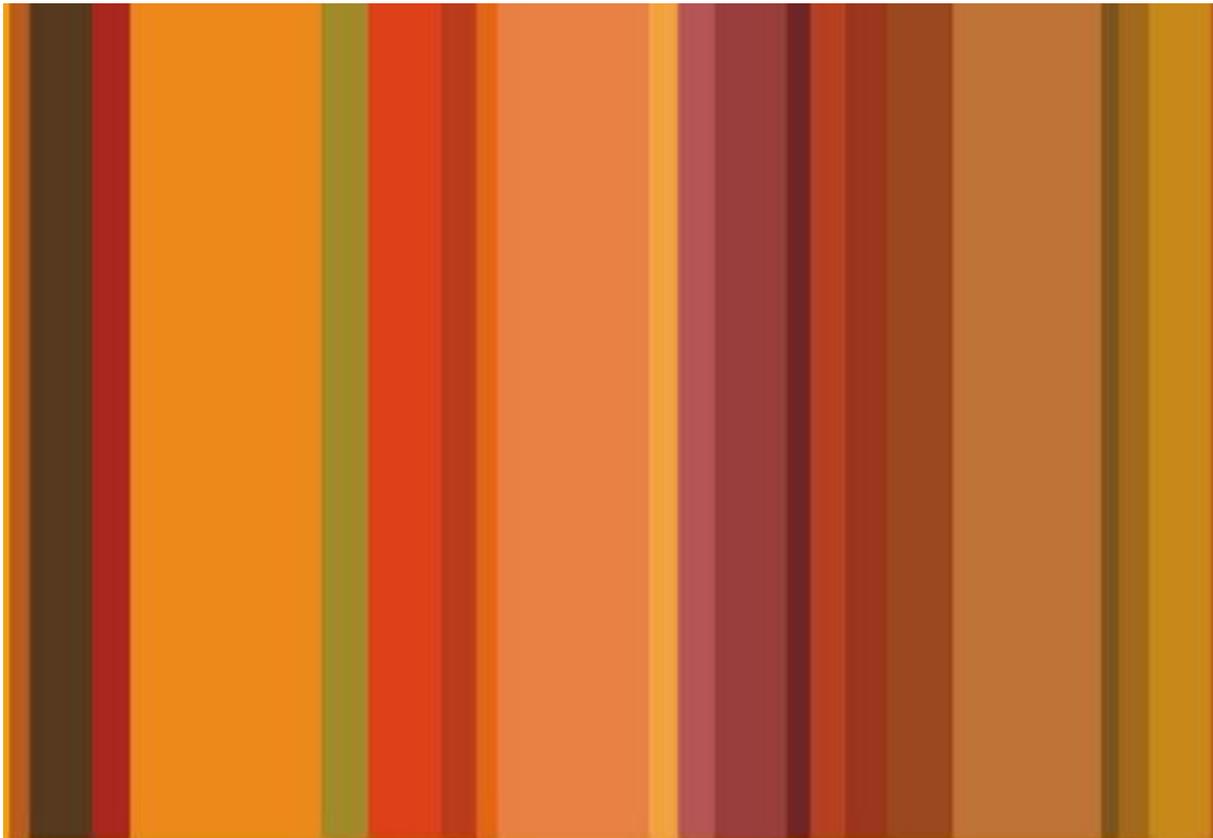


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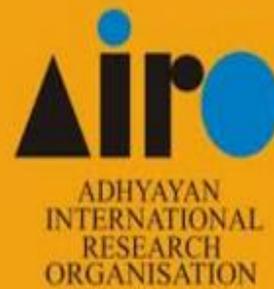


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Gender Inequality in Contemporary India – An Overview

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Abstract: *Gender-based inequalities in India translate into greater importance being placed on the health and empowerment of males than of females. In India, health and population indicators that are driven by gender differences include sex ratios at birth, infant and child mortality by sex, and low ages at marriage for women. At the household level, dis-empowerment of women results in less access to education, employment, and income, and power and freedom of movement. Considering all these fact, India and its society has a mammoth task of empowering women to provide them the basic needs and to prepare them for a safe and productive future.*

Keywords - *Women in India, Gender Inequality in India, Modern India Problems*

INTRODUCTION

The root cause of gender inequality in Indian society lies in its patriarchy system where we follow a system of social structure and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women and this system

finds its approval, authenticity and rationality in our religious beliefs be it Hindu, Muslim or any other religion. Women's exploitation is an age old cultural phenomenon of Indian society.

Ancient Hindu law giver Manu says

पिता रक्षति कौमारे भर्ता रक्षति यौवने ।

रक्षन्ति स्थाविरे पुत्राः न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति ॥ मनु स्मृति 9.3

Which means "Father should protect in Kaumara-hood (before marriage), husband should protect in youth, sons should protect in old-age and thus, the women do not deserve independence"? The societal

position of women as described in Manusmriti hasn't changed in the present social structure. Apart from the few exceptions, women still has no power to take independent decisions either inside their homes or in outside world. The sanction for

discrimination or sub ordinance is provided by many religious texts and hence women are being discriminated in one or the other way. The condition is worse since women have been nurtured with this socio-cultural conditioning to accept themselves being subordinate to the men and they become a part and parcel to the same patriarchal system.

To quote some of the main reasons extreme poverty conditions and lack of education can be attributed to the low status of women in society. This drives women to work as low paid workers in domestic services, migrant laborers and also sometimes opt for prostitution. Women are unequally paid in spite of the same amount of work done as compared to men and they are also not considered for high skill jobs. This has originated a major form of gender inequality.

Even after many Governmental Initiatives and Awareness Programs educating a girl child is still seen as a bad investment because she is bound to get married and leave her paternal home one day. On the contrary each year's High School and 10+2 standard results show that girls are always doing better than boys. Non-Exposure to professional skilled courses haven't given women space to the present day's demanding high skilled jobs.

As far as nutrition or food habits are concerned, in many families only the male child gets all the nutritious and choicest foods while the girl child is taught to compromise with whatever is left behind after the male members have taken their meals. Thus the food that a girl child gets is low in both quality and nutrition which leads to major common health issues in her later years like the high occurrences of difficult births and anemia. The excessive workload which a girl is made to bear is not at all substituted with proper nutritious food. Hence a woman faces inequality or discrimination at various levels of the society. In India, 174 women died for every 100,000 child births, according to the Human Development Report 2016.

INDIA'S PROBLEM

According to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report 2016 India ranks 125 out of 188 countries on the gender inequality index. Gender inequality is especially tragic not only because it excludes women from basic social opportunities, but also because it gravely imperils the life prospects of future generations. Indian families often prefer boys to girls, and female feticide is tragically common.

Only 26.8% of Indian women above the age of 15 in 2016 were a part of the country's labor force, compared to 79.1%

men. In Parliament, only 12.2% of lawmakers are women, while in Pakistan 20% are women. In United States which ranks 43 on the list, 56% women and 68.4% men are a part of the labor force. Only 35.3% women above 25 years received a secondary education in 2016, compared to 61.4% of men. In the U.S., 95.4% women have received a secondary education – a figure slightly higher than for men (95.1%). *Female literacy* is at 65.46% in 2011 as against 82.14% of male literacy. This gap indicates a wide gender disparity in India that Indians do not give enough importance to the education of girls.

THE REALITY

Gender inequality in India is highly complex and diversified because it is enrooted in the society in many ways, many fields and many classes. There are a number of fields like education, employment opportunities, sports, civil aviation where men are always preferred over women. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that has resulted in a wide gap between the position of men and women in the society. Gender gaps have become extensive when access to basic rights, resources, economic opportunities, power, political voice etc. and these are definitely obstructing development of the country.

THE ORIGIN

In India Gender Inequality has originated from the male dominance where a woman still needs the support and backing of her husband and family. Over the years due to this male dominance women have learnt to walk with their head down which has been practiced since ages and is being followed till date. Women's domestic work and their skills are underrated and unrecognised everywhere and they are just accumulated in the poorly-paid, low-skilled women's sectors of the economy.

The interpretations of Hindu mythology have given fixed views on how women should behave like being obedient, loyal and honest to everyone in the family. For a woman in India "Sita" is the role-model. Unfortunately, these interpretations do not have relevance as it just leads to Gender Inequality.

In India, a sex-selection phenomenon has emerged where couple go for sex selection with the pressure to have boy as a heir to their family. This has turned violence against women as a bigger issue today.

ANCIENT INDIA TO PRESENT

In the ancient India women were held in high esteem and the the position of a woman in the Vedas and the Upanishads was that of a goddess (Devi). According to

Manusmriti, woman was considered as a precious being : "यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता: " which means "Where Women Are Honored, Divinity Blossoms There; And Where They Are Dishonored , All Action Remains Unfruitful". But with the passage of time and practices such as polygamy, Purdha System, Dowry, Sati etc. the status of woman deteriorated. Even the modern Scientific methods have resulted in the practice of female foeticide in a large scale which has led to a drop in the female ratio. According to the census 2011, the sex ratio in India is 943 females to 1,000 males. The major reason for this is identified as the need of a male heir for the family.

In many parts of India, women are still viewed as an economic liability despite contribution in several ways to our society and economy. The crime graph against women is increasing at an alarming rate and the condition is quite deplorable. Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual Exploitation, molestation, eve-teasing, forced prostitution, sexual harassment at work places etc. are the common crimes against women.

FACETS OF INEQUALITY

The disparity in workplace is clearly evident through a different working environment for women, unequal wages, undignified treatment, sexual harassment, higher working hours, occupational hazards,

working roughly twice as many hours as men, unpaid activities etc.

Lack of education in women has led to poor literacy leading to gender gap in literacy rate and higher education. Discriminative socialization process is another aspect of inequality towards women. Unfavorable cultural practices like male dominance, limitations in continuing maternal relationships, early marriage, patriarchal attitudes are contributing factor to the inequality.

SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Strategies for advancement of women should be higher literacy, more formal and professional education, greater employment opportunities, equal opportunities in all fields, reducing dropout ratios from school, improving personal and literary skills etc. This will surely enhance social advancement. In job opportunities there should be special provisions of services for women. In governance all rights and all legal measures should be always available for women's protection and support to enhance the quality of life and enabling social advancement. Collaborators such as NGO, INGOs, NPOs, SHGs, CBOs, policy makers, local leaders, information disseminators, health care providers, teachers and family members should help in the social advancement of women.

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS AGAINST GENDER INEQUALITY

The Preamble to the Constitution talks about goals of achieving social, economic and political justice to everyone and to provide equality of status and of opportunity to all its citizens. Article 15 of the Constitution provides for prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex also apart from other grounds such as religion, race, caste or place of birth. Article 15(3) authorizes the State to make any special provision for women and children. Moreover, the Directive Principles of State Policy also provides various provisions which are for the benefit of women and provides safeguards against discrimination.

Other than these Constitutional safeguards, various protective Legislations have also been passed by the Parliament to eliminate exploitation of women and to give them equal status in society. For instance, the Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 was enacted to abolish and make punishable the inhuman custom of Sati; the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 to eliminate the practice of dowry; the Special Marriage Act, 1954 to give rightful status to married couples who marry inter-caste or inter-religion; Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill (introduced in Parliament in 1991, passed in 1994 to stop female infanticide and many more such Acts.

Parliament time to time brings out amendments to existing laws in order to give protection to women according to the changing needs of the society, for instance, Section 304-B was added to the Indian Penal Code, 1860 to make dowry-death or bride-burning a specific offence punishable with maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

There are varied legislative safeguards and protection mechanisms for women but the ground reality is entirely different. Despite all these provisions women are still being ill-treated in our country. Men are treating women as an object to fulfill their carnal desires. Crimes against women are increasing at an alarming rate and the prevalence of such evil practices has to be curbed at any cost.

CONCLUSION

The list of legislations, acts, provisions, awareness programs as well as types of discriminations or inequalities may go on but the real change will only come when the mentality of men will change and when men start treating women as equal and not subordinate or weaker to them. Women also need to change their mindset and come out of the cultural conditioning and the exploitative system of patriarchy and stop supporting and furthering men's agenda of dominating women.

Strong Movement for Women's empowerment is needed where women can

become economically independent, self-reliant, fight for their own fears, go out in the world fearless; fight for their rights, get away from the clutches of men, get good education, good career, ownership of property and above all get freedom of choice and also the freedom to make their own decisions without the bondages of age old saying of Manu.

India thus needs to deactivate the gender Inequality and break the culturally determined patterns of society which is not ensuring equal status of women. The need of the hour is to offer various societal possibilities to women beyond the traditional practices to ensure equality of status for women.

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