

GENDER INEQUALITY AND CULTURAL RESPONSES IN CONTEXT OF INDIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Gender Inequality refers to unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender. Man and Woman play important role in process of creation and development of their families at personal as well as social level. In contrast to it, there is a continuous struggle for equality among men and women. Gender inequality is experienced differently across different cultures and it also affects non- binary people. While there are biological differences between men and women but when we talk about gender inequality, it is a social construct. Writers across the globe throughout history always write about the burning issues of their time. The postmodern idea has changed the entire layout of literature, be it print or media or moving literature, authors behave as reformists to bring a social change in society along with activism what plays an important role to put that changes into praxis. This research paper attempts to bring out elements of gender inequality and certain cultural responses to it in Indian context, for the right of equality.

Keywords: Gender, Society, Culture and Media.

Introduction: The World Health Organization provides ranking as Gender Inequality Index (GII) to analyse gender disparities in three dimensions: Health, Empowerment and Labour market and higher this value in gender inequality index indicates the worse achievements. Another report by World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Index (GGI) showed India slips down 28 places, ranked 148 among 152 countries [The Hindu]. It examines the gap between men and women in four dimensions namely Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment. This incongruity between gender is visible in Literature of all times from the so called enlightened society of Greeks to the modern 21st century literature and various art forms.

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Amartya Sen in his essay “Many Faces of Gender Inequality” defines seven different kinds of inequalities as Mortality, Natalivity, Basic Facility, Special Opportunity, Professional and Ownership and Household Inequality so as to define “Gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems”(Sen, and explaining that women in all classes have experienced low status, oppression, subservience that led to their exploitation.

Feminism that started in 19th century and early 20th century has entered in its fifth wave in India and sixth wave in overseas. Gender Inequality in India is a critical reality. On one side, women are performing well in all socio- economic spheres but still majority of Indian women are facing discrimination. Mainstream social media at conscious as well as subconscious level portraying women in negative or defeatist light along with other issues like stereotypical representation of the women, body shaming and many more. Whereas other prominent people or organization are actively engaging to overcome these issues given by social and cultural patterns of constructed human tendencies. For example, 'Dove' a popular American brand owned by British multinational company Unilever started a campaign on body positivity and self-love by filming it in their commercial ads. “*Har Body Ko Pyaar ka Haq*” the campaign's 30 sec ad tells the story of Diksha, a content creator who faced social media bullying because of her body weight. Dove also launched the Dove Self-Esteem Project claiming that the company “believe no young person should be back from reaching their full potential.” Few more examples are Bollywood movies like *Fire*, *Angry Indian Goddesses* and *Lipstick under my Burkha*. The Female protagonists in all these movies mentioned above are basically the characters born with same kinds of natural urges and instincts, be it the urge to be free, to enjoy bodily pleasures, to interact with the wider society to learn, to grow and to evolve. The variations and the differences have been in their behaviour and conduct which are caused by the social, cultural and political contexts. In other words it can also be said that every individual has exhibited its own capabilities or courage to overcome these hurdles in retaining their original, pure and natural self. Every individual is born different. We should always bow to nature on this and there is also a nature residing inside us but the other elements social, political, cultural, economical combined together in a feudal structure creates a sense of inferiority in some.

Another cultural response to Gender Inequality can be seen in the works of the young and rebellious women poet Meena Kandasamy. She is from Tamil Nadu and belongs to a

Dalit community she has got a powerful voice to break all the stereotypes and shattering the walls of pessimism for women in general in her introduction to *Ms. Militancy*, a feminist retelling of Tamil and Hindu myths she writes

“My Maariamamma bays for flood, My Kali kills.

My Draupadi strips, My Sita climbs onto a stranger's lap.

All my women militate. They brave bombs, they belittle kings.

They take on the sun, they take after me.” (Kandasamy)

Kalki Koechlin, a French actress, writer and an activist. She has written against the 2009 stay of article 377 on criminalization of same sex marriage and has featured in video campaigns emphasising on an individual's freedom to choose their sexual identity. In the *Truths of Womanhood*, Kalki dig into the historical and mythical female portrayal and unravels how women have been denied its personhood and subject positions in the society since time immemorial and examines the secondary position of women in the contemporary times. She is of the view that,

We keep talking about educating the girl child but educating boys is equally important to spread women empowerment it is not a war of female against male it is about equal rights and equal wages it is about breaking the stereotypes and allowing girls to opt for science and letting them play football we are living in an animal world and men are the predators here where you have to bear. (Kalki, The Indian Express)

Kalki also gave powerful performance on the poem *The Printing Machine* which encapsulates the way media sensationalise news about crime against women instead of taking concrete steps to empower them. It can also be viewed as oppose to radical feminism which calls for re-ordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts.

To conclude, it can be said that women has very little recognition in the patriarchal society even in 21st century. She has to face discrimination, surprisingly even when she is the most significant part in every walk of life and inseparable part of human race. Numbers show that women struggle to get education, healthcare and a place in politics. However, with education and some major initiatives by Government of India for

removing gender gaps in all aspects of social, political and economic and progressive thoughts of people in India, along with activism, we can hope for a future where people can live in equitableness no matter what gender they have.

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