

Chapter – Three

Socio-Cultural Background of Women in India and Palestine

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Introduction

The issue of discrimination against women is a global problem faced by women in the world in various degrees, regardless of culture, religion or geographical location, which means that this problem is global in nature rather than local. As a result, the international community paid attention to this issue and to the problem of discrimination on the basis of gender in the world. Thus, women were given a special role in the international treaties and covenants. Within this context, the United Nations Charter in its preamble confirms the fundamental human rights, individuals' dignity and worth, in addition to men and women's equal rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in turn, emphasized the importance of equality and avoided any kind of discrimination based on gender. The Declaration's seventh article stated that "all people are equal before the law, they are entitled to equal protection of the law, without discrimination " and it was followed by both the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to emphasize the importance of equality and non - discrimination between people based on gender, race, religion The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights equated the rights of spouses in the matrimonial bond, and it confirmed individuals' right to work without discrimination between men and women.

Because it is normal to revolt against oppression and racism, women have been trying to retrieve their rights by all means. Accordingly, the concept known as "Feminism" emerged, which dated back to the roots of the

fourteenth century AD when Christine de Pisan defended women's rights in their inheritance and in their membership in any association or union. Yet, the emergence of this social theory as a philosophical movement dated back to the contributions of women like Mary Wortley Montagu and others.(Darraghmeh, 2006:2)¹

This social movement has been concerned with the issues of inequality and discrimination against women in the economic, social, and political domains based on gender. It defines itself as a movement with social roots aims to overcome the barriers between people on the basis of social class, gender, culture and religion resulted from inequality between the sexes. One of the most thorny issues faced by this movement over the years, is the subject of biological difference between male and female, which is based on the traditional thinking which means (inferiority of women compared with superiority and authority to men), Inferiority Versus Superiority. According to this vision, men have the capacity of rational thinking and they are the owners of advanced moral and mental abilities, while women have the natural qualities that allow them to pay attention to others.

Palestinian society, like other traditional eastern societies, male-dominated patriarchal society in which relations are arranged on a hierarchical basis which lack justice and harmonization in terms of power and responsibility. In these societies, individuals' rights and duties are determined and based, socially, on their gender. This leads to affect the principle of citizenship deeply because society, in this case, is dominated by the social and cultural heritage which is consistent with the interests of the most powerful sex, men, in the community at the expense of the weaker sex, women.

Women in Palestine face a great deal of social discrimination and inequality. Palestinian women are still far from full equality with men, and their role is still weak in terms of participating in political, civil, economic, social and cultural domains and in other areas of development. This is due to some factors including, lack of laws and legislations to ensure a full equality between men and women, as well as to the existence of the rule of traditional and conservative patriarchal culture in Palestinian society that limits the full equality in the long run. In addition, Palestinian National Authority and the civil society organizations did not develop any social development policies in different sectors that will strengthen and empower women and increase their participation in national decision-making between men and women, and recalled legislation to enact laws and appropriate policies. (Darraghmeh, 2006:3)

The Palestinian struggle against Israel has contributed in the emergence of active women's movement that formed an essential part of the national struggle. Women, besides, participated in the "Intifada" and resistance. Since the Oslo Accords of 1993, women's movement's activities have been expanding to address the issues of discrimination and violence and other issues affecting Palestinian women. Yet, women's influence remained limited due to the lack of resources and the prevailing culture which resists any social change. Also, the presence of occupation forms the main obstacle to create social structure especially when the necessary political, legal, economic and social circumstances have not been created yet to accomplish the comprehensive revival to develop the Palestinian society, including women.

Palestinian women suffer from several problems and at all levels as a result of the occupation and the policy of closure, siege and murder, etc.

These practices therefore cause unemployment, poverty and other social problems. In such circumstances, women suffer as other members in society, but the degree of suffering is more than those experienced by men and for a number of factors. Women face a programmed injustice which can be traced through two points. First, through occupation authorities and in this case women suffer as men. Second, through the rooted factors of customs, traditions, culture and even religion which discriminately explain and justify the injustice and inequality suffered by females in the Palestinian society. Women, therefore, are forced take it either through coercion or through cultural alienation which affects the mind and thought to accept certain standards and specific values. So that, these values are not subjected to analysis and study by the target group (women), but they are accepted by the subconscious as a commonplace.

As discussed in Katamesh that women in the Palestinian society are imposed to accept the molecules of their lives including their clothes, study, work, and even the husband and the number of children. It is notable here that most women accept these roles imposed on them and deal with things as normal, indicating that most of the Palestinian women have experienced what is known as the cultural alienation and dealt with many elements as normal things.(Katamesh, 2001:44)²

In India there are several clear indicators of the fact that Indian women continue to be discriminated against: the sex ratio is skewed against them; maternal mortality is the second-highest in the world; more than 40 per cent of women are illiterate; and crimes against women are on the rise. Yet, the women's movement which gathered strength after the 1970s, has led to

progressive legislation and positive change, spurred on by the participation of women in local self-government.

It is a paradox of modern India that women wield power and hold positions at the topmost levels, yet large sections of women are among the most underprivileged. Some women from the upper classes head political parties and command large followings, yet women's representation in the Parliament and state legislatures has not been more than 10 per cent.

As in Palestine the roots of discrimination against women lie in the religious and cultural practices of India. The beginning of changes started with the reform movements in the nineteenth century, which addressed practices like *sati*, child marriage, life of the widows, etc. The status of women in the contemporary context is reflected in the state of their health, education, employment and life in society.

The roots of discrimination against women traced back to ancient Hindu civilization. Although some studies point to the equal status and rights that women enjoyed in the Vedic period (2500 B.C. to 1500 B.C.), patriarchy seems to have been the norm throughout history.

In the later Aryan period after 300 B.C., domination by the Brahmins (the priestly class), the growth of the caste system and other factors led to social decline. Child marriage became the norm, wives were expected to worship their husbands, barren women were thrown out of their homes and widows were not permitted to remarry. Many of these vicious customs are still observed in parts of the country.

Other religions, like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism or Islam, have questioned some of the practices in Hinduism, but, by and large, all religions have kept their women in varying stages of confinement and restrictions. The Bhakti cults tried to restore women's status and questioned some of the forms of oppression. Reddy referred that:-

" The devaluation of women commences at birth it self with the preference of male child to continue family succession as well as to perform the rites of lighting the parents funeral pyre. Besides the males are looked upon as an economic support, while the females are considered as burdensome and economic liability. (Reddy, 2002) ³

The clearest indicator of discrimination against Indian women is the skewed sex ratio. There were only 927 females per 1000 males in India in Palestine sex ratio. It is 984 women per 1000 men. (the world average is 990 women per 1000 men), according to the 1991 Census. Provisional figures for Census 2001 indicate that the trend has been slightly arrested, with the sex ratio at 933 females per 1000 males. (www.censusindia.net).

Yet cause for concern remains. The sex ratio of the 0-6 age group has declined sharply from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. One reason for the adverse juvenile sex ratio is the increasing reluctance to have female children. Portable ultrasound machines and sex determination tests have made possible to detect and abort the female fetus. Social neglect of women and girls is the other contributing factor.

In recent decades three major development are responsible to bring about profound changes in the status of women in India.

The first of them is increasing importance of higher education among women. With each generation more and more women go for higher education. The second major development has been an entry of women into labor force. In the pre-industrial era, women belonging mostly to lower income groups were employed in family trades and occupations. The third development has been an entry to married women into the labor force. (Jadav, 2006 p:85)⁴

After reviewing the studies and literature on the subject of women in general, the main topics can be classified into seven domains which are important in society and include all of the following areas:, education, employment, law, political participation, health, poverty and violence.

- Women and Education

Education is a means to enable social, economic, political and cultural existence at the same time. With its so many advantages that surpass women, family, children and society, education remains in itself an important means by which women can improve their situation and at all levels, social, economic, cultural and political.

It should be noted that the report of the Advancement of Arab Women has considered the issue of direct support for the education of girls or women's literacy a means of correcting gender gaps.

The study made by Ogabekian in 1999, pointed out that the education sector must be one of the most important platforms for the promotion of equality between men and women. The report of the indicators of development in Palestine has criticized the weakness of gender dimension in the Palestinian curriculum, so that the latter was characterized by the rule of

the number of masculine linguistic expressions over the feminine language. (report of the Advancement of Arab Women, 2004)⁵

In addition to devoting the stereotypical roles associated with gender. In the same context, the national strategy document of Palestinian Women, 1997 has indicated that women's priorities in the education sector are focused on the issue of reducing the illiteracy rate and anti-leakage and diversion from the school, particularly among females and it called, explicitly, to the need of increasing the proportion of women in decision-making sectors in the educational system.

Within the same context, the report of human development indicators is consistent with the national strategy of Palestinian Women in regarding to the dropping out of school as one of the main problems facing women. The report pointed out that the most important reasons for dropping out lies in social problems, which include family problems, customs and traditions that are affected more by females. So, early marriage forms about 52% of the reasons for dropping out at the students. (the report of human development indicators)⁶

In general, less female numbers indicate more education, especially higher education. The report of the Central Bureau of Statistics 2005 shows that the number of females who received BA or higher degree were up to 5.4% in 2004, compared to 9.2% for males in the same year.

With respect to illiteracy and women, although the improvement in its percentage compared to previous years as rates of illiteracy among members of the group aged 15 years and over was 3.7% among males and 12.6% among females, there are still differences between the two genders as a result of societal, cultural, economic and even political factors. In this regard, the report of the Central Bureau of Statistics November 2005,

pointed that rural women are the most marginalized groups of society in education, where the percentage of illiteracy among females in the Palestinian rural areas is 16.6% in 2004, compared to 12.4 in the camps, and 9.6% in urban areas. (Report of the Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005)⁷

On education, the report of the millennium goal - gender equality pointed that there is progress in the field of education, but that is not accompanied by an improvement in economic and political participation for women. Herein lies the fundamental problem, so it is not only wasting the energies of half of society through the exclusion of female labor, but to undermine the benefits of education that is supposed to be the primary mechanism for changing the status of women and their transition from dependent to independent status. In the same context, the data on rates of education among females in the Palestinian society does not help to predict the level of social progress and equality of women and men, since it is not accompanied by changes in both the economic, political and even social status of women.

In India in 1951, shortly after Independence, the Census recorded that only 25 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women were literate. By the 1991 Census, female literacy had risen to 39 per cent. Census 2001 provisional figures indicate that 54.16 per cent of women are now able to read and write. Still, 245 million Indian women cannot read or write, comprising the world's largest number of unlettered women.

National averages in literacy conceal wide disparities. For instance, while 95 per cent of women in Mizoram are literate, only 34 per cent of women in Bihar can read and write. (Reddy and Sumangala, 1998)⁸

Since the majority of Indian's unlettered people are female, literacy and education programs need to focus on girls and women. Yet progressive government programs like the Mahila Samakhya, that designed a scheme to empower rural women and motivate them to educate themselves, have been distorted in recent years. The District Primary Education Program focuses on enrolment but not on the retention of girls in schools. In the absence of an enabling and empowering environment, girls are unlikely to stay on in school, more than 50 per cent girls drop out by the time they are in middle school.

Although the rate of growth in girls' enrolment at education, for instance at the high school level. In 1950-51 there had been only 0.16% girls for each boy at this level of education; in 1990-91 this ratio increased to 0.42%, the literacy levels especially for females still low.

(<http://wcd.nic.in/CEDAW4.htm>)

Poverty and preference for educating the son rather than the daughter, if the costs are difficult to meet. The second reason could be classified as ignorance or cultural biases of society and the consequent belief that education is irrelevant to the future role expectations of a wife and mother. It may be observed that many parents still hesitate to send girls to distant or coeducational institutions and are averse to those in which there are no women teachers; while for a rural women, education is considered unnecessary, for an urban woman it is merely a value – raiser in the marriage market. (Pruthi. R and others, 2001, p:78)⁹

-Women and Work

Palestinian women form about fifty percent of the total population. According to statistics, the percentage of women in 2003 was 49.1% of the total population. Yet, this convergence semi-integrated in the percentage of the total number between the sexes in Palestinian society is not accompanied by equal percentage in the total labor workforce. The information provided thereon in accordance with the Central Bureau of Statistics, indicates that the percentage of women in the labor force aged 15 years and older, arrived in 2004 to 13.2% of the total, while the percentage of men for the same age group in the labor force arrived 66.6% of the total and this figure rose slightly higher in the year 2005, up to 14.1% compared with 67.8% for men.

According to the United Nations Development Program in 2004, about 90.5% of women in the Palestinian territories are outside the labor force. This fact requires analysis. According to these data, the problem of widespread unemployment is not the only factor behind the very high rates of unemployment among women; unemployment exceeds to include other topics closely related to gender issues. (U.N.D.P, 2004)¹⁰

Services sector is considered as the most effective among the economic activities practiced by women since the percentage was 50.2% in services and 33.7% in agriculture. Regarding the daily fee, the percentage was 64.3% for women and 75.4% for men. We discussed in the context of research that poor women's economic empowerment is due to considering women work without pay, whether at home or with family. The percentage of busy household chores for the year 2004 was 48.9%. The percentage of households headed by women was 9% and this percentage increased as a result of the current situation. (Darraghme, 2006)

Within this analytical context, it is important to refer to what Shaker Khalil and Yusuf Odwan who pointed that as a result of difficult economic conditions and community structure of masculinity, women were considered second in terms of eligibility in the competition for jobs. So, in addition to structural factors and other cultural and social ones on the proportion of Palestinian women in the workforce is affected. (Khalil, S 2005)¹¹

Within the same context, Freedom House report on women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa pointed that a large proportion of women are outside the labor force in the Palestinian territories when ,at the same time, a large proportion of women are free of charge within their families or in the informal sector without the privileges and protection prescribed in the Labor Code. The report, depending on the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, considered that the main obstacle for women in the labor sector is the lack of appropriate services to help women on the coordination between work and their role at home. The percentage of contribution of this factor is 69.7%. (Nazeer, 2005:228)¹²

These data are consistent with what is contained in the report of "Human Development Indicators in Palestine for 2004 by the Center for Development Studies at Bir Zeit University which refers to the low participation of women in the development process both in the formal labor market and in the formal decision-making public institutions. The same report noted that the rise in the level of education of females is not accompanied by a marked increase in the participation of women in other areas. (Development Studies Centre, 2004)

The United Nations Human Development Report for the year 2002, paid attention to the phenomenon of the low participation of Arab women in the labor market and development commented that: "It's sad that the Arab world

deprives itself of the creativity and productivity of the other half." One of the main conclusions of the report was that the percentage of using the energies of Arab women through political and economic participation is the lowest in the world, and that society as a whole suffers from freezing half of its productive energy. The report called for the need to address the feminization of unemployment/ Poverty Feminization through the elimination of discrimination against women in the labor market, including the differences in wages and the distribution of posts between men and women. (United Nations Development Program, 2002: 24)¹³

The report of Advancement of Arab Women for 2004 cited that the participation of women in the labor force in the Arab region is the lowest in the world, and that women usually occupy low-status jobs, adding that women in Arab countries have the highest fertility rates along with the lowest rates of participation in the power of work, reflecting, clearly, the values of a patriarchal society: women stay at home and give birth to children. (Report of Advancement of Arab Women, 2004:4).

The report considered that such low levels of women's participation in the labor force reflects the absence of recognizing the value of the unpaid work of women in taking care of and weaving the fabric of local communities. This led to consider that the paid employment is the only way to get women a fair share of their contribution to development. This report has indicated that the division of jobs on the basis of gender is still prevalent, so that men have in general more jobs in management positions than women.

In India most of the work that women do, such as collecting fuel, fodder and water, or growing vegetables, or keeping poultry for domestic consumption, goes unrecorded in the Census counts. Many women and girls

who work on family land are not recorded as workers. In 1991 women and girls comprised 22.5 per cent of the official workforce. Data from the National Sample Surveys records higher work participation by women than the Census. <http://wcd.nic.in/CEDAW4.htm>

Women constitute 90 per cent of the total marginal workers of the country. Rural women engaged in agriculture form 78 per cent of all women in regular work. They are a third of all workers on the land. The traditional gender division of labor ensures that these women get on average 30 per cent lower wages than men. The total employment of women in organized sector is only 4 per cent. Although industrial production increased in the 1980s, jobs in factories and establishments -- or non-household jobs -- stagnated at eight per cent of the workforce. Increasingly, companies tend to rely on outsourcing, using cheap labor. <http://infochangeindia.org/www.sewa.org>

The disadvantaged situation of women in the labor market is a consequence of their illiteracy, lack of training and skill, and low position in the social system, including their total exclusion from the structures of decision-making and power. (Ahuja, 1993 p:104)¹⁴

There had been increased female work participation as revealed by census data. In urban India, the female work participation rates of all workers (main and marginal) had gone up from 8.31% in 1981 to 9.91% in 1991 as compared with the declined, male work participation from 49.06% to 48.95% during the same period. In rural areas, the relative share of the female workers was higher among landless agricultural laborers. Due to the existing social conditions, taboos and costumes, low level of women's literacy, physical weakness, early marriage and childbearing, timidity, and male domination, there has been discrimination against women in the

society. This is despite their higher sense of job involvement. (Reddy, 2002:63).

- Women and Law

Within this context, the laws in Palestine are not much different from those circulating in other Arab countries. In fact, some of these laws go back to other non-Palestinian governments like Jordan, Egypt and the British Mandate. Therefore, such laws are not valid for current time and are not consistent with the aspirations and sacrifices of the Palestinian people, especially women.

An analytical reading of some of the laws employed in Palestine, including those inherited from the Jordanian and Egyptian regimes, or of the Legislative Council or other bills, women inequities can be monitored. As the lawyer Abdeen says in the context of his analysis of the status of women in international charters and conventions compared to Palestinian legislation, that he checked the laws passed by the Legislative Council and draft laws and those employed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is noticed that the Palestinian legislator, in principle, calls for the equality and non-discrimination between the sexes, but this does not negate the existence of texts which include discrimination against women based on gender with another carrying a direct encroachment on the rights of women but did not bear the meaning of discrimination on the basis of sex. (Abdeen, 2002)¹⁵

The report of Freedom House confirms this subject through the observation of the existence of legal discrimination puts women in inferior status. This is evidenced by the lack of considering women to be competent in law before the courts as a witness or in relation to marriage, divorce or child custody. Not to mention the discrimination suffered by women only because they are women on the notion of inheritance. The law of inheritance

as guaranteed by the Family Code is a source of inequality between women and men, so that any sister gets half of her brother's share in inheritance, however, most sisters do not get shares of the inheritance. (Nazeer, 2005:228).

In India women have equality of status under the country's Constitution. However, many anomalies remain under different laws.

During the 25 years of the women's movement the government has amended several laws that affect women, including laws related to dowry, rape, cruelty, maintenance, prostitution and obscenity. India has ratified international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It has set up family courts in some states and the judiciary has issued a series of progressive judgments in favor of women, including a recent judgment on sexual harassment at the workplace and on child custody. www.wcd.nic.in/CEDAW4.htm.

During the last three to four decades, a number of laws have been enacted/amended to ensure equality of status and opportunity for women.

These laws may be examined at three levels: -

- * Social, the major issues relevant to women and relating to social laws are: marriage, adoption, guardianship, and abortion.
- * Economic, the issues pertaining to economic laws include: right to property or inheritance, equal wages, working conditions maternity benefits and job security.
- * Political, the two important rights in the political field sanctioned to women by the Indian Constitution are: female enfranchisement and eligibility for legislature. (Ahuja, p: 109).

However, Hindu law still does not give women equal rights in ancestral property. For instance, they cannot be coparceners in ancestral property and have limited rights to inherit it. They cannot ask for division of the property. No law exists to prevent wives from being thrown out of the matrimonial home. Separated, deserted or divorced women face major hurdles in claiming maintenance for themselves and their children.

- Women and Political Participation

The importance of political participation of women is one of the basic platforms that women may be able to contribute to upgrade the current laws to be in a desired status in order to ensure women's equality with men in any society. Therefore, the progress of societies can be examined through the extent to which women participate in political and public life. However, the historical experience of many countries in the world shows that women's access to the positions of decision-making does not guarantee positive effects on women's rights.

It is noted that the role of Palestinian women through the long struggle of Palestinians is a significant role. However, their share in decision-making positions in public institutions is almost not noticed. Despite the fact that Palestinian women participated side by side with men in their struggle and sacrifice, this involvement has not been matched by a fair share in decision-making positions at all levels. In this regard, Dr. Al- Labadi, in her context of analyzing the topic of women and the field of political action, finds that women are being recruited as soldiers in the political parties and electoral reservists force to support the elite men of politics since women usually find themselves at the end of wars and revolutions second-class citizens. (Al- Labadi, 2004)¹⁶

This vision has proven itself on the ground in the Palestinian case where women did not hesitate to participate in struggling and making sacrifices. Also, when it was possible to form a national authority on ground, they have been treated as if they were second-class citizens. Hence, can we explain the case of quasi-absence or low presence of women in all decision-making positions at all levels?

In the cabinet representation, the two ministers were occupied by women (Higher Education and Social Affairs) out of the twenty-five ministries in the years 1996-1998. Then, the rate decreased to a single ministry, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in 1998-2003. In 2003, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was founded.

Despite the fact that women represent 13% of administrative staff, women occupy only 3% of senior decision-making positions, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. Moreover, political parties in the Palestinian territories are, in general, male-dominated, while there are eight women in decision-making positions in the largest party in Palestine versus 188 men. (Darraghme, 2006)

Also in India although Indian women played a major role in the freedom movement, it did not translate into continued participation in public life in the post-independence era. On the contrary, many women withdrew into their homes, secure in the belief that they had ushered in a democratic republic in which the dreams and aspirations of the mass of people would be achieved.

Representation of women in the state legislatures and in Parliament is low. Women currently comprise 5.9 per cent of Lok Sabha members. In the 1999 elections a mere 6.5 per cent of candidates were female.

www.censusindia.net

Women have persistently lobbied for the passing of the 81st Amendment Bill, drafted in 1996, that proposes the reservation of one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha. But political parties have repeatedly sabotaged attempts to have the Bill approved. Although Indian Women achieved important rights in the political field sanctioned by the Indian Constitution, a very small number of women (less than one-fifth) have political awareness. Voting behavior of women is neither linked with political mobilization nor with political socialization but with their husbands' political beliefs and attitudes, also women generally are not the active members of political parties. The main barriers in the awareness of rights are : illiteracy,excessive involvement in domestic chores, household constraints (that is attitudes of husband and in-laws), and economic dependence on males.(Ahuja, 1993:113)

Women and Health

In general, developing communities suffer a lack of adequate sanitation and lack of necessary medical equipment. The international community has paid attention to this dilemma faced by all developing societies in varying degrees since it has serious consequences on human life in general and on women in particular because of pregnancy and childbirth. Which causes deprivation and violation of human right to have a healthy life, free of diseases and disabilities. For example, the fifth goal of the eight development goals adopted by the United Nations (United Nations Fund for Population) UNFPA, which called for the improvement of maternal health and reducing children deaths under five to two thirds. (UNFPA), Manual Report (2004)¹⁷

The Palestinian society is a part of this issue. There are many factors imposed on the Palestinian situation as the occupation and the policies of closure and its consequences on the health of individuals who may not have

access to hospitals and health centers. In addition, there is a lack of many medications, not to mention some situations that women give birth at military checkpoints.

Poverty and lack of awareness also hinder mothers from giving adequate care for their children. For instance, diarrhea is the second largest killer of babies. Similarly, only one-third of children are fed complementary foods between the ages of six and nine months when breastfeeding should be supplemented. The second National Family Health Survey suggests that uneducated mothers tend to lose the most infants.

Social restrictions on women's mobility also contribute to lesser healthcare for women and children. For example, 90 per cent of married women in Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir and about 80 per cent in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Assam need permission to visit even friends and relatives. (Reddy and Sumangala, 1998)

Women's health tends to be viewed narrowly as reproductive health, whereas many factors need to be considered. For instance, communicable diseases are more of a threat to women than pregnancy. Tuberculosis and not pregnancy is the leading cause of death of women in the reproductive age group, followed by burns and suicides.

The privatization of the health sector has increased the burden of the poor. Studies suggest that illness is the second highest cause for rural indebtedness. Government spending on public health fell from 1.26 per cent of GDP in 1989-90 to 1.12 per cent of GDP in 1995-96. Only 50 per cent of villages have any government health facility.

Women and Poverty

The United Nations defined poverty in the Beijing Conference, 1995 as: "Poverty has various aspects, including lack of food and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods, as well as hunger, malnutrition and lack of health, lack of access or limited access to education or other basic services, high levels of death due to illness, homelessness and lack of shelter and unsafe environment, and social discrimination and isolation. Poverty is also characterized by the lack of participating in decision-making positions in social, civil and political life." (Darraghmeh, 2006:25)

The above-mentioned definition is characterized by its comprehensive terms that link the issue of poverty with all forms of discrimination and suffering that women may suffer as a result of negative discrimination against them at all levels, political, economic and social. Poverty is accompanied by deteriorating health and poor education, and beyond this, it includes the poor participation in decision-making at all levels including social, political and civil rights.

In her attempt to identify the underlying causes responsible for women poverty, Sarah Bradshaw finds that there are two reasons. First, limited opportunities for women to access to lucrative jobs because of their responsibilities for the care of children and considering their income as a secondary source for men. Second, it is attributed to the fact that women, mostly, do not possess a freehand of their incomes, and even if they do, it is likely to be used to improve their families' status and not for their own personal benefits. (Bradshaw, 2002)¹⁸

The problem of poverty in the Palestinian case is characterized as being a general rather than a particular problem. Both, men and women suffer from

this phenomenon for several reasons, most importantly of which lies in the political conditions and practices of the occupation, keeping in mind some privacy for women conditions.

In this regard, the latest statistics from the IUED published by OCHA show that the level of poverty in Palestine has reached to 70%. This means that more than two-thirds of the Palestinian people currently suffer from poverty and deteriorating economic conditions with the consequent social and other health problems. (OCH 2006:8)¹⁹

According to a recent study conducted by Dr. Khadija Jarrar, Director of Women's Health Program in Palestinian Medical Relief, it was found that the percentage of families who have experienced difficulty in providing food during the period of the "Intifada" and reached 63.4% and the percentage of children with anemia aged (6-56 months) reached 38%. (Jarrar, 2006)

Regarding the distribution of poverty by region, figures released by the Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006, indicate that the refugee camps occupy the highest percentage in terms of the spread of poverty compared with urban and rural areas, so it reaches 39.9% compared to 32.5% in rural areas and 24. 9% in urban areas. The report, clearly, points that the more number of children within the family, the greater the proportion of poverty. For example, the percentage of poverty reaches 50.6% in families in which the number of children ranging from 3-4, while this percentage increases up to 69.5% in families of 7-8 children. It should be noted that Palestinian women have the highest rates of fertility compared to other countries. The rate of fertility for Palestinian women in 1999 was about 5.9 live births according to the report of development indicators in the West Bank and Gaza in 2004. That means that they and their families may be more vulnerable to poverty compared to neighboring countries. (OCH 2006)

In this context, the literature addressed the issue of deploying the phenomenon of Poverty Feminization in the Palestinian society, which is caused by several factors, most important of which lies in the absence of justice based on gender. Palestinian women suffer from the phenomenon of Poverty Feminization due to the lack of women's access to the same educational opportunities as men, and to the denial of their rights in inheritance. Also, they are forced, in some cases, to support their families alone. On the subject of the denial of their inheritance, a survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 1999, confirmed that about only a quarter of women have the right of inheritance (30% in the West Bank and 16% in Gaza) and it is noted that among these women 67% of them in the West Bank and 38% in Gaza did not get their share of inheritance. (Report of the Central Bureau of Palestinian Statistics, 1999)

There is a strong relation between poverty and illiteracy, most of the people, below the poverty line, are illiterate. The landless laborers in agriculture, child laborers in the unorganized sector and the women in the informal sector are found to be illiterate. Lack of knowledge and skill among these illiterate women have made them to earn very low income (Govt. of India, 1997, p. 109-119).²⁰

In India poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of health care during pregnancy are the major reasons for both maternal and infant mortality. In rural India almost 60 per cent of girls are married before they are 18. Nearly 60 per cent of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one third of all babies are born with low birth weight.

(<http://infochangeindia.org/www.sewa.org>)

Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world, estimated to be between 385-487 per 100,000 live births. Close to 125,000 women die

from pregnancy and pregnancy related causes each year. Antenatal services are poor with only 53.8 per cent receiving tetanus Toxoid injections and 46.8 per cent having their blood pressure measured. 80 per cent of women are anemic. As many as 58 per cent reduce their food intake during pregnancy instead of increasing it. Two-thirds of deliveries still take place at home, with only 43 per cent supervised by health professionals. Only 52 per cent of couples in the reproductive age groups use contraception.

<http://wcd.nic.in/CEDAW4.htm>

Women and Violence

Violence which is related to gender is considered as one of the most serious problems faced by Palestinian women since it affects their entity and dignity as human beings. Not to mention their health in general and their psychological condition which is one of the main pillars.

Palestinian women have been suffering from social oppression for a long time. This suffering is accompanied by negative justifications taking the surrounding political circumstances along with the economic and social consequences as an excuse in any argument. As a result, Palestinian women become vulnerable to a programmed violence by two opposite directions: Israeli occupation, its procedures on the one hand, and family and community values with its authoritarian patriarchal values on the other hand. The second affects all aspects of life in the Palestinian society including the legal dimension, which regulates the affairs of the people. For example, as provided in articles of the Penal Code, No. 16 of 1960, such as articles 340 and 286 and others, which are discriminatory against women, and at the same time one of the basic mechanisms that encourages such criminal practices, and sought to excuse the offender and not the victim.

In spite of the limited available data and sources that discuss and expose the level of crimes against humanity especially against Palestinian women. In accordance with the few available data, one concludes that this phenomenon is widespread in the Palestinian society for all categories and classes because it has many connotations. Most notably is the absence of social legal deterrent to curb this social problem and criminalize it.

As an example, the report of the NGO forum to combat violence against women declares that 25 women were killed because of the so-called "honor" in the period between May 2004 and July of 2005 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to the Ministry of Women's Affairs' data. Not to mention the cases of attempted murder, rape and other types of violence against Palestinian women. In this context, it should be mentioned, according to the report, that most of the perpetrators of murders of women are their male relatives (father, brother, uncle). Surprisingly, none of those perpetrators has been sentenced. Yet, most of them were released on bail within a period that does not exceed 3 days, which carries a lot of meanings and interpretations. (NGOs Forum Fighting Violence Against Woman, 2006)²¹

Based on these data, we conclude that women's participation in the national struggle does not help them to get rid of hatred and social authoritarian exercised by men who are armed with granted privileges by the patriarchal system. This makes the issue of special legal amendment to the Penal Code a priority of the feminist movement and civil society as a whole because it results in legal deterrent to such criminal behavior.

As Palestinian women, Indian women faced many types of increased violence crime each year. Violence, both outside and within the household, is a grim reality of women's lives. Between 1990 and 1996 crimes against

women grew by 56 per cent. Cruelty to wives comprised 28 per cent of all crimes in 1996.

The extent of trafficking in women is unknown. However, one official study admits to 100,000 prostitutes in six metro cities. Of these, 15 per cent are girls below the age of 15. Cross-border trafficking is common.

According to the National Sample Survey Organization figures NSSO, one out of ten households is headed by a woman. Women-headed households include widows, deserted and divorced wives and single women. They tend to be among the poorest households in the country. There are indications that the number of such households is rising and that the NSSO figure is underestimate.

The status of tribal women is in some ways better than that of other women, for instance, female infanticide is lowest among the tribal people. Tribal women work shoulder to shoulder with men and have a higher status than many caste Hindu women do. Still, violence and oppression is a common occurrence. They are doubly oppressed as part of a community that is among India's most deprived people. Their customary access to the forests has been restricted with the government appropriating forests and forest produce through a series of damaging legislations. Large numbers of tribal people have been displaced from their homes by modern so-called 'development' projects including mines, giant industrial plants, dams and electricity projects as well as defense installations like missile ranges. (Reddy, 2002:61)

Women and NGOs.

Civil society institutions concerned with women and their positive role they play in order to empower women and increase their awareness. These societies have had an active role and impact on the status of women through many activities focused on supporting women's development and advancement. The role of these institutions was clear during the first Palestinian "Intifada". So, through those institutions, the Palestinian women's participation in many political, economic and social activities emerged. In addition to their political and economic struggle, women assist in household income during the absence of the breadwinner or even during his presence. They, also, do simple household chores such as agriculture or careers that does not need experience and skill such as embroidery. The absence of government's role was after the emergence of these institutions that are still working effectively. There are lending institutions for small enterprises which help Palestinian women in terms of increasing their income and developing their participation in all activities. In addition, many constant and comprehensive courses are to be held all over the country without exception, which explains the role of women within and outside home and their handling and breeding of their children, in addition to their participation in political seminars. Palestinian women have emerged in various walks of life and the percentage of educated girls have increased specially in rural communities, where they had only a limited role in assisting their families with household chores. This has been a result of families' awareness of the importance of girls' education.

Commenting on this subject, Nazzal clarified that the Palestinian national issue was the basis for the formation of the Palestinian public organizations,

including the General Union of Palestinian Women, and other women's frameworks emerging from political parties, or women's development civil charities. She adds that, although such formations have not abandoned women's rights in their social and democratic interests, the problem is noted in practice since the national dimension has prevailed over other ones as a part of their philosophy to postpone the social issue of the post-liberation. (Nazzal, 2004)²²

With the emergence of the Palestinian Authority, the percentage of women who work in governmental jobs has increased resulting in increasing the families' income. Women's contributions were culminated in the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. All of that reflected on women in social terms. For example, girls used to get married to their relatives and they did not leave the country they belonged to in order to preserve the customs and traditions of their societies. Today the percentage of those who can marry the one they choose with no objection by her family is increasing. It was also so difficult for families to let their daughters work outside the town where they live. But today, girls live in residences outside the scope of their families. Besides, women's social relations have increased within the mixed societies at work between colleagues, after it was forbidden. The activities of these institutions have reached the rural areas and affected, positively, the economic and social development.

In India several debates of thought and activism emerged to create the contemporary women's movement in India. The spark was provided by the Declaration of the UN Year of Women in 1975 and the release at the end of that year of the Status of Women Committee Report, a voluminous compilation of data, that blew apart the myth that post-Independence Indian

women were gradually 'progressing'. Faced with stark facts on the abysmal status of the mass of Indian women, who suffered from poverty, illiteracy and ill health as well as discrimination in both the domestic and the public spheres, middle class women in the metros began to campaign against the worst manifestations of sexism and patriarchy.

Opinion on these issues built up gradually during the Emergency period and in 1977, when the Emergency was lifted, women began to organize themselves into small feminist groups. They represented different sections of the society - left leaning political groupings in academia, students' unions, trade unions, peasant groups and ordinary middle class women.

The movement energized older associations such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the All India Women's Conference and the National Federation of Indian Women and in turn drew strength from their experience in organizing. The emergence of the magazine *Manushi* and other feminist publications signified this ferment in women's minds.

Early feminist activism questioned the practice of dowry and protested the deaths of many young women by holding *dharnas* in front of police stations and the houses where the women were burned to death.

During the early 1980s, the larger, national level women's organizations had come together in a loose alliance and become known as the "seven sisters". The autonomous groups held conferences biannually to discuss movement issues and strategies. The Indian Association for Women's Studies provided activists and academics a forum to meet and confer.

The 1990s saw the consolidation of the women's movement. Grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Money was available for research on women's issues

and for some forms of activism. Today autonomous women's collectives are the exception, the majority of groups are NGOs identified with one or other individual. Many such NGOs have become part of the 'delivery' mechanism of the government as they provide services such as reproductive health care to women, or gender training to government functionaries and panchayats.

<http://infochangeindia.org/www.nationalcommissionforwomen.org>

Conclusion

It is noticed that there were similarities between Palestinian and Indian societies in general which is related to women status and roles as both of the societies are patriarchal social systems which give men superiority over women, so women were neglected in taking their roles in the family and society, and so they face discrimination which affects their opportunity in education, employment, law rights and political participation and more exposure to health dereliction, poverty, and violence.

From previous presentation, woman faces negative discrimination in all her life stages. In infancy, parents usually give preference to male boys than female girls, this is considered an indirect pattern of violence in which girls learn to accept this behavior as an ordinary one. This process continues in adolescence stage, as girls are usually forbidden, specially in rural areas to continue their education, for several reasons such as: Parents preference to get their daughters married in an early age, difficult financial conditions which make parents prefer males education, which is related to social and cultural norms and habits. As habits always see daughters as wives, mothers and have main responsibilities in giving care to the family, husband and children.

In general women are utilized through discrimination against them in the

labor market, through the differences in wages and the distribution of posts between men and women. According to these data, the problem of widespread unemployment is not the only factor behind the very high rates of unemployment among women; unemployment exceeds to include other topics closely related to gender issues.

It was cleared that the disadvantaged situation of women in the labor market is a consequence of their illiteracy, lack of training and skill, and low position in the social system, including their total exclusion from the structures of decision-making and power. The situation will not be better when we discuss the political participation of women, for example, the low percent of women achieved in legislative side in Palestine and India. This points that these societies were not able to get rid of social discrimination based on gender.

Although women have equality of status under the country's Constitution in many domains, However, many anomalies remain under different laws. Through the observation of the existence of legal discrimination puts women in inferior status specially marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.

Developing communities suffer a lack of adequate sanitation and lack of necessary medical equipment, high percentage of poverty and violence based on gender, since these phenomena are related to percentage of education and employment these phenomena were noticed in Palestine and India with some differences.

The main difference related to Occupation, Palestinian woman faces many problems and pressures as women in general in addition she faces problems

and pressures through Occupation and its persecution against Palestinians.

Although one should accept the fact that there are noticed changes taking place in all aspects all over the world including Indian and Palestinian societies which has made tremendous impact on people's attitudes particularly regarding women's status and role, hence it is noticed that there is an increase in women education, work opportunities, participation in household managements and participation in society.



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