

Gender Equality In India : A Viewpoint

An overview. The Global Gender Gap Index is an index designed to measure gender equality. It considers the state of gender discrimination in 144 emerging economies. India has for the last two years been positioned at 108 amongst 144 countries. Gender inequality and gender discrimination are a universal phenomenon and United Nations and all nations in the world are seized with this problem and many a remedial measures, acts, laws have been enacted world over which has lessened this menace but there is yet much to be done before its completely eradicated.

India : In India, female child has been, since antiquity, been viewed as a burden to the family she has been born into. This is primarily due the physical insecurity women face all over India and heinous crimes on women are a common day occurrence. Down the ages, chastity of a woman has been considered as the honour of a family in Indian society. Lack of security to common masses has been the story of India and security of chastity of a girl child, especially ones who have attained puberty, till her marriage at her parental home and after her marriage at her husband's home, has evolved many an Indian customs which were and are being followed even today. These have stymied the true potential of this section of population and they are yet to become able contributors in the making of modern India.

Evolving Modern Indian Society. The

girl child, a victim of child marriage, dowry, unequal nutrition vis a vis her male siblings and unequal education opportunities, have yet managed to break many a shackles of archaic traditions and customs, aided by state policies against gender discrimination and spread of literacy in the country. But modernization has its cons and one such con has been the advent of dish TV in the 1980s and now direct to home broadcasts of Indian electronic media. The exposure of the Indian males used to seeing his family womenfolk covered from head to toe and in veil, to skimpily clad women and Baba Sehgal music, has warped their sense of reasoning and this has led to increasing commoditization of women in Indian society which gravely threatens the security of working women.

Population Bomb : As India steps into 2020, over 50 percent of the Indian population will have an average age of 29 years. The majority of this population, seeking gainful employment may lose out due to lack of qualification, automation in this era of Artificial Intelligence. The male coefficient of this unemployed work force has already started grumbling loss of jobs to their women counterparts. This coupled with the gender imbalance due to rampant unchecked female foeticide, despite rise in literary standards, of average gender ratio of population to 925 female to every 1000 males will make finding a bride difficult for them, adding to their frustration, leading to rise in crime against women and gender discrimination/exploitation.

Much has been written on the gender inequality/discrimination in India, its causes rooted in the patriarchal society preferring sons over daughters, the menace of dowry, the inequalities in education and nutrition of girl child as she is treated as dead investment as ultimately she will be married off, child marriages and of the plethora of laws enacted by State and Central governments to uplift the girl child, much of which are flouted openly as the religions and the society at large turns a blind eye to their implementation. All these causes of discrimination has created namely restricting the opportunities of education and nutrition for the girl child, the ramifications of which can be seen in the economic inequalities namely lack of job opportunities, inferior pay packages and exploitation, lack of access to bank loans and lack of encouragement for entrepreneurship. This has led to minimal representation of women in core manufacturing industries, infrastructure development, teaching, scientific and military professions. Notwithstanding all the pitfalls of the society in relation to development of girl child, this year's CBSE results have seen two Girls jointly topping the examination and the pass percentage of girls being 88.7 vis a vis 79.4 of the boys, which augurs well for the country. In the workforce, the sincerity, dedication and intelligence of the female workers are making them preferred candidates for employment but women make a paltry 25 % of the workforce out of which a whopping 97 % is in the informal sector. If this figure increases by 10 percent then over the next seven years the value addition will be to the tune of \$770 billion.

Even when this paltry workforce steps out of the protected domains of their homes, they face discrimination, the causes and remedies of which have been briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.

Work : Home conflict. The Indian male, the preferred child of Indian society carries his superior status in his marital agreement too, even if his wife is a working professional. He expects her to be home in time and even after a hard day at work, fulfill all her obligations as a Indian wife, i.e from cooking to cleaning to teaching children to taking care of in laws and the list is rather infinite. This is creating a conflict situation and increase in domestic violence wherein again the wife is at the receiving end. Ultimately many such able female workers either drop out of employment or prefer not to get promoted, to strike a healthy balance between professional and family life (sic!).

Parental Care : Gender norms universally prefer mother to be the care giver to the children. For a professional woman this would, after the end of her maternity leave mean the end of her career. To prevent this, there is a requirement for the males to avail not only their right of paternity leave but to also ably contribute to bringing up the children, sharing the load equally with his wife. In India, this is easier said than done though increasingly husbands are contributing but the mother still remains the primary care giver. To prevent parental care from affecting either the work or the children, the State must provide high quality low cost child care which will be an incentive to the mothers/ either of the parents to take a sabbatical

from work , without being worried about finances. In addition, the employers too can offer “flexible work times” to the parents and the “work from home” option. Employers too can offer “shorter working hours”. All these initiatives will help retain skilled manpower in the industry and the productivity of the nation will gain.

Earn Well to Defeat the ills of Gender Inequality. Empirical evidence suggests that women in workforce who are well paid are often considered superior to their male counterparts earning inferior pay packets. This enable s the women to not only lead the men which is kind of unheard of in a traditional society like India but it also enables her to break the shackles of many a taboo which stymie the growth of women in India . More often than not , due to the present level of gender discrimination in the society , a superior woman maybe perceived as a threat by the Indian male and this may lead to conflict situation for the women , in a male dominated traditional society. The society often wins such conflicts unless the education of the children addresses gender equality and the society too changes.

Is Marriage an Institution of Inequality? In India marriage is the medium of transferring status, wealth and property from generation to generation. But this institution also comes with strongly prescribed gender roles. Women’s personal and civil rights and access to financial resources are strictly controlled in marriages. Regardless of the economic status of the family, women and their labour was considered the property of her husband. This however has undergone

a sea change in India, thanks to the spread of education and formulation of laws to protect the gender equality. Recently Supreme Court struck down the the archaic law of “Adultery” which defined only women as the culprit . The Honourable Supreme Court categorically upheld gender equality and stated that “married women are not Chattel of their husbands”. For a married working couple in India, the emphasis on understanding and practicing Gender Equality is a key to the not only the success of the marriage but also of their career. This requires a mindset change in the society to which education is the key.

Remedies for Gender Equality at Workplace. Some remedies to correct gender inequality in the workplace are suggested below:

- **Gender Pay Parity :** This will ensure equal pay for men and women doing same job and help men recognize women as their equals.
- **Gender Balanced Leadership :** In the workforce, as a policy ,the proportion of women leaders should be equal to the percentage of the women workforce in the lower rungs. This will ensure a healthy environment and also encourage the junior rungs to aspire, knowing the system to be equal towards all.
- **Gender Balance Across Disciplines :** In any industry, as per policy (desirable) the work force in all sub discipline of that industry must be balanced including in those which are considered male bastions. This will give a huge boost to

Gender Equality and instill confidence in the women work force and women in general in this patriarchy dominated society.

- **Gender Neutral Assessment :** Often in India while assessing, the female worker is discriminated as it is thought that a good assessment will make her eligible for promotions and posts of leadership considered male domains. And that after promotion, the women may not be available due to confinement during maternity leave or other commitments as found in traditional Indian households. This mind set needs to change and a system put in place where the assessors are sensitized about the need to assess without gender discrimination into which they have been ingrained since childhood .
- **Equal Workforce Participation :** A concept utopian in today's India as the present gender inequality deprives larger portion of the women from joining the labour force in equal numbers as men .This needs to be remedied post haste by ensuring equal opportunities to all children in all spheres during their development years .This will pay huge dividends to the nation.
- **Equal Share of Domestic Responsibilities :** State and the Industries must put in place provisions which ensure that the men

and women work force contribute equally in discharge of their domestic responsibilities. Provisions such as maternity leave, parenthood leave to men, which ensure that motherhood doesn't affect career and that career doesn't affect parenthood. In addition, flexible work hours, work from home provision, shorter work hours and vacations during children's school holidays are a few suggestions which may help ease the domestic front of their workers and a happy worker is always a productive worker.

In Conclusion : Our evolutionary past inclines males to dominate females and females to be deferential. But we shouldn't be slaves of history. The need of the hour is to evolve a system of fairness and justness in the society by ensuring gender equality and putting in place an education system which sensitise the ills of gender inequality and extols the virtues of Gender Equality and the pressing need to adopt measures to ensure gender equality. Children, so sensitized, will break the shackles of traditions and taboos which are the root cause of gender discrimination and ensure an India where the tenet of equality engraved in our constitution is practiced to its letter and spirit. This will pay enormous social and economical dividends for our Nation and we will march into modernity of scientific world , in all its glory, with heads held high.

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