in India. She paid the visit to India to learn more about the above two subjects which are prevailing in India. She shared the issues, the status of women in UK, how different the UK women are in terms of education and employment, the pressure that the women face in UK with peer group and social institutions.

Mr. Paul Azhagurasan, Director, Ford Trust, Karaikudi who accompanied Ms Mhairi spoke about the activities of the Ford Trust and introduced the subject of enquiry and the concerns of the visitor Mhairi. He shared the activities of the Trust and their interaction with most vulnerable, marginalized women and analyses how women put to sufferings, insisting the need for economic independency ensure by Self Help Groups. He also highlighted that the members of SHG are coming forward to demand the need from the State. The Trust also conducts skill training programmes to start small enterprises for sustainability of economic independency of women.

Ms. Mhairi shared the status of Women in UK. In her address she mentioned the women in UK also have gender discrimination and it is a myth that the women in the WEST are free from violence. Even though women are members of parliament, management and in leadership position, they are still expected to take care of the child even at their grown up ages and look after the household duties. Such pressures forced several women to give up work and choose to part time jobs. The children must be cared with the presence of the parents till 14 years of age and if they leave it with neighbours, otherwise, the parents will be penalized.

She shared her own mother's story. Her mother was an Engineer who had to quit her job to take care of the Mhari. So women are always put into the pressure of job vs child care where the motherhood force every woman to give up work due to lack of support in the family in sharing the responsibility or cost support system for babysitting. Most of the women in UK prefer teaching which still considered to help balancing home and career roles, she added.

Other group of women choose to part time jobs to manage the dual roles. So women engineer once become mothers their career pattern changes. She added that in UK there is No Caste System, No arranged marriages, Class system not formalized, No early marriage. Compulsory education, Social protection for children and single women, Women are in parliament but not able to voice out much.

She raised some questions and wanted to update the status of Human Rights of Women and Empowerment in India.

1. What do you think is the biggest Barrier for Female Empowerment in India
2. In what areas do you feel human rights are lacking in India
3. What are the most efficient methods to help empower women in India
4. To What extent do you think the government should help women? Should they leave it to local government
5. Do you feel women in your local area are empowered? Why and why not?

Ms. Geetha Chandran an Engineering Entrepreneur shared her experience where she spelt out that readiness to step out and ready to face challenge are the key to empowerment.

Faculty Members, Students and Research Scholars shared their views and spelt out the barriers for women empowerment in India.

Other issues and strategies emerged in the discussion for women empowerment includes education, employment, occupying leadership positions, etc. There were participants who differ on the above strategies have not helped in empowering women.

There is lack of awareness on women's rights. Though there is progress, still women are lagging behind what is expected from them. Discrimination exists in food, nutrition, etc. What is actually needed is attitudinal change and every body's involvement. The system is feudal culture, and social structure on which the caste and religion are remaining as super structure, which is governed by capitalist. Caste and Religion define different social norms and rules. Gender, caste, class, religion etc intersect and such intersectionalities be analysed. Caste is the fundamental unit based on this belief system, say religion, the social norms are being executed, through family system. India failed to eliminate the intervention of caste and caste never allowed the women to be independent. Their participation in legal areas is minimum or nil. They lack the constitutional and legal rights guaranteed. International conventions are just signed and not fully be implemented. Hence without understanding the pluralism of the country, bringing uniform civil code cannot be possible.

Ms. Jeyanthi, Field Investigator, Ford Trust shared the incident of a girl and boy, who was torched by the police man. Faculty members of the Department also shared how women employees are excluded in higher administrative position in the Higher Education Institutions like University even though women have eligibility, capability by the stereotyped male employees. Dr.S.Iyyampillai, Professor, Dept. of Economics also highlighted the attitude of parents from Minority Community of sending their ward to Minority institutions. Finally the session came to end by Mr. Paul Azhagurasan, Director Ford Trust Pillayarpatti thanking for the arrangements and concluding remarks

Participants also shared the incidents of violation of Human Rights, also spell out the strategies to overcome the barriers and the way to empower women by insisting to bring changes in their attitude, behaviour and mind set of every individual.

Lack of awareness on legal and constitutional rights must be done away with. Caste and Religious norms ruling the society through traditions and rituals must be analysed scientifically and addressed. The oppression of women, the marginalized must be analysed scientifically and understand the politics behind to address them. Caste, Religion and family systems remain as the root cause which must be uprooted. Education of the girls, training to face the challenges.

Integrate Gender Sensitization Education as foundation course on gender studies to schools and colleges. Caste discrimination at the school system be eliminated. Women should come forward to fight against the legal and human rights violations, including domestic violence, sexual harassment at work places, etc .50 percent reservation at the local body but no 33 percent at the parliament and it needs to be lobbied for. The elected women in parliament should speak on the issues of women at the parliament. Discrimination against SC/ST must be given up (the caste segregation at ICPS to PDS). In the higher education system Women representation in the decision making committees is poor or low. Women are not found in key positions of decision making. No Women minister in defense, finance etc and there is need to introduce women in such areas. SC/STs are not represented in several committees. Post globalization since 1980s had seen a peak of activism among the autonomous women's movement but now got weakened. Collective activism alone will help to improve the situation of women. Youth collective groups to be formed which is a necessity. The youth identity politics to be given up. Curriculum is corporate requirement based in the current context should be changed to the people need based. Education became commercial where the objective of education is no longer realized to be inclusive. The inclusive focus also have commercial component. Endogamous marriages must be given up slowly to do away with caste. The Human Rights convention and convention against torture and other such legal provisions must be implemented