

“Gender Bias in the Society”

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Gender bias has always been prevalent in our society. Gender is not a binary term but a spectrum. Gender bias is hierarchical in nature because one gender is valued more than the other. It begins right from the childhood. These biological gender divisions have created bias everywhere.

What is Gender?

An individual becomes man or women by the socially preconceived notions. The term sex and gender are often used interchangeably. However, there is a difference between the two terms. Sex is the biological characteristic of an individual whereas gender can be defined to be a socially and culturally built term for a man and a woman. Gender and sex are not linked. Gender keeps on evolving and the gender roles keep on changing. Gender identity and sexual identity are also often linked; however, both the concept converge each other. Gender identity is also about your internal feelings.

Gender Bias faced by Women-

Women’s Rights Movement is the oldest movement in the world. Breaking the ‘glass ceiling’ is a very popular phrase. Women are trying to achieve equality from decades. Women were always seen as someone who fills the absence of something or someone who fills the spot of the man of the house when he was not there.

‘Family should be your first priority, don’t run behind your career’. Most of the woman have grown up hearing this. Every child is embedded with social and cultural norms that based on their gender. If it is a girl, she is told that she should help her mother with all the household chores because she is expected to look after the house in the future. If it is a boy, he is told to develop his physical strength and concentrate on his education because he is expected to be the bread earner of the family. We are living in and also following these stereotypes from time immemorial. Not many things have changed. The patriarchy however has remained staunch.

Women, have always been oppressed of their rights. They are not only exploited of their economic, social, political and cultural rights but also reproductive, health, legal and educational rights. Even though the Constitution of India guarantees equality and also provides provision of reservation for women, the equality in opportunity is adrift. In many countries, women did not get their voting right just because the society thought that a woman were not capable enough to understand the system.

Whenever a woman is pregnant, the very first question a person asks to her is, ‘what do you want, a girl or a boy?’ or ‘What do you think is it a girl or is it a boy?’. It is unfortunate that even

today a girl child is aborted because she is less valued than a boy. Female foeticide is a result of gender bias. From the rural to urban areas, the practice of female foeticide is prevalent. Even though prenatal sex determination is banned in India and after the implementation of acts such as the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostics Techniques Act (PCPNDT) the rate of female foeticide hasn't reduced much.

Reproductive right is a women's right and also a human right and these rights are frequently violated. Women are subjected to forced pregnancies and repeated pregnancies because there has always been a preference for a male child. They are also subjected to forced abortion. Women are often blamed for infertility even if the male is infertile. All these factors affect the physical and mental health of a women. It is unfortunate that majority of the population does not know about the reproductive rights of a woman.

At the tender age of 12 or 13, where a teenager is supposed to get primary education, girls are pulled out of the school just because they hit puberty and are considered to be fit for marriage whereas a boy, of the same age, still continues to enjoy his life and do whatever he wants to. A girl is pulled off from the school because spending on her education is a waste of money. Is education a waste of money? Unfortunately, people still consider a girl child as a burden. People have failed to understand that a girl's education empowers her family. Girl have been the victim of child marriage, violence, abuse for years and yet continue to be. In most of the cases, when a girl gets married, she is completely dependent on her husband as she is forced to give up her career and instead look after the family. There have been cases where the girl is forced to get married even before she completes her higher education.

The practice of dowry is consequence of gender bias. Before a girl gets married, she is considered to be a burden on her father and after marriage, she becomes a burden on her husband, so as a security for the marriage so that it lasts long, dowry is given to the groom. Though, the payment of dowry has long been prohibited under specific Indian laws including the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498A of the Indian Penal Code,¹ the practice still continues. Many women have faced and continue to face a problem like domestic violence, bridal suicide etc. if their family fails to give dowry. Violence is grave issue that women continue to face.

Women, earlier were denied of their inheritance rights. After six decades of the implementation of laws related to succession, women finally got the right to inherit property. However, this law though in practice, women are still at the disadvantage.²

A woman is always expected to sacrifice her career to look after the family. But times have changed, women have realized the importance of being financially independent, they have

¹ Dowry System in India – Wikipedia

² Property Rights – gender inequality in India - Wikipedia

entered in various field and also excelled in the same. They no more are home-makers and also not dependent on their husband. Women now pursue the career of their choice. However, women face gender bias at the work place too. Many women are denied opportunity simply because the employer thinks that the women won't be able to handle her career and house at the same time and that she won't be able to take the responsibility given to her. Recommendation of a female candidate is always excluded. It is also seen that women have been denied opportunity when it comes to leadership. Even if the women is given an opportunity to become a leader, the male co-workers find it difficult to follow superiority of women. It not only happens at workplaces but also when it comes to political representation. It is preeminent that the number of female leaders is comparatively very low than the male leaders.

Economic inequality is also a result of gender bias. The Constitution of India guarantees Equal Pay for Equal Work under Article 39(d). Most of the times, a woman is paid less wages compared to a man. Employer's think that women are less efficient than men and therefore women are paid less salary even though they do equal work.

Sexual Harassment at workplace is also the consequence of gender bias. Many women face harassment by their co-workers and employers. Hideous acts like passing lure comments, spreading rumors, intimidating behavior and also humiliation are pulled off by the co-workers, employers so that the women are denied of future opportunities, promotion, increments or even being hired. Such people consider women to be weak and in most case suppress them for filing cases.

Gender Bias faced by the Third Gender –

It would be unfair if the bias that the third gender faces is not mentioned. Third gender is an umbrella term for many other gender identities. The social status of the third gender is complex. Even though the presence of this community is from the past so many years' they have always been out casted by the society. Most of the people from the third gender community are abused and abandoned by their families. Many of them face violation and bias daily. They are molested, raped and harassed. No employment opportunity is provided to them, many a times they are not even provided with healthcare facilities. It is unfortunate that to earn money they opt or they are forced to become sex workers. Many choose to beg for their livelihood.

The third gender faces problems and bias when it comes to identity. Since everything requires an identity, like in case of education facilities or healthcare facilities, there is no such option made available to them where they can put what do they identify themselves as and this itself is very insensitive. It was in the year 2014 that the Supreme Court officially recognized the third gender. There is no specific legislation related to the inheritance of property or adoption or maintenance for this community.

The Hijra community in India is one of the ancient transgender community in South Asia. They have their own beautiful history. They are considered to be demigods. It is said that they have the power to bless and curse. People often seek blessings of them because it is a traditional belief that the Hijras have the power bestow the couples that are infertile. New born children are also taken to them to seek their blessings so the child can lead a healthy life. On the other hand, people refuse to treat them equally and to consider them as a part of the society. They are looked upon as someone different.

Sexual Orientation, is something that is really very personal, natural and inborn. However, many people consider it to be a psychological disease or a disorder and therefore try to find the treatment for the same. As this is seen unnatural by the society, especially by the family, they are forced undergo correction therapies. Many of them are excluded from social gatherings just because of their sexual orientation. The words like ‘gays’ and ‘lesbian’ are often used as derogatory terms. LGBTQ issues remain largely untalkaboutable.

Gender Bias faced by Men – The Unspoken Gender

Men too face gender bias. As stated earlier, the society has pre conceived notion which are expected to be followed by everyone. It is because of the stereotypes like men should repress their emotions, should be masculine, aggressive, dominant, self-reliant etc. When a male expresses his emotions, he is considered to be weak and stigmatized of having feminine characteristics. All these factors affect the mental health and may drive some to extreme decision. Men face toxic masculinity throughout their life. This toxic masculinity reinforces in the oppression of women.³

Hatred towards men or Misandry is manifested in many ways, one of it being gender bias. Some men are the victims of gender-based violence, and those men deserve justice. However, the society ignores these facts. The issues remain unspoken.

Conclusion -

Gender bias is an obstruction for the evolution and progress of the society. It has prevented many to reach their full potential. It is important for us to understand that sticking up to the stereotypical roles assigned to the respective gender causes of gender bias and therefore it is the time we should discontinue them. It is of utter importance that we become gender sensitive, not only towards a particular gender but towards all the genders. It is important to strengthen and respect every individual so that we, together can break the wall of the bias.

All the genders should be treated equally. Equality is enshrined under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution and it is important to practice the same. Gender equality is a human right.

³ John Stoltenberg on Toxic Masculinity – Wikipedia