

“Gender Bias – Patriarchal Norms of Ethics”

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ABSTRACT

India is a country where women are considered to be Goddess. The ancient scriptures of the land include transgender community along with men and women. They are not just religious concepts but an indication of the tradition. It is quite surprising that, the same country which worshipped women and named transgender in holy books have witnessed a lot of struggles for gender equality. The stereotyped notions of the society have forced the Constitution makers to include a provision for “equal treatment of gender” as a fundamental right. The supremacy of men in the society has fixed by placing him as the first gender. The same is happening in the family, media, and politics. Gender discrimination is the result of deep rooted patriarchal norms of ethics. Making the concepts of “gender” free from the clutches of patriarchal norms of ethics is essential.

GENDER BIAS AND ETHICS

Gender bias is a preference or prejudice towards one gender over the other.¹ It welcomes unreasonable discrimination amongst genders. Even in this century people believe that, gender bias is essential to keep society in an ethical way. The gender bias has an undisputed relation with religions. Basically most of the ideas behind such stereotyped ethical life were deducted from religious text books. The subjugation of women and LGBT communities are specifically mentioned in those holy text books. In Christianity “women are supposed to keep silence in the church”² and there is no scope for debate to grant priesthood to women. According to Manusmriti there should be a guidance of male in every stages of a woman’s life. Considering women as the “tilth of man”³ is another holy version of gender bias. It is hard to expect a justiciable space in the society for transgender people from the institutions which grants a lower position to the women.

The structure of families in the society is also influenced by the ethical norms of gender bias. Usually in families men are assigned as the “bread winner” and women as the “home maker”⁴. Domestic violence, dowry death, marital rape and career drops are not just nightmares but the

¹ Available at <https://www.diversity.com/page/What-is-Gender-Bias>

² 1 Corinthians 14:34

³ Verses 2.223 of Holy Quran

⁴ Available at <http://sociology.iresearchnet.com/sociology-of-gender/gender-bias/>

hard reality. All these are the result of gender bias. The family structure which demands women to be the sufferer and men to be the decision maker could never grant justice.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE VIEWS OF GANDHI, NEHRU AND AMBEDKAR

“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved”
-Dr. B.R Ambedkar

In the name of tradition, faith and custom a whole set of social flows revolved around women.⁵ The patriarchal nature of society confined women to the households making them inferior to male counterparts and invisible in public place.⁶ Social reformers played a vital role in helping women to break the chains and make them to realize the public spaces are not alien to them. The towering figures of Indian Politics Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar have contributed much for women empowerment. It is not possible to tie their ideas about women empowerment with a common twin. But their vision was same. They raised voice courageously to declare that, the world is not just for male. They expressed the thirst for creating a world without gender discrimination.

At the time of freedom struggle women were afraid to come forward. The reluctance in the part of women was the result of taboos in the society regarding ethics or morality. Shoulder to shoulder work with men were not allowed to women. But Gandhi succeeds in bringing women to the public space as potential agents capable to voice their needs and demands shoulder to shoulder with men.⁷ In the words of Gandhi; *“unless women of India work side by side with men, there is no salvation for India”*. Gandhi’s views regarding women and need for equal treatment are embodied in his words.

“The parameter for the examination of progress of a civilization was to see how it treats its women” – Jawahar Lal Nehru

Nehru was also of the view that discrimination based on genders would never bring progress to the Nation. He was very much enthusiastic with educating women. He believed that, educated women could bring quality generations. He also rebuked the mindset of the general public towards prostitution.⁸ He believed that, the status of these women could be advanced by helping them find or provide them with honourable means of employment.

Ambedkar strongly criticized the status granted for women in the society during his period. He was of the view that, “in the days before the Shasthras were written, women occupied a very high position in the society. They were entitled to education. But with the passage of time,

⁵ Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BpHH3hTS6Y>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Supra 5

⁸ Supra 5

situations altered as a result of the restrictions imposed in Manusmrithi”.⁹ Also he believed that, when the religious notions were demolished, women were free from the clutches of custom and tradition and her status automatically rises.

Gender bias in the society is not something new which existed years before and continues to exist. Centuries long struggle for creating a world without gender bias is continuing. Scrolling again through the words of Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar about women empowerment is essential to understand the need for ending gender bias.

SET THE SKY FOR RAINBOW

“Openness may not completely disarm prejudice, but it’s a good place to start”

-Jasons Collins

Gender is not a synonym for biological sex. In general terms “sex” refers to the biological differences between males and females but gender is “an individual’s concept of themselves”.¹⁰ Discriminating LGBT community from the main stream of society is the worst form of gender bias. A Country which celebrates decades of Independence is still witnessing the struggle of a minor community. Representing this sub-altern community with prime importance is essential. Every single right which the heterosexual community enjoys should be granted to the homosexuals. Because they are just different genders not an alien enemy. The Judgement which struck down S.377 of IPC¹¹ is a historical one and which pave way to hope.

CONCLUSION

Equality is everyone’s birth right. All are equally entitled to enjoy all the rights irrespective of their gender. Suppressing one gender physically, mentally or sexually for the enjoyment of another gender won’t justify any ethical standards. No religious, Social, Moral or Ethical institution is capable of reducing one’s basic human rights. Prosecuting women alone for prostitution, demanding to have a pardha over her identity, forcing to stay with the biological sex are not the jewels over ethics but the curse.

⁹ Supra 5

¹⁰ Available at <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/232363>

¹¹ Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India W.P(Crl.)No.76 of 2016