Cultural Beliefs and Women's Social Participation in Japan and India

Gender in India

Dr. R. Indira

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Sakurako Goto

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Six years ago, on the night of December 16, 2012 the brutal gangrape of a paramedic student by six men on a bus in Delhi shook not only the nation, but also the international community. As the diffusion of social media has progressed as well as globalization, this incident gave the world an unfavourable image of Indian societal attitude towards women. At the same time, it spurred on social movements promoting women's rights and establishment of strict laws against rape and violence regardless of inside or outside India. Many developed countries, especially Western countries, have established favorable social structure for gender equality, whereas many Asian countries still face to many obstacles. Women and gender studies have originally been from the West, and it is said that Asia is a century behind the West in the field.as many countries have rapidly raised with globalization. In particular, Japan has been at a stalemate even though the country has achieved dramatic economic growth as a developed country after the Second World War. On the other hand, many researchers began to focus on women's movements and problems in India, where has been growing as an uprising country in the region. However, both countries have experienced conventional patriarchy based on their own long history. In order for both countries, which play an essential role in the huge economic network of East Asia and South Asia, to survive in the international community, it is necessary to sweep away gender stereotypes rooted in society. There are two main factors discouraging women from social progress in both states: education and religion. Especially, religion has set some values to social attitude and has influenced culture and tradition itself. Therefore, this paper will examine how these two factors influence patriarchy using some examples of violence against women and focusing on the social context in Japan and India.

First of all, it is necessary to understand similarities and differences of background between these two countries. Japan is a developed country whereas India is a fast-developing country. Japan is a small country in terms of geographical and population size and has a different industrial structure compared with India where has the second largest population in the region. Japan was a major driving force of the Asian economy after the Second World War until the 1980s but was severely hit by the Asian financial crisis in 1997; meanwhile India has emerged as a new major power house in the development of the Asian economy since the 1990s. Japan is culturally fairly homogenous country where many Buddhism and Shintoism customs still prevail in the society, whereas India is far more diverse in its religious and racial spread and influence in the entire nation. However, both countries share a fundamentally similar cultural value of male dominance and son preference that determines the position of women in the family and the nature of marriage, as well as influences the nature and outcome of women's social participation. Many researchers have tended to examine women's participation with the relationship between education and only labour economics. According to the human capital

theory, education level is an important determinant of a person's employability and earning power (Clark and Ramsbey, 1991). Labour market discrimination against women or against certain social groups such as caste and religion is also to some extent responsible for the relatively low level of education attainment of women in these groups. It is true that education is the most important factor to ensure gender equality and empowerment. However, women's education, especially up to the undergraduate level, in these countries has improved its quality and participation. According to the statistics in 2012, the percentage of female students at universities reached 41.9 percent, almost a half amount, in Japan while women comprise about 45 percent of the total students in higher education in India (Mukherjee, 2015). This seems that India has more female participation in education than Japan, but many states have struggled with scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, which also hinders women's participation in higher education (Kawai, 2015). Nevertheless, women's social participation in Japan has little progress despite the improvement in education, and in India religious elements still restrain them. Any forms of violence against women are a deep-rooted social problem, and policy response in the form of broadening the legal definition of sexual harassment, enhancing punishment, and increasing the number of courts and police stations would not be sufficient (Roy and Dastidar, 2018). Therefore, education in this paper means 'informal education' which implies cultural and conventional elements which deeply root in the societies that have unconsciously established the idea of male-dominated society. Gendered role-play, gendered behavior and gendered aspirations manifest themselves in social institutions such as family, religion, class and economy (PowerPoint from lecture, 2018). These institutions construct women's images and either facilitate or hinder their empowerment. Even though most of Japanese population are non-religious believers, this occurs simply because Buddhism and Shintoism identities have become a prerequisite for any social activities in Japan. To make the matter worse, Indian societies are based on not merely religious identities, but caste. The caste system derived from Hinduism has changed its form into traditional and cultural identity in India, and the Hindi population dominated most of the total population in the country provokes this idea (Kawai, 2015).

Glass-ceiling index in 2017 showed how slow the society has made a progress in women's social participation as Japan ranked 28th out of 29 OECD countries (The Economist, 2017). Improved educational attainment of women is not necessarily translated into economic empowerment through their increased participation in the industrial labour force. Girls had often received formal education even since the sixteenth century, the first Fundamental Law of co-Education was promulgated in 1947 after the Second World War. Even in the pre-war years, girls' schools following Christian concepts tended to increase with the opening of the country in

1854, but the enrollment rate in higher education was still extremely low. Girls are alienated from the philosophy of university education, because girls respect the social position of men, but the idea of being always deeply rooted in society. It has been noted that the continuous growth in higher education among women in Japan has not led to improvements in women's wages or the greater participation of educated women (Lee et al., 2010). This reflects to some extent the unique features of the Japanese society, such as strong family cohesiveness and integrity, limited promotion opportunities for female workers in employment systems. In addition to lower participation in economy, Japan has experienced domestic violence as a major issue. Many researchers have emphasized that domestic violence is unique, but a major issue in Asia. It is estimated that 67 to 77 percent of women experience mostly physical, even mental, abuse by her partner (Weingourt, et al., 2001). In particular, rural area has higher rates of domestic violence compared to urban area for ideological reasons (Brown, 2014). Domestic violence tends to occur in countries where culture, religion, family and patriarchy have inextricable influences (Weingourt et al., 2001).

In addition, social norms defining women as familial roles deny women's social participation in both countries. Women's primary responsibility is home-making whereas men are seen as the pillar of the family, socially, financially, and spiritually (Lee et al., 2010). Not only Japan, but also many other East Asian countries are influenced by Confucian values in which women are subordinate to men socially and economically. Japan has struggled with the specific social constraints on belief changes about gender. Women are widely recognized by employers and organizational managers as being less committed to their career because of their family commitment (Osako, 1978). Similarly, in India, the woman's role is largely confined to the home domain although their labour market participation is now more widely accepted, and women are making few progresses into senior positions in organizations and politics in part as a result of the severe talent shortage in the labour market (Salve, 2017). Some reseachers pointed out that India has these problems with a different reason. As mentioned, there are strong ideas rooted in the society traditionally. Ideologies and arguments against women's rights have created substantial barriers to women's social participation in general. In terms of political representation, many political theorists such as Thomas Hobbes justified the exclusion of women from politics because of their assumed non-rational nature. The research made by Madhumita Pandey, who was shocked by the Delhi gang-rape in 2012, surprisingly showed the more uneducated men are, the more they have conventional and strong religious beliefs against women (Doshi, 2017). She has interviewed a hundred convicted rapists in India during three years since 2013. The death of a raped woman in 2012 encouraged thousands of people to protest the widespread culture of rape and violence against women and to reconsider social

factors why abuses against women still increase its number. There is a tendency in society to conclude the reason by saying that violence against women mostly arise from increasing women's social participation as well as increasing number of women who tend to go out at night and wear western clothes with immodest style. However, it is only a justification from the perspective of people who have strong patriarchal ideology, and it is never mentioned in any other countries such as Western countries. As mentioned, the report showed that there were only a few of them those who graduated from high school and most of them finished their education with only primary schools. Pandey said "these men are not extraordinary men. They are really ordinary. What they've done is because of upbringing and thought process." In other words, raping against women is not criminal action for these men. This story shows the fact that there is no proper education about sex and gender issues at school even though there is less gap in education participation between men and women up to secondary school in India. Various educational programs for men are still in great need of changing their outlook (Mukherjee, 2015). In terms of domestic violence, more than 65 percent of women had experienced a range of physical, mental and sexual abuse by their husbands (Brown, 2015). However, another study showed only 45 percent of women had been abused by her husbands (Chokkanathan, 2012). This may be related to the influence of social attitudes, not only religion, but also caste system, towards the acceptance of domestic violence in different regions (McPhillips, 2002). While embodying women's right in education, many institutions are based on national systems of education that require conformity to traditions and policies rooted in the male-dominated society.

In both countries, socio political system dominated by patriarchal values and practices and social norms are favoring men. Distinctive societal features play in shaping women's participation. In terms of labour market, women's employment outcome of a given society is contextualized and needs to be understood through the analysis of not only its economic context and labour market conditions, but also social institutions and dominant values. Cross-national differences in the characteristics of women's labour market participation are explained also by societal cultural conditions that are fundamental factors in influencing the development and effects of other factors that shape women's employment decisions and aspirations. In other words, cultural domination or hegemonic power is at least partly embodied in social and economic institutions and these institutions create different ideological constraints and resources for social action against women. Gender beliefs are important because each of them is the narrative of examining gender issues in the society. It is necessary for both countries to make more adoptable space to think socially rooted gendered ideologies by giving not only formal education at school, but also informal education by family or even society itself because

women in both countries still struggle with social obstacles preventing them from their social participation even though access to higher education does seem to help narrow the gap. Women's social participation is far from universal and it has a potential to prevent both countries also from further economic growth in the international community.

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