

STATUS OF WOMEN TO GENDER INEQUALITY

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Abstract: -

The status of Women is how the society perceives a woman and not what it should be. Gender equality includes protection from sexual harassment and right to work with dignity, which is a universally recognized basic human right. Empowerment of women is highly accelerated by the closing gender gap in education. Women represent half of the world's population, and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Denying women and girls equality and fairness not only hurts them, but also hinders the rest of the society. Unless societies, governments and non – governmental organisations around the world come together and make a concentrated effort to empower and grant equality to women. Until and unless, women's economic security is strengthened, one will not be able to eliminate poverty, achieve gender equality, or realize any genuine progress.

Keywords: - Women, Gender Inequality, Gender gap, Women Empowerment.

I. Introduction

Gender is a word which is misunderstood, because whenever the word is spoken, it arrives at the concept of weaker sex present in society that is the female. It is a range of characteristics which is very often used to distinguish men and women and the masculine and feminine attributes assigned to them. Sexologist, John Money for the first time in 1955 introduced the terminological distinction between biological sex and gender as a role. Earlier, it was not so common to use the word 'gender' to refer to relative statuses of men and women but use the word only grammatically.¹ The word 'Gender' refers to the different values, attitudes and behaviours that are attached to the roles of males and females by different social and cultural groups. For example, women cook and clean, men fix car and fly aeroplanes! women take care of children and household chores and men are supposedly the bread earner in the family.²

“Bringing up a girl child is like watering a neighbour's garden” This old Indian saying captures the mindset towards the girl child in the country. It has been demonstrated time and again by a lower literacy rate, higher incidence of malnutrition, higher morbidity and higher mortality rates, adverse sex ratio and increasing violence against women and girls. In a patriarchal society such as India, where the male child takes forward the

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family lineage and is looked up to for support and care in old age, sons are always preferred. The girl child in India, needs five basic rights, in order to live life on an equal footing with her brothers: the right to be born, to survive, to equal opportunities to childhood and to protection.³

Basic rights of Girls in India

It is often found that discrimination against the girl child begins within the four walls of her own home. A surprising finding is that it is not just the father but also the mother who also holds the negative attitudes towards a girl child. Therefore, an environment needs to be created in the home itself, where the girl is valued and nurtured as much as a boy child and given her a share of care, affection and opportunities. A change in the negative attitude of parents is important before any large scale social and cultural transformation can be affected.

Some of the basic rights of girl child in India are mentioned below:-

The Right to be born

India is a patriarchal society where the sons carry on the family lineage and are expected to support and care for the parents in old age. Daughters on the other hand are considered a burden because dowry will have to be paid out at their weddings, and after that they would live with their husband's families. It is not surprising that sons are the preferred progeny and they are treated as such all their lives. However the advance technology would increasingly be used to determine the gender of the child before birth and parents would opt for selective abortions if they know that the foetus was female. Although the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 was legally banned, still then several medical centers and clinics offer the facility for gender determination test.

The Right to Survive

The girls who are allowed to be born for them, life is not a bed of roses. There is no guarantee for the girl child that once born will get an equal opportunity to survive and live a full life like boys. Out of 12 million girls who are born every year in India, 3 million girls who are born every year in India, 3 million girls do not survive beyond their 15th birthday. About a third of these deaths are in the first year of their life. Yet girls are biologically stronger than boys still then the statistics is an alarm which shows the fact that the survival of boys is much better. It is estimated, that every sixth female death is because the girls are regarded as a burden and female babies are no more welcomed. Due to several ingenious ways like the use of plant poisonous, rice, grain, and spicy chicken gravy, the girl child are murdered in the first few hours of their lives.

The Right to Equal Opportunity

If a girl child survives her infant stage, then she is discriminated in receiving nutrition, health and education. That means a boy child will get better nutritious food, and will receive more care and attention during sickness and will get first preference when it comes to education.

Daughters are often not sent to school or their education is discontinued at an early age. The cases of dropping out of school are much higher amongst girls than boys at the primary and upper primary stage. It is estimated that only 60% of the girls who enter class 1 to class 5 and 7. Most of them were dropout in the first year of primary education itself. The dropout rate is higher as one goes up from primary to middle to secondary, and is highest in the higher education. Overall, it is found that the school attendance of girls lags severely behind those boys.

Most of the girl child in their homes were groomed by their family and prepared them for a single function of their life: to be a good wife and mother. Socialization begins with gender specific toys: dolls and kitchen set for girls and outdoor games, medical kits etc for boys. Daughters are allowed many more chores in the house to prepare them at an early age for their lifelong responsibilities. They are not given the same liberties to go out as their brothers and are consequently less exposed to the outside world.

Society perpetuates patriarchal nations and women are accorded an inferior status. Sons are perceived as necessary for the material and spiritual advancement of their parents. Hindus consider it ritually essential that their sons light the funeral pyres of the parents.

The Right to Childhood

Unlike their male siblings, girl children are expected to help with domestic chores from an early age. The work would range from cooking, fetching water, cleaning and taking care of younger siblings. In some cases they are also sent out to work in the fields or as domestic help. It is estimated that over five million girls in India under the age of 14 years are working. Most of them work in the invisible and unorganized sector. Nearly 50% of female child workers in urban areas are engaged as domestic help.

Child Marriage, though banned under the Indian law, is still prevalent and continues in most of northern and central India. Several studies have revealed the detrimental effects of early marriage on the life and development of the girl child who is physically and psychologically not prepared for the various obligations and strains that the marriage brings. Though the Crime Record Bureau, records very few marriages under the Child Marriage Restraint Act, the practice is rampant and almost never reported. Child Marriage is inevitably followed by early motherhood. Furthermore, malnourishment, severe anemia and natal complications lead to a high rate of maternal mortality.

The Right to Protection

Girl children, who manage to overcome the threats to their lives and the lack of opportunities, are exposed to various forms of violence and abuse. Many girls are expected to work under harsh conditions, often supporting their families which take many forms: sexual exploitation and abuse, rape, incest, prostitution, child pornography, trafficking and harmful traditional practices. Girls face violence in their homes and outside in their communities and at their workplace. In emergency situations, conflicts or natural disasters, they are even more vulnerable.

Research studies show that victims of any kind of mental abuse, including sexual abuse, suffer from internalized feelings of shame, guilt, low self esteem, low self confidence, helplessness, and anguish amongst others. These emotions bear them forever and further off feet their chances of keeping pace with their brothers.

According to the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India, there are close to half a million child prostitutes in the country and the numbers are rising. The girl child falls prey to the viscous sex trade, often sold into prostitution by her own relatives – people she trust to protect her.⁴

Empowerment of Girls and Women

“ Women are Honoured Where, Divinity Blossoms There; and where they are dishonoured, all – action remains unfruitful. When Bhagwad Gita revealed to contain the wisest of sayings, describes a woman to be versatile enough to do the different mantles of a mother, assistant, advisor, and wife, can’ t she shoulder the responsibilities of a manager? Surely the inspiring annals of the female human species are replete with several women have made their mark as great leaders like Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher Kumaratunga, Golda Meir to name a few. The success of a country and society should be seen from perspective of social infrastructure. A woman is a massive circle. Within her, she has the power to create, nurture, and transform. She knows that nothing can come to fruition without bringing that to the limelight.

In most, third world countries, women are struggling against many obstacles in – built in their social status. In these areas, economic and social independence for women may be regarded as deceptive of family life. The social norms relating to women range from outright taboos against working outside the pressures, which discourage women from being involved in economic and social activity. This taboo is more pronounced in rural areas. It is necessary and more appropriate to understand the status and the lifestyle of women.

Still to a “ man” , it is not so appealing to visualize a woman managerially gesturing from an executive’ s chair to her office mates conveying decisions, instructions, and advice. According to those who have made a detailed study of the subject, irrespective of the gender difference and biological disparities, women have displayed, at crucial times, an array of abilities like tolerance, patience, forbearance, concentration, team spirit, and even determination. It is not surprising, therefore, that the employment scenario itself is undergoing a far- reaching transformation.

Need and Importance of Women Empowerment

There are inequality and vulnerability of women in all spheres of life. They need to be empowered in all walks of life. Without the active participation of women establishment of a new social order may not be a successful one because women constitute half of the population. Women should realize that they have constitutional rights to quality health care, economic security, and access to education and political power. Mahatma Gandhi firmly states that the status of women would not change merely by bringing legislation; it must be supported by the change in the women’ s social circumstances and situations and also man’ s sexist attitude towards women. Fertility rates, age at marriage, health and nutrition are very low. Participation of women in the political process at the grass

root level enhances their social status and it helps to solve the local problems, particularly drinking water, health, education, child development, social security for aged, disabled and in planning grass root level planning.

Women are deprived of:

- Decision – Making power
- Freedom of Movement
- Access to education
- Access to Employment
- Exposure to Media

Globalization Effects on Women Empowerment

Globalization means to know about the social, political, and economic empowerment of women through their status. Globalization is a mode of sharing of the experiences, exchange of ideas, technology and network of the institutions and organizations through bilateral and multilateral arrangements. There are various means by which globalization mitigates the cross border problems with the help of airplanes, telephone services, emails and instant capital flows.

Globalization with the help of positive economic and social policies helping women to empower themselves so that they can realize their full potential. It is helping most of the countries to eliminate the discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child, it is providing equal access to health care, quality education at all levels, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and ensuring provisions of the women basic needs, several programs would be initiated globally.

Women' s Access to the Economy in the Current Period

There is a long voyage for women in India, to penetrate the threshold of curtain under which they were captivated ever since. The glimpse of Indian women always portrayed a pathetic scene, she has been associated with problems like female infanticide, dowry, sati etc. and was a victim of man led society by now. In today' s job scenario gender is an irrelevant factor for recruitment Armed with professional qualifications and skill; the Indian women executives are seizing the corporate world by storm. Organizations are willing to pay the premium in terms of accommodating women' s needs for the women candidate.

To break the shackle of applying women as merely an object, there is an utmost requirement of “empowering women”, to make her eligible for legislative rights she deserves. Various researchers have examined the rationale behind women becoming economic actors. Income – generating activities are not merely viewed as a tool for the economic needs of women. It is equally a powerful instrument to enable women to determine their likes. Culturally, even women are more befitting to ride a venture on account of skills developed through managing households, nurturing relationships and furnishing creativity. Thus, a transformation from house management to enterprise management would be conducive than a shift from unpaid to the paid workforce.

If a man is educated, only one individual is educated but if a woman is educated the whole family is educated, said by M.K.Gandhi. Traditionally, a woman's role has been that of a homemaker while a man is expected to fulfill the role of a bread earner. The woman in ancient India played a highly esteemed role; she was regarded as Devi and Adishakti.

Time changed and women confined to pardah due to insecurity in the social system. Later during the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi brought the women into the freedom struggle. Two decades back, women are employed in traditional jobs, which were considered as befitting them such as Teachers, Nurses, Secretaries, Doctors and clerks.

Suggestions to Empower Women

- The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroot problem. However education for women has to be paid special attention.
- Changes in women's mobility and social interaction.
- Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in society.
- Strict implementations of Programmes and Act should be there to curb the malpractices prevalent in society.
- Providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation, Housing.
- Awareness programs need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights⁵.
- We should also give them opportunity in active politics and social activities so that social integration in Indian Society can be made⁶.

II. Conclusion

To compete in a man's world, women have to shed all inhibitions and become bold. They should learn to introduce ideas with conviction. They should learn to convince people and try to become skilled communicators. They should learn to adjust themselves to the 'rhythm' of the conversation. Women should not give the impression that they are like appendages and dependants.

We dream of a better India for an even brighter tomorrow – a country which is free from petty squabbles over caste, creed, and religion, treats all its citizens with the same dignity and offers them equal opportunities at education and work. Let us take an oath that is we want an egalitarian society where men or women get the equal opportunity to express and uplift ones well – being of the society as a whole.

It is rightly said that “ To awaken people it is the woman who must be awakened once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves” .

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