EMERGING GENDER ROLES IN URBAN CITIES OF INDIA

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Abstract
Every human being is born a unique individual and has specific personality traits. But certain traits are precluded in a gender. Gender has been an important issue in humankind since ancient period. Gender distinction entails assigns specific social and cultural roles for individuals. Gender bias has seeped into our collective conscious since times immemorial. Women have always been taught to be tolerant and submissive; to ‘watch’ what they say and ‘when’ they say; and to avoid ‘loud’ behaviour. The patriarchal system of society teaches women to internalize the concept of male domination in the process of their socialization. There is palpable evidence to prove that women during the Vedic period earned utmost respect and position in society. That is the reason probably why the Vedic society flourished, prospered and touched the pinnacles of glory. In contemporary times however, women are fighting vehemently for their stature. They are most of the times treated like a commodity. Where they find a way, they outshine their male counterparts and prove their mettle over and over again. Today, there is a lot of rise in consciousness amongst women, especially in urban areas. Women in India have finally come to realize that they have a separate identity, a self apart from the family. They have slowly mustered courage enough to proclaim their individuality, to reject subordination through domestication. Literate women are more enlightened about their rights and duties. Both men and women are the lynchpin of a society and civilization. Together they carry forward the seeds of procreation, impart life to it and nurture it. The need of the hour is to recognize the importance of women in our society. All social evils like eve-teasing, rape, dowry, domestic violence and female foeticide et cetera have to be nipped in the bud. Women do not need to be treated special. They need to be treated with equality and dignity.

Key Words: Gender bias, gender gap, urban India, emerging roles

Gender bias has seeped into our collective conscious since times immemorial. Women have always been taught to be tolerant and submissive; to ‘watch’ what they say and ‘when’ they say; and to avoid ‘loud’ behaviour. The patriarchal system of society teaches women to internalize the concept of male domination in the process of their socialization. Women had always been made to feel that they were inferior by nature and though men paid lip-service to equality, they would resist its implementation. Some men might be sympathetic towards women’s issues, but only women themselves knew what they felt and wanted. The conventional patriarchal setup of our society stifles the talents of women and even undermines their very existence.

Today, there is a lot of rise in consciousness amongst women, especially in urban areas. Women in India have finally come to realize that they have a separate identity, a self apart from the family. They have slowly mustered courage enough to proclaim their individuality, to reject subordination through domestication. Literate women are more enlightened about their rights and duties. The 2019 Global Gender Gap Index finds that India is slightly ahead of the regional average having closed at 66 percent parity overall, leaving a gap of 34 percent. The report measures the gender gap in four main areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. However, the situation in urban areas of India is quite contrary. Here, boundaries are merging and gender roles are constantly being redefined.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Women in urban India are joining the work force more than ever as families in these regions are much more progressive and enlightened. Economic empowerment of women helps tremendously towards poverty reduction. Women are major breadwinners for the household. It leads to education of children as women invest their earnings towards buying better opportunities for their children. The Indian government has been supporting and encouraging economic participation of women through various schemes. Challenges in effective implementation, along with deep rooted social norms have constrained the impact of these policies. Female labour force
participation has plunged to 23.3% according to the 2018 Economic Survey. More girls are studying but they are not necessarily landing more jobs (Namita Bhandare, 2019). The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2017-18 found that if women are paid the same remuneration as men for similar jobs, economic participation and opportunity can receive a boost. Women contribute to the dynamism and vibrancy of bustling cities.

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

Females in the urban areas get equal opportunities to study. Educational institutions in the cities witness heavy enrolment of girls in various courses. The value of education is clear to parents. Universities offer special seats for single girl child. In higher education, the gender gap is at its lowest. Female enrolment in colleges is up from 47.6% in 2017-18 to 48.6% in 2018-19 (All India Survey on Higher Education). Girls have clearly breached the gender gap in primary and secondary education. The success rate of girls in various courses is much better than their male counterparts. More girls than boys attain meritorious positions.

**HEALTH AND SURVIVAL**

There are variable equations as regards to health and survival of men and women in urban cities of India. The overall percentage of population of India residing in urban areas is much less. The situation is dismal in poor households. Health of males figures on a higher rung than females. Precautionary medicine like routine vaccination and treatment of diseases is followed more religiously for males than females. However, in prosperous households, there is no gap the treatment or precautions for males and females.

**POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT**

Political representation of women in urban areas is massive with regards to voting and running small offices. The gap between men and women voters has considerably narrowed over decades. In some cases, women voter turnout exceeds the male turnout. However, women find a much lesser space in the larger political canvas of the country. They are successfully handling political parties but their share in policymaking is much less than men. The constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities but anomalies continue to exist. The picture painted by 2019 Lok Sabha elections is by far the best till date. Firstly, India saw the highest voter turnout in 2019. The 17th Lok Sabha has the highest number of elected women MPs—14.58% as compared to 11.23% in 2014. The 33% reservation of women in the government is also in the favour of females.

**CONCLUSION**

*A woman is the full circle. Within her is the ability to create, nurture and transform.*

-Diane Mariechild

Both men and women are the lynchpin of a society and civilization. Together they carry forward the seed of procreation, nurture it and impart life to it. There is palpable evidence to prove that women during the Vedic period earned utmost respect and position in society. That is the reason probably why the Vedic society flourished, prospered and touched the pinnacles of glory. In contemporary times however, women are fighting vehemently for their stature. They are most of the times treated like a commodity. Where they get a way, they outshine their male counterparts and prove their mettle over and over again. They have risen from the ashes like the phoenix and conquered the world. To mention a few names, we have Nobel laureates Mother Teresa, Aung San Suu Kyi, Malala Yousafzai, Space scientist and astronaut Kalpana Chawla, media personality Oprah Winfrey, writers JK Rowling and Toni Morrison, poetess Maya Angelou, first ladies Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton, and the list is endless.

The wave of change is on the surge albeit gradual. In the contemporary era women in urban India are more enlightened and liberated. Financial independence gives them voice in the family. The need of the hour is to recognize the importance of women in our society. All social evils like eve-teasing, rape, dowry, domestic violence and female foeticide et cetera have to be nipped in the bud. Women do not need to be treated special. They need to be treated with equality and dignity. Our social and family systems are crumbling because our women are not being given their due. We must not treat women as the quintessential workers and caregivers. We must impart them their true identity as respectable members of society. They also have their dreams and wishes and aims. Educate women and empower them. Give them the freedom to exist and our society will flourish and prosper like in the Vedic times.

**REFERENCES**