

The Oppression of Women in India

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In India, as in all countries around the globe, violence against women occurs daily. Patriarchy plays a role in this violence. For some Indian women, the possibility of violence occurs throughout their lives, especially with changes in marital status. This article discusses several fatal forms of violence that some of the women in India experience. Included in this discussion of violence are the role of women's status, dowry, and the influence of Western capitalism. It is concluded that to combat violence against women, it is imperative that people work toward a global village where women are viewed as equal and valuable partners in society.

Today, in every corner of the globe, some women are denied basic human rights, beaten, raped, and killed by men. Their continued persecution is a conundrum for scholars. Why does this inequality and oppression persist? Advocates of women's rights have suggested that among other factors, the sociostructural parameters of the ideology of patriarchy serve to constrain and control the thoughts, movements, and lives of women. It is arguable that societies that appear to be heavily patriarchal—male-dominated, male-identified, male-centered—are the ones in which women's lives are the harshest (Johnson, 1997). These harsh conditions often include crimes perpetrated against women by men, including violence and rape. In this article, we will argue the theoretical position that violence against women in India is due in part to the patriarchal nature of that society.

AUTHORS' NOTE: We wish to acknowledge the extreme sensitivity of this issue. In the course of doing this research, we often struggled and questioned our position as researchers in presenting this culturally sensitive yet contentious issue. We hope that we have in no way demeaned the feelings of the people and cultures involved. Also, we would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of an earlier draft of this article and C. Benjamin for their helpful comments.

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The burning of women is one example of a fatal form of violence against women. In India, police figures indicate that in New Delhi, 2,755 women died as a result of dowry burning between 1979 and 1983 (Silver, 1985). In the state of Karnataka, there were 792 dowry deaths in 1987 and 922 in 1988 (Kelkar, 1992; Narasimhan, 1994). In terms of the geographic distribution of dowry burnings, some assert that they occur more prevalently in northern India, whereas others argue that dowry burnings occur throughout India, with a concentration in certain areas such as "Delhi, Harayana, Punjab, the Western Uttar Pradesh and the Saurashtra region in Gujarat" (Kelkar, 1992, p. 80).

Patriarchal forms of oppression manifest themselves in different ways. This article addresses some of the most extreme types of oppression: dowry, dowry death, and sati. We focus on India because of the degree of oppression and the extent of the literature available on dowry burning. However, it must be stressed that this type of violence occurs elsewhere in the world, such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. We will examine violence against women throughout the life cycle to demonstrate that some Indian women are oppressed throughout their lives by the rules, social mores, and values of their patriarchal society. This can be shown to be especially true when a change in the marital status of these women occurs. In addition to investigating the role of patriarchy in the creation and perpetration of the burning of women, we will also address the question of the role of increasing westernization. We will try to address whether westernization increases the violence through the exacerbation of capitalist greed or whether it alleviates it through the introduction of an individual rights-based legal system.

A QUESTION OF PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is "a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture embodied by everything from the content of everyday conversation to literature and film" (Johnson, 1997, p. 84). "At the heart of patriarchy is the oppression of women, which takes several forms" (p. 11). Patriarchy colors family, work, law, individual identity, and religion; in fact, there is not a single area that can escape the effects of patriarchy. Patriarchy must be recognized as one of the underlying causes of violence against women in India.

Examples that demonstrate that India is a society governed by a system where males hold the power include feticide, the disproportionate gender ratio, the fact that most women are not allowed to be employed, and the belief that from birth until death a woman's role is to serve men. It is recognized that patriarchy and the control and dominance of women by men have significant roles to play in the violence perpetrated against women. The patriarchal ideal is that a woman's duty is to serve her father, brothers, and husband for the entirety of her life; it is a sentiment lived out in many societies where women are subjected to spousal abuse daily.

COMPLEXITY OF INDIAN SOCIETY

India is a complex society with citizens from various social, religious, and economic backgrounds. Although this article will not discuss all aspects of Indian society, the key aspects contributing to the fatal forms of violence against women will be addressed here.

According to the 1997 *Demographic Yearbook*, the population of India was estimated to be 955.2 million people or one sixth of the world's population (United Nations, 1999). More than four fifths of the population is Hindu, more than one tenth is Muslim, and the remainder includes Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and people of other religious identifications (India, 1990). Although there has been a decline in the total fertility rate, the accompanying decline in the death rate and infant mortality rate during the past 40 years has not helped to reduce the population pressure (World Conference on Women, 1996). However, in spite of the improvements in mortality, women are still at a disadvantage in terms of survival, as the gender ratio remains disproportionately skewed toward males.

Although the Indian government has taken measures to improve the health of children, especially females, the death rate for girls aged 0 to 4 years is still higher than that for boys in the same age range (World Conference on Women, 1996). Life expectancy, which is a reflection of the overall health of the population, has risen substantially since the beginning of the 1900s. For the period 1989 to 1993, the life expectancy of women was 59.7 years and for men 59.0 years (United Nations, 1999). In other parts of the

world, the differences in life expectancies between males and females is usually larger than 0.7 years, with women living longer than men. One factor that may account for this unusually small differential in life expectancy in India may be the harsh conditions that women endure.

In addition, there are regional, caste, and social class variations in India that appear to be linked to the issue of violence against women (Miller, 1992). For example, several scholars state that dowry burnings occur more frequently in the northern parts of India and among middle- and upper-class households than in lower-class ones (Kelkar, 1992; Miller, 1992; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). The primary reason proposed for this difference is that in southern India, women are considered more (economically) valuable because they actively participate in agricultural production.

WOMEN AND LIFE UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF COMMUNITY

In Indian society, one's community and the approval of others are seen as two very important aspects of life (interview with Informant 1, November 1998, Toronto, Ontario, Canada). A community in India is not simply a location for a house, but rather an integral part of day-to-day life where a person's reputation is taken seriously. As such, the possibility of being ostracized represents a severe punishment (Deschamps, 1986).

The patriarchal nature of Indian society is seen quite clearly when one examines the role of women. For the most part, women are viewed and treated as inferior to men (Frankl, 1986; Gangrade & Chander, 1991; "India: Till Death," 1990; Narasimhan, 1994). As a result of this domination by men, women are economically dependent on men and have fewer choices in terms of occupation, education, and life course (Miller, 1992). From the day she is born until the day she dies, an Indian woman is expected to be under the control of a man and to serve him without question (Baig, 1988; Kelkar, 1992; Narasimhan, 1994). Female children are not as highly valued as male children, and females are often viewed as economic and social burdens. As a result of this low status and domination by men, some women in India are quite susceptible to abuse. Part of the reason they are considered a burden is because

of the dowry system. This will be discussed further elsewhere in the article.

Female children belong to their fathers until they are married, at which time they become the property of their husbands and are expected to be of service to them (Gangrade & Chander, 1991; Narasimhan, 1994; Puri, 1999; Shurei, 1997; K. Singh, 1994). If the husband should die before the wife, the woman cannot live alone, but instead becomes the property of her sons (Puri, 1999). Finally, for Indian women, marriage is the only socially acceptable life course option. As Vina Talwar states, "Remaining single means bringing disgrace on your family. A woman who doesn't marry is regarded as an object that has failed to find any use. There's no place for her. It is an attitude that leaves the girl and her family prey to extortion" (Frankl, 1986). Thus, if a woman does not marry, she and her parents will suffer socially. If a woman does marry and finds herself in an abusive situation, she probably will not return to her parents' home or divorce her husband because she and her family will be ostracized from their community. Although marriage is the only acceptable status for adult women, this constraint does not apply to men (Puri, 1999).

In India, marriage is not just the bringing together of two individuals, but the uniting of two families (for a thorough discussion, see Puri, 1999; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). Most marriages today continue to be arranged by the parents of the respective parties, although self-arranged or love marriages do occur (Puri, 1999). When a daughter reaches a marriageable age, parents play a pivotal role in the choice of her partner. The process of choosing a husband or wife begins when parents express to kin, friends, and possibly professional matchmakers that they are seeking a marriage partner for their child. Recently, newspaper and Internet advertisements have also been used as a means of searching for potential mates ("Greedy In-Laws," 1983; Puri, 1999; Stein, 1988). During the search, both families take into account certain traits of the potential mate. For example, the female's parents consider the status of the potential groom's family, the caste to which the potential groom belongs, his education and job prospects, and his general personality (Stein, 1988; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). If a match is made, marriage preparations, including the negotiations of a dowry, will commence.

A dowry "refers to the property given to the daughter by her parents and family to take with her into marriage" (Puri, 1999, p. 30). The giving and receiving of dowry have been part of Indian tradition, particularly among Hindus, for a long time. It is usually a one-way flow of goods from the bride's family to the groom's family that may continue throughout life, especially when important "firsts" occur (Stein, 1988). In an ideal situation, the woman remains in control of the possessions that came as her dowry, but it is quite possible that the groom and his family will assume ownership of the possessions. This lack of control over her dowry may mean that the woman has no economic collateral at her disposal.

Technically, the giving and receiving of dowry in India is illegal. According to Narayan (1997), there are three main explanations for the existence of the dowry tradition. First, a dowry is explained as a gift that is part of the gift of a daughter. This gift is said to provide the donor with spiritual wealth. Second, dowry is considered compensation for the groom's family for taking on the economic burden of caring for the bride for the remainder of her days. Third, dowry is perceived to be a form of premortem inheritance for the bride.

The tradition of giving dowry has expanded into other cultural and religious communities and has changed in character. However, the reason for this transformation is not so obvious. One theory holds that the evolution of dowry from a gift to its current status is due to the influence of commercialism, consumerism, and Western culture on India (Narayan, 1997; R. N. Singh & Unnithan, 1999). In its new form, dowry has come to include cash, jewelry, household items, appliances, and vehicles, and it is often open-ended in nature (Puri, 1999; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). According to Gangrade and Chander (1991), "The dowry system as it is practiced today has become an instrument of oppression and torture for the bride and her parents" (p. 263).

Dowry is usually negotiated between the two families during the marriage preparations. However, there have been instances where requests for dowry were made just prior to or during the marriage ceremony.¹ Most often it is the groom's family that sets the dowry. It is believed that the larger the dowry offered, the better the bride's family appears to the community at large. Large dowries also assure that more desirable husbands can be found. This notion is based on the idea that the size of a dowry is

determined by the male's credentials (e.g., his education or caste). Therefore, parents wishing to provide their daughter with the best possible partner and marital situation will often put themselves in debt for life to provide a suitable dowry ("Greedy In-Laws," 1983; Narasimhan, 1994). Furthermore, when the groom has female siblings, the dowry he receives is often incorporated into his sister's dowry (Deschamps, 1986; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). Sometimes the dowry provided by the parents of the bride is seen as insufficient and demands for supplementary items continue long after the couple is married (Narasimhan, 1994). It is when these additional dowry requests are not met that a dowry burning is possible.

Once married, most Hindu women leave their natal home and begin their new life as part of their husband's family (Puri, 1999). This patrilocal residence pattern is another factor that contributes to the violence and dowry murders because often the woman's kin do not reside close to her. As a result, the abused woman cannot leave her marital home and retreat to the safety of her natal home. Even if she does manage to return to her parents' home, her husband or his family often comes to retrieve her, claiming the violence will stop. However, it usually does not.

THE LIFE CYCLE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

According to Banerji, "The life of a woman according to the *Dharmasastras*, has three stages, that of an unmarried girl, a married girl, and as a widow" (quoted in Puri, 1999, p. 6). Interestingly, all three stages of a woman's life are defined in relation to her status to men, that is, premarried, married, and postmarried. We will examine the violence that occurs for some women during their life cycle. Figure 1 shows the path of this violence.

UNMARRIED GIRL

Evidence of the preference for and dominance of males in Indian society is found early in the life cycle. From conception, female children are regarded and treated differently than male children. For instance, if through amniocentesis the gender of the fetus is determined to be female, she may be aborted because of

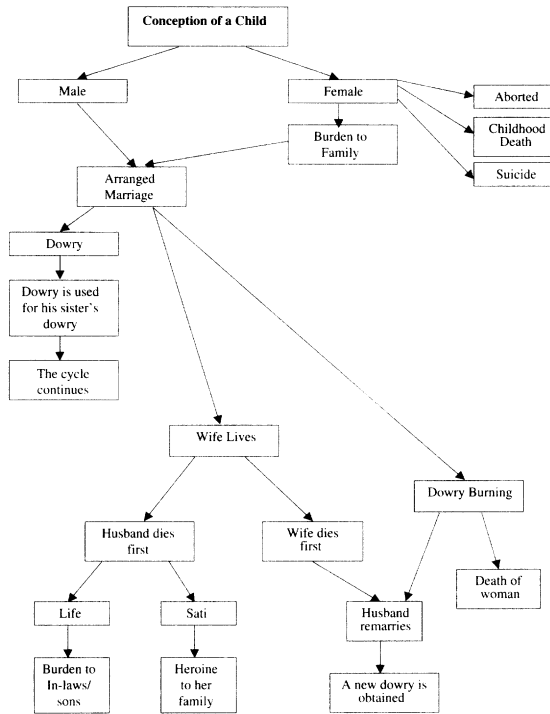


Figure 1: The Life Cycle and Violence

the preference for male children (Kelkar, 1992; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). This bias is substantiated by the disparities in the "sex ratio (number of females per 1,000 males), which was recorded as 933 per 1,000 in the 1981 census, [and] has fallen to 929 according to the census of 1991, making India one of the few countries with such an adverse ratio" (Narasimhan, 1994, p. 51). Formerly, infanticide was used to eliminate an unwanted female child immediately after birth. Now, however, due to the availability of amniocentesis, it appears that abortions are taking over this role (Gangrade & Chander, 1991; Puri, 1999).

In contrast, male children are highly valued. Males do not require dowry, they will be able to support their parents in their old age, and they are the only ones who can perform the death rituals (Deschamps, 1986; interview with Informant 2, November 1998, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Puri, 1999). Males are also favored and viewed as an investment because they receive dowry from their bride's family.

Parents may choose to keep the female child, but priority is almost always given to male children. The female child receives less or poorer quality food and may experience unequal access to health care (Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). As a result of these differentials, female children often die prematurely; the mortality rate for male children is lower than for female children (World Conference on Women, 1996).

The female child may continue to live until it is decided that she is too much of a financial burden on her family or her parents cannot afford to supply her with a proper dowry. At this time, she may be killed or commit suicide (interview with Informant 2; Joshi, 1992; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). For example, Kanwaljit, a senior policewoman, reported that a penniless couple took their lame 6-year-old daughter to a lonely spot along the Yamuna River in the Indian capital and pushed her to her death in the muddy water. Their reason was that they were too poor to save for her dowry, and their daughter's disability would have required more dowry money (Joshi, 1992). Another example occurred in February 1988, when three sisters committed suicide together because they had been observing the negotiations for the marriage and dowry of their elder sister and realized the difficulties they and their family would face in arranging marriages for them (Gangrade & Chander, 1991).

If the female child lives to adulthood, she will remain a charge of her family until she is married (Gangrade & Chander, 1991). Once married, she would be a charge of her husband.

MARRIED WOMAN

The control of women and the potential for violence are especially great when a woman leaves her natal home to become part of her husband's family. On moving in with in-laws, the status of the daughter-in-law is often very low compared with the men and even with any older women in the household. If there are dowry-related problems, it is at this stage that the likelihood of fatal violence is elevated (Kumar, 1993). The abuse begins when the husband and/or in-laws harass the wife for more money and more goods from her family (Kelkar, 1992; Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). If the wife and her family do not comply, a staged accident—dowry burning—may occur.

Dowry burning² is a type of fatal violence against women. These burnings are not supported by religion or law, but Muslims, Hindus, and Christians have all experienced dowry burnings in their communities (Baig, 1988; Stein, 1988). A dowry burning³ occurs when a wife is doused in kerosene by her husband and/or in-laws, lit on fire, and left to burn to death (Stein, 1988). If the authorities investigate the death, the incident may be explained as a cooking accident (Miller, 1992). Often, the goal of the dowry burning is to allow the husband to remarry and receive another dowry from his second wife's family (Frankl, 1986; "India: Till Death," 1990). Remarriage creates the potential for another burning incident (Fineman, 1983). There are numerous reasons given by husbands and their families to justify dowry burnings. They include the fact that the woman is not fulfilling her role as a good wife, that she did not bring enough dowry to the marriage, or that she has not produced a male heir.

WIDOWED WOMAN

The final stage of the female life cycle is widowhood. If the wife dies first, the husband may remarry, leading to another dowry and the possibility of another dowry burning. However, if the wife is widowed, the restrictions on women's freedom in India due to the patriarchal nature of the society leave her few opportunities.

On becoming a widow, a woman may be subjected to another form of fatal violence, sati.⁴ Although illegal⁵ and rarely practiced in modern India,⁶ the ritual of sati takes place when a woman is burnt alive with her late husband's corpse or with his personal belongings (Narasimhan, 1994). Supporters of the ban have argued that sati was not a voluntary act performed by the widows. In fact, these women may have been pressured or forced into sati. As with dowry burnings, many different reasons are offered to justify sati (Narasimhan, 1994). For example, if a woman's main reason for living is to serve her husband, she no longer has a purpose once he is dead. Therefore, she must show her eternal devotion to him by throwing herself on his funeral pyre. It is said that by choosing sati, a woman will be given magical powers to return as a spirit and spread good among her people, a small consolation

when one is losing her life in an excruciatingly painful way (Narasimhan, 1994). As a result, a woman who commits sati is seen by her community as a heroine until the end of time. The obvious irony of the sati ritual is that men are not expected to burn themselves on funeral pyres to become heroes. If the protests that arose surrounding the sati of Roop Kanwar are any indication, it appears that the practice of sati has become rare and is no longer tolerated by all members of Indian society (Weinberger-Thompson, 1996).

Today, the vast majority of widows do not end their lives as a result of the sati ritual, but a few still do. The widow is considered to be worthless after the passing of her husband, and she is often blamed for his demise (Baig, 1988). As a widow, a woman is no longer under the control and care of her husband and must either reside with her sons or in-laws. Either of these living arrangements may translate into very poor treatment, abuse, or even abandonment, as the woman is yet again transformed into a social and financial burden (Baig, 1988; Mani, 1990; Poulin, 1988). Furthermore, mistreatment of the woman by her in-laws arises, especially when the widowed woman is without male children. Once again, the patriarchal notion of male supremacy prevails.

Aside from living with a son or in-laws, a widow has one other socially acceptable alternative, that is, to live among other widows in holy cities:

It is estimated that 500 widows live in Brindavan in reality in hapless and pitiable conditions. Most of them are so poor that they have only one saree, worn with no blouse, no petticoat. . . . According to them, they can manage with one piece of clothing, but cannot do so without shelter because they are women. (National Commission for Women, 1996, p. 28)

There are government assistance programs, but most widows are either unaware or unable to take advantage of them (National Commission for Women, 1996).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is no law against widow remarriage. In fact, for male Indians, remarriage is encouraged. However, women do not often remarry in India because it is not socially acceptable; remarriage is only for the progressive (Narasimhan, 1994).

FACTORS BEHIND WOMEN'S SUBJUGATION

CONTROL

The absolute control of women is present in every aspect of the burning of women. In most cases, the woman's death is planned many days in advance. Even women who sense that their husbands or in-laws are going to kill them may feel that they have no other option but death. Returning home would disgrace her family, dishonor her husband, and result in ruining her sister's chances of ever marrying (Shurei, 1997). As for sati, it has been reported that women are physically forced onto their husband's pyres, armed guards are stationed at the ceremony, and women are even drugged so they will not try to escape (Narasimhan, 1994).

WOMEN AGAINST WOMEN

Despite the fact that many women are beginning to unite through the growing feminist movement in India, some mothers-in-law actively participate in the violence perpetrated against other women. The role of the mother-in-law in the violence can take the form of encouragement and support of a son's desire to kill his wife, or it can escalate to the point where the mother-in-law physically participates in the killing of her daughter-in-law. This perpetration of violence against women by women may appear at first glance to be attributable to "historical variables" and "identification with the aggressor" (Brown, 1997, p. 89). However, as Sev'er (1997) indicates, one must be careful not to blame the victim. Although the mother-in-law is involved in the violence, she, like the daughter-in-law, is trapped by the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system under which she lives. The most important thing to remember is that some women in India lead horrible lives in which they are second-class citizens, oppressed, controlled, dominated, and undervalued by their fathers, husbands, and sons. Instead of focusing on the hostilities between women, we must center our attention on the real perpetrators of the violence.

EDUCATION

Education is a strategy that is often used to combat issues such as violence against women. However, there is reason to believe that education may not be as effective in India as it has been elsewhere. There are several reasons for this concern. The first is that recently there has been a push by the Indian government for women to continue to be formally educated (Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 1997-1998). The government has implemented scholarships specifically for girls to encourage continued schooling (Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 1997-1998). However, it appears that the overriding motivation for a daughter to become educated is not to broaden her knowledge, increase her job prospects, or provide her with a sense of power, but rather to improve her marriage prospects (Shurei, 1997). The second is that despite this emphasis on education, violence against women in many forms, including dowry murders, continues to occur. Finally, a strong preference for the dowry system remains among the people of India (Gangrade & Chander, 1991; Puri, 1999). According to Gangrade and Chander (1991), "Many times it seems that educated young people and their parents become even more greedy and demanding of the bride's parents, in order to recover their expenditures on the boys' education" (p. 264). As a result, the strategy of formally educating women may not work as one of the main strategies to combat violence in India. Indeed, many women are already educated but cannot use their knowledge to improve their situation. Strategies must be found so that the education these women have obtained can be used to make a social change.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Presently in India, laws exist that prohibit dowry, dowry murder, and sati. However, these laws are either ignored, unknown by law enforcement, or not enforced by some higher officials (Gangrade & Chander, 1991). As a result, the ability of the laws to be effective in the fight against violence is questionable.

With respect to dowry, laws were put in place in 1961 that banned the practice, but they were not effective.⁷ As a result, in 1984 and 1986 amendments were made to the Dowry Prohibition Act. The government of India made the practice of dowry "punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than five years; and with a fine which shall not be less than fifteen thousand rupees or the amount of such dowry whichever is more" (Van Willigen & Channa, 1991). Despite these changes, the laws remain ineffective. Part of the reason for the ineffectiveness of the laws is the continuing support and expectation among the population for dowry (Puri, 1999).

With respect to dowry death, the 1986 amendment to the Dowry Prohibition Act included a definition of dowry death and ordered that "any person who causes dowry death is liable to be punished with imprisonment for at least seven years, and up to life imprisonment" (Gangrade & Chander, 1991, p. 274). However, just when it seemed that progress was being made, a high court overturned the historic ruling of an Indian judge who ruled in favor of a dead bride by sentencing her husband and his parents to death for her murder ("Indians Denounce," 1983; Kumar, 1993). The problem is that although the laws and punishments exist, little is done to change the methods by which the judges and police officers enforce them (Fineman, 1983; "India: Till Death," 1990; Singh, 1994). It is worth noting that "feminists have been variously advised by policemen and politicians to use 'social pressure' against dowry murderers rather than to take recourse in the law" (Kumar, 1993, p. 122). The strength of public shaming⁸ lies in the fact that Indian people place extreme importance on the community and community approval. However, caution is needed, as public shaming may be a regression to a time when conflict was left entirely up to the people to resolve. In addition to having laws in place, it is necessary to address the ingrained notions of women as social and financial burdens who need to be controlled and dominated before real change occurs.

A DISCUSSION OF SOME REMEDIES

To combat the problem of violence against women, strategies that are culturally sensitive and relevant must be implemented. One strategy is to continue to evaluate those remedies and laws

that already exist and to continue to support those that are working. For example, although the laws against dowry and dowry death are not working as effectively as desired, they are producing some positive outcomes. It is important to concentrate on improving and supporting these measures before implementing new ones.

Another strategy needed to combat the problem of violence is to work toward changing men's beliefs and attitudes. Young children need to be taught that men and women are equal. This must be taught and reflected at home and in the greater community. In addition, the people with the power—that is, judges, lawyers, teachers, and the police—must also change their ideas and be willing to enforce the existing laws.

CONCLUSION

Violence against women is an international problem. Women are friends, partners, lovers, family, and human beings. They have a right to life and to freedom from persecution based on their gender. This article has demonstrated that fatal forms of violence against women, such as the burning of women, are serious issues that cannot be ignored by the global community. It must be recognized that the reason the violence continues to occur is because men dominate, control, and oppress women. To combat the problem of violence against women, it is imperative that we work toward changing the socialization of men to be aware of the gender discrimination that exists and work toward changing it. To do this, we cannot simply begin with the young generation; although raising them to believe in equality is important, we must work toward changing the opinions and ideas of those who are presently in power.

This article shows that the potential for lethal violence against Indian women occurs throughout their lives, with increasing vulnerability at times when their marital status changes. We have argued that the issue of violence against women in India is intrinsically linked to the problem of patriarchy and Western capitalism. In fact, the influence of Western capitalism on Indian society has been linked to the increased value of dowries and the resulting occurrences of dowry deaths. Finally, readers have been introduced to possible strategies to help combat this violence,

although change is likely to occur slowly. What is needed is an international movement that works toward a global village where women are viewed as valuable individuals and equal partners.

NOTES

1. This can result in a number of scenarios, including the bride's parents scrambling to raise the money needed to meet the last-minute dowry demands or (although rarely) the wedding may be called off and criminal charges laid (Gangrade & Chander, 1991).

2. Dowry burning is also known as dowry death, dowry murder, and bride burning.

3. Although referred to as dowry burnings by many, the harassment is usually not because the dowry was unpaid but more often because the in-laws desire more goods.

4. Historically, sati was practiced in all parts of India with the exception of the matrilineal castes in the southwest (Stein, 1988). However, the practice was not unique to India and was also practiced in China, Mesopotamia, Iran, and other countries (Baig, 1988; interview with Informant 2, November 1998, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Stein, 1988). Although there is no confirmation of its existence in religious scripture, many have and continue to justify the practice of sati as a religious ritual and part of Indian culture. However, others have challenged this idea since the 1820s, arguing that sati was not a part of the Hindu religion or scriptural writings (Stein, 1988).

5. By 1829, the practice of sati was banned in India (National Commission for Women, 1996).

6. There is little consensus as to the prevalence of sati today. For example, Narasimhan (1994) states that for Rajasthan there has been approximately one death per decade, whereas Kumar (1993) states that "there has been, on average, something like one sati a year in India" (p. 174). Yet another value of "only" 28 postindependence sati has been put forward by the prosati group, Sati Dharma Raksa Samiti (Stein, 1988).

7. See Gangrade and Chander (1991) for an explanation of the legal reasons for the ineffectiveness of the 1961 Dowry Prohibition Acts.

8. One example of public shaming occurred when a man was paraded around naked in a crowded market area because he was known to have burned his wife. A second example occurred when more than 300 members of a community arrived at a guilty husband's family home to express their disapproval of the burning of his wife. They refused to leave until the police and judiciary took action (Kelkar, 1992).

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