

“Gender Bias in Society”

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INTRODUCTION

Gender Bias has been existing in the society as long as humans can remember. The fact that different genders have to be treated differently due to various mindsets that we developed has infected us and has made us biased towards one or the other gender. We have always assumed that there are different roles for different genders in the society. Women have been suppressed in our society for a long time assuming that they are weak and are only suited to become housewives and the third gender or Transgender have been ignored by the majority of the society since the beginning of the time and are considered as an aberration of nature. These biases, we come across every day, and are witnessing them at a large scale in various forms.

In the recent years, we have seen a massive change in the awareness towards gender bias. People are becoming more aware of the way certain people are treated on the basis of their gender. There has been a huge uproar concerning women’s and transgender’s rights especially in the last decade. There have been movements against female foeticide, girl education, women’s safety, recognition of the third gender and so on. The government and various NGOs have worked together closely to spread awareness about the aforementioned issues and about the fact that there is no difference between various genders and the society should not be biased towards one gender. Women who were subjected to biases at their workplace, homes, schools, colleges and kept their silence due to the social stigma attached and that the society is biased towards men got a chance to speak and express themselves online without any fear. Trans people also came forth on the online sites to speak against the bias.

Since these movements and awareness campaigns, there has been steady rise in girl education, less inequality and more empowerment. The government also took steps to make sure that women and transgender be treated equally and with dignity. The government passed various legislations like The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Maternity Benefit Act, 2017 and one of the major Acts in the decade, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. Against the crimes too, the government has passed legislations against trafficking (both women and transgender) and domestic violence as such. All of this has ensured less crimes against women and the third gender and that they are treated equally as men.

Another serious issue that needs to be addressed here is if feminism has truly justified the means to equality? Instead of bringing women up we have taken down men and situation has changed to harassing men instead of promoting women. We have looked at it from the point of view of women but has the men's side grew as exponentially as women. For the sake of uplifting women, men are being subjected to harassment on every social platform. Clearly, the feminist movement instead of upliftment and providing equality for women has had a negative effect on men and now their intentions are being questioned and they are facing biases by society.

Feminist movement was needed, no doubt. But has it completely worked out as it was expected to? Feminism according to me and in its purest form is equality of every gender in the society and sometimes it means equity of one gender i.e. giving opportunities and being favourable towards one gender if that is what's necessary. It does not mean bringing down a specific gender by harassing and deprecating them.

Let's back up a bit. 2018 was a bombshell. During the latter part of 2018, inspired from the movement in the United States of America, the #MeToo started making rounds on Twitter and Facebook and took the Internet by storm. Thousands of stories started pouring out of survivors of sexual harassment and assault. Many famous names were being named ranging from actors to writers to politicians. The trending hashtag brought to light various incidents of sexual harassment and assault allegedly. This was necessary, someday this was bound to happen and it did. We needed to speak about this issue which was lurking in the dark and bring it directly into the spotlight if we are talking about gender bias.

If we are talking about gender bias then one must throw some light to the aforementioned issues.

BIASES AGAINST WOMEN

The history of women facing gender biases is as old as history itself. During the pre-independence era, women were not allowed out of their homes and were not allowed to take education. They were married as a child and were sent to their husband's home where they were subjected to mental torture and were suppressed and at times physical torture.

Girls started to receive education when activists like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule fought for girl education and child marriage. They themselves started schools and educated the girls in the locality. Not just in the education, women faced lots of inequalities. The practice of Sati which only women were compelled to follow when they were widowed and not men. Women who refused to sacrifice themselves after their husband's death in the practice of sati were shunned from society and were given the worst treatment. Activist like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his self-founded organisation Bramho Samaj fought for the abolishment of the Sati practice. Even after some ground-breaking conventions and legislations like UN Women's Human Rights in the Human Rights Declaration of United Nations many countries are still struggling to achieve gender equality because of their differing mindsets. Despite the record breaking and increasing leadership of

women there are some old stereotypes of bias and discrimination that has converted workplaces as a hostile environment and is at the top of the list where sexual harassment and gender bias occurs. There have been many cases in the past decade regarding sexual harassment at workplace which is one of the biggest obstacles to achieve gender equality.¹ There is a lack of flexibility in the society and hence the workplaces which cannot bear women climbing her way up the ladder and being leaders not only domestically but also professionally because of the stereotypes and the patriarchal society which bodes only men.

The most common reason why women did not work and were not provided work was that was the thinking that they had to leave once they are pregnant and according to the employers a working pregnant woman is inefficient. So, in furtherance to achieve this goal, the government introduced the Maternity Benefit Act in 2017 which allowed women to take a maternity leave.

All these steps were taken so as to ensure gender equality and for the upliftment of women in the society. To a certain point we have achieved that goal but there is a longer way to go. We need to get rid of this stereotypical mindset and set ourselves on the path of equality.

GENDER INEQUALITY AGAINST MEN

Men have been subjected to defamation and harassment in the name of feminism. Along with the positives, comes negatives and a lot of false cases were registered due to the false accusations. Feminist in order to uplift women have overlooked men. As the stereotypes go, men are always categorised as the anti-feminist and as the gender who opposes the upliftment of women. There is no doubt that men are always considered the dominant gender and women being the subordinate, people think that women are always the victims. Men experienced a lot of cases of sexual harassment at the workplace as it is a common occurrence regardless of the gender.

Men are being harassed with such false claims so much that a survey conducted in Delhi in 2013-14 revealed that more than half the claims were false and did not have any basis, according an article posted by BBC News.²

After the MeToo movement, a survey was conducted and it was found that more than half of the accusations online and the cases reported were false. Now, regardless of the accusations being true or false, the men accused are being subjected to harassment. Consequently, it leads to defamation and can affect them personally, mentally and socially. Men who have been accused allegedly are subjected social embarrassment. Our media and the general public assume the guilt even before the case reaches the court and the accused is abused and stripped off his dignity before the verdict of the court is out. This destroys the character, the social status and the dignity of the accused even though the verdict comes out in his favour.

¹ (1997) 6 SCC 241

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38796457>

The intention behind the movement was to empower women to speak against the harassment, biases and inequality against them. Rather it has given unchecked power to people to accuse men.

TRANSGENDER AND THIRD GENDER

Whenever one talks about gender bias, they always talk about the mainstream genders i.e. men and women. But one always forgets that there is more to gender than just men and women. There exists one more and most ill-treated gender i.e. transgender. The third gender people have been treated unfairly since the peak of civilization. Trans people are the most suppressed gender in the society and are subjected to prejudice and bias. Transgenders were confined to a particular role in society and were treated as unique. They were given the most mediocre jobs such singing and dancing in the weddings and celebrations in the king's courts. During the British rule, transgender people were considered unnatural and they were prosecuted for being a transgender or of third gender under Section 377 of the IPC which was finally decriminalized in September 2018 in the case Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India. Even now when transgender have been recognised by the India Government they are still treated as marginalised section of the society. Their human rights are abused by the society. They have less employment opportunities available. Even now, after the government have recognised them as the third gender, they still face gender biases on a regular basis. They have been provided with all the fundamental rights like the rest of the people. In 2016, a bill was passed to protect the rights of transgender people. Rights like educational rights, economic rights and it also includes harsh sanctions to whomever assaults or harasses transgender. In 2009 they got voting rights and in 2014 they were recognised as a third gender apart and male and female.

This is just the case in India, internationally several steps have been taken to protect the rights of transgender and third gender people. There are still a lot of countries who have not yet recognized the transgender or third gender rights. UAE have still not recognized these rights and have passed rights opposing the third gender and armed the doctors with performing sex change surgeries on transgender or third gender people so as to correct them. There is still a long way to go and they deserve equal rights as men and women.

CONCLUSION

Apart from the rights reserved and the recognition given to women and the third gender, there is still a long way to go as the society need to widen their gaze and accept that all genders are equal and these biases are just in their minds. Achieving the goal of equality does not mean that we will ignore the rights of the already recognised gender. It does not mean that in order to empower women and the third gender, men must be marginalised. We should make the world a better place where all the genders can thrive without the fear of being subjected to bias and prejudice.