

GENDER JUSTICE: ROAD TO A HUMANE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Gender justice is the antithesis of gender injustice. All known human societies are facing the menace of gender injustice in various forms at different levels resulting from widespread gender inequality and discrimination in the veils of domestic violence and exploitation of women, socio-economic discrimination, the gender based division of labour, socialization on gender lines etc. The irony is that women constitute around half of the humanity but receive a full inhumane treatment full from both women and men. The normative heart of all ethos of a humane society is the belief that nobody should be discriminated on the basis of sex. This paper asserts the basic reasoning that all living beings deserve a humane and civilized treatment. It invokes a fruitful discourse on the issues at the centre of both the phenomena called gender justice and gender injustice. It casts a doubt on the very validity of the notion of man-woman dichotomy and contends that if a fundamental difference lies between man and woman as two different categories, then a single criterion for measuring justice seems incorrect. And, if they are not different from class point of view, and indicates only personal traits, then the very idea of gender justice rested on the aforesaid dichotomy is full of flaws. The paper further puts the point that the very socio-cultural conditioning restricts the possibility of autonomous decision making in patriarchal structures of social existence. Elaborating various constitutional, legal, governmental and civil society measures in realizing the gender justice, present paper ends with a positive note that with multidimensional policy initiatives and concerted efforts by all the stakeholders we can materialize the goal of the constitution of a humane society that can guarantee equality of all kinds among all human beings. In realizing this unfinished project the present paper calls upon all of us to change our mindset and reinvent the relations between man and woman.

Keywords: *Gender Justice, Gender Injustice, Gendered Socialization, Mindset.*

Introduction

Men and women are nowhere standing on an equal footing. Every known human society is facing the problem of unequal gender relations that result in the domination of one over the other and exploitation of one by the other. Such gender relations are so unequal and deep situated in the organizing and functioning of our society that expressions like gender injustice, gender discrimination, gender inequality, gender disparity, gender gap, gendered division of labour etc. have become inseparable from discourses which aims at capturing the social, cultural, economic and political realities of our time. In sociological literature the concept of patriarchy is used to refer to the existing unequal interpersonal relations among men and women. The implications of this patriarchal social structure are very intense for both men and women. Different spheres of their life (social, cultural, economic, political, educational, psychological, recreational etc.) are more or less organized according to the dictates of the patriarchal system.

There is a worldwide consensus about the active and formative role of women in the strengthening of their family, community life and the entire society or nation. But various research studies and indices present a rather contrasting empirical reality. Women are not participating in the development process with their full potentialities. They experience multidimensional discrimination in both private and

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public domains of their life. This is a global phenomenon indeed. From womb to tomb women, only because of being women, are treated unequally and kept aloof from their various rights which they can also claim because of being human. To say in other words women's rights are also inalienable human rights. If they are not in the reach of almost half of their humanity, all the claims of social, economic and political achievements are only rhetoric but not a reality. During the last three- four decades under the impacts of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (together labeled as LPG) the situation has improved to a significant extent in developed societies but the conditions of developing and underdeveloped countries are more or less the same. Even today their half of the women population has to become a victim of multifaceted discriminations and inequalities. The structure of gender injustice has become a characteristic feature of almost all the socio-cultural systems. Only through some feasible and fundamental strategies and processes of transformation a humane and just society can be achieved ensuring gender justice in a society where empowered women can participate in the socio-economic development of their family, community and the larger society on an equal footing with their counterparts. In such a humane society women will find a central place in the organization of their day-to-day life.

How Grave the Situation is?

In India discriminatory attitudes against women have been existing for generations affecting both men and women adversely. Research shows that even after the intervention of government and civil society institutions patriarchy still continues to direct the organization of social life to the advantage of men and to the disadvantage of women in the areas of physical and mental health and nutrition, education, employment, participation in decision making, socio-economic development of the family, community and Society.

The issue of gender inequality has long been an area of serious concern for modern societies. Given the global expansion of this problem it becomes necessary to have a notice that in developing countries like our country gender disparity is also a matter of grave anxiety because its systemic nature hinders half of their population from participating with their full capabilities in development process and fulfilling their promising roles. This situation gives rise to a very specific version of social injustice called gender injustice. In India gender injustice manifests itself in various forms like gender disparity, division of labour based on gender, gender discrimination, gender exploitation, gender violence, gender based crimes, violation of women's rights, sexual harassment of half the population in both private and public spheres of life.

As a result of the concerted efforts of government, civil society organizations, social activists etc. there has been witnessed substantial improvisation in the economic and political statuses and roles of women in India but on the socio-cultural front the success story is not so bright. The Global Gender Gap Report - 2020 measuring the various dimensions of gender inequality ranks India on 112th place out of 153 countries with a score of 0.668. According to this report India with a score of 66.8% has succeeded in closing 2/3 of gender gap in overall terms. However, the situation of 50% population remains very uncertain in various dimensions. Though, our country has improved its overall score but it is very discouraging to note that it has lost four positions since the last report published in 2018. The major highlights of the this report are as following :-

- In India gender gap on economic front makes a deep mark even today. Only 1/3 of this gap could have been closed. Unfortunately this gap has become widensubstantially since 2006.. Among all the studies countries (total 153)our country is the only place where the situation of economic gender gap is worse than the gender gap in political terms. Only around 25% of females, compared with 82% of their counterpart, are actively participating in the labour market—one of the worst participation rates in the world (ranks 145th).
- Estimated income earned by women is a mere 1/6 of the income earned by men, which again represents the lowest position (ranks 144th).
- On the Health and Survival sub-index, India makes a place at 150th rank. The sex ratio at birth is extremely imbalanced. There are 910 girls born per 1000 boys born, the figure is well below the natural average.
- Discrimination, exploitation, domestic violence, marriage being forced and compulsory still matters much with regard to the access to health facilities.
- In terms of gender gaps in education India has registered a success story. The share of women attending schools in primary to tertiary levels of education is systematically larger than that of men. But the unfortunate side of the story is that a huge difference still exists in terms of literacy

rate. Women claim only around 67% literacy in contrast with men claiming an around 82% literacy. But the satisfying trend is that this gap in terms of literacy has been narrowing in the past decade, because there has been registered a substantial increase in literacy of women(around 66%) and slight decrease among men (around 79%).

- Lastly, on the Political Empowerment sub-index our country holds 18th rank, which largely explains our strong performance in this sphere of human enterprise. But again, even today political representation of women is not up to a satisfactory level: women constitute only 14.4% of the parliament (ranks 122nd) and 23% of the cabinet (ranks 69th). Women only account for 14% share of the leadership roles (ranks 136th) and 30% share of professional and technical workers.

Efforts to Set the Things Right

Given the wide expansion and multi-dimensions of gender inequality in India government, civil society organization sand social activists have long been in action mode to set the things right. A serious note has been taken to address the problems of gender inequality and gender injustice in India by them which has also given them an opportunity to come up with some feasible solutions to ensure an equitable environment for women in India.

- **Government Efforts**

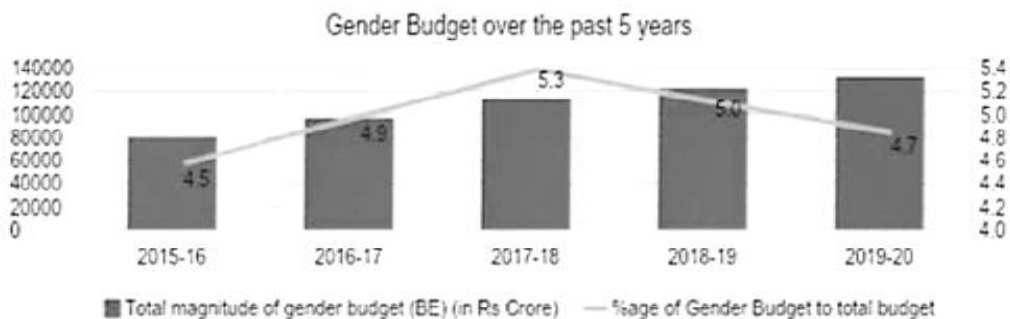
Government at different levels (Central, state and local) has experienced a paradigm shift in its approach to the cause of Women’s Question in India. Starting from a "welfare approach" going through a "development approach" to reach the current "empowerment approach". Behind this paradigm shift is the rationale that it is far more sustainable to "teach women how to fish "than" giving them the fish itself". Therefore, the need of the hour is to ensure multidimensional empowerment - social, cultural, economic, political, educational, psychology etc. of women.

Empowering women means:

- to establish an equitable environment and to ensure freedom for women to take decisions regarding their life on their own terms.
- to build their capacity to make advancement in frontier roles and frontier skills.
- to infuse them with a sense of self-respect and self-assertion so that they can enjoy their identities being women. It is to say that they can find a substantial meaning in their womanhood

Government takes policy measures to combat the menace of gender inequality, gender gap manifested in different spheres of life and gender injustice. During the past few years a clear cut focus on the empowerment of women ensuring them in a safer, more secure and a more equitable environment has received priority. This has resulted in the launching of various schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Support to Training and Employment Programmes for Women, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana to name a few. For the success of these programmes sufficient financial resources have been injected in the implementation machinery. The following figure clearly shows this :

Figure:1



Source: Official website of Ministry of Women and Child Development (GOI)

Some other initiatives launched by GOI like NARI Portal - facilitating women to be more aware of the various government schemes; SHE-Box Portal- to facilitating people to get their complaints registered for sexual harassment and e-Samvad – to provide a platform for NGOs and Civil Societies to interact with Government are really worth celebrating and help further to reduce the issues emanating from the systemic nature of gender inequality. These are a few among many government efforts to support around 50% demographic force to contribute actively and positively to the development, prosperity and growth of the family, community and the society.

- **Non-government Organizations and Civil Society Endeavours**

Given the limited nature of government resources the aim of reorganizing social life online with gender equality cannot be left solely to the responsibility of government. Acknowledging this clearly many Civil Society Institutions (NGOs, NPOs, SHGs Cooperatives etc.) at global, national and local levels have proved very effective in providing a fertile ground for women empowerment. Launching awareness campaigns, feminist social movements, shaping public opinion on women's issues, acting as advocacy groups and pressure groups to influence government policy responses, providing infrastructure support to the cause of women's socio-economic empowerment are some of the achievements registered by these Civil Society interventions for the establishment of a humane society for all.

Concluding Remarks

Gender justice is desirable for all the humans. It ensures equality, dignity and freedom for all regardless of their sex. The full and equal partnership of men and women regarding them as human beings in all the spheres of life becomes a part of their lived experiences in their everyday life. Therefore, gender justice is our movement, our expressions towards the removal of all barriers and a solution towards the goal of a fair and just society which proclaims dignity and justice for all.

A gender-neutral lifestyle seems to be the least costly option for all including men and women in a gender neutral society. Gendered lifestyle need not be thrown away but should not be achievable at a lower cost than a gender-neutral lifestyle. The costs of gendered lifestyle are very wide. To consider a few of such costs we can talk of material costs- like financial, time or efforts; psychological costs- like self respect, a good relationship with one's body and emotions and social costs - such as reputation, social acceptance and valuable social relationships. Therefore, we all should subscribe to the fundamental underpinnings of feminism that nobody should be disadvantaged and discriminated against only because of its sex - an anatomical difference only. If we all make sincere and concerted efforts for minimizing the occurrence of gendered patterns of behaviour in our private and public domains there is no doubt that these positive changes in our patterns of thinking, acting and feeling will usher in a society marked with gender justice ensuring the establishment of a humane society in the true sense of the term.

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