

Since I was a girl, ...

Thursday, 16 August 2007

... I was not given the opportunity to continue my studies!

I am Suja from the village Karungal in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, India. I am 20 years of age. I have 1 elder brother and one younger brother. I finished Secondary level education in a government school. I have been working in a cashew nut factory for the past 4 years. My father is a mason (in construction work) and my mother is a house wife. My elder brother is 22 years of age and he studied Diploma in Mechanical Engineering in a private college and now he is working in a company that makes motors that pumps up water. My younger brother is 17 years of age and doing his Higher Secondary education.

When I finished my secondary education, my aspiration was to continue my education and become a Teacher. I told my aspiration to my father and mother and asked them to allow me to continue my study. At that time my elder brother was doing his Diploma Course. The cost of education was very expensive for him. My father told me that it was impossible for him to pay for my brothers educational expenses through his salary. Therefore, instead of allowing me to continue my education, he asked me to stop my study and go to cashew nut factory to work in order to support the study of my brother. He also told me that it is always good for the family to give higher education for the male members. It is because they could support the family even after the marriage. He argued that as a girl I would be married soon and live in another family. Therefore, it is useless to invest for my education as a girl. Hence, I was forced to work at a very young age. As a girl I could not confront the decision of my father. Yes, this is the fact in my village. The parents and the male members decide for the life and future of the female. At this I felt that being born as a girl in my society is a disgrace. I also felt that I was discriminated. Since I was a girl, I was not given the opportunity to continue my study and achieve my aspiration. I wanted to be a teacher. However, now I work in the cashew nut factory removing the peels of the nuts. This factory work is not respected in our area. Now my father and elder brother are paying more attention to the Higher education of my younger brother.

Due to this situation, I raised many questions inside me. Why should this happen to me as girl? Why couldn't my father and male members in the family understand my aspiration? Why couldn't I decide for my life and future? Why should I work at a very young age in order to support my brother to achieve his aspiration?

These questions helped me to discover more elements on the discrimination I face in my family and society as a girl. For example, when there is a good food in my family, the best portion is given to my brothers only. My mother and I are given the least portion. Before I go to work in the factory, I have to prepare the breakfast with my mother and serve it to my brothers. However, my brothers never do any work in the home. When my brothers come back home in the late evening, they never prepare dinner. My mother and I prepare the dinner and serve them. I have to wash the cloths of my brothers. My brothers even decide the type of dress that I need to wear.

My brothers can at any time get out of the home to spend their free time with their friends. They need not inform to my father or my mother about their whereabouts. However, I have to get the permission of my father and brothers to go out of the house. Very often they refuse me to go out. Even if they allow they used to ask me where am I going? Who am I meeting? Then I need to get back home before 6 pm

These are the experiences I underwent in my family. There are also thousands of women who have the same experiences in India. I would like to highlight the following general reality that women in India face today:

- During the pregnancy, the sex test is done and in many cases and if the human is a female the women are forced to abort the female fetes

- In many villages, the new born female babies are killed immediately after her birth by giving poisonous seeds
- There is less care, less education, poor food, given to girls in the family when it is compared with boys
- When the girl attains puberty, she is isolated and kept in a separate shed from the family form 3 to 7 days
- Girls are not involved in the decision making process in the family
- Girls can not even decide for their life, study etc
- Young girls are not permitted to participate in social functions and activities
- Girls depend on parents and male members before their marriage for their needs
- Girls have to pay huge amount of money as dowry to get married
- Even the decision to marry is taken by the father and male members in the family
- After marriage she depends on her husband for her needs
- Women have no right over the property
- In the work place women face discrimination in wage (for example men get Rs. 60 per day and women 40 per day in the village)
- Women face sexual harassment in the work place

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