

## Women in patriarchal code of living

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### Abstract

All humankind naturally has a calculative stand, based on his own profit and loss. When we talk about gender imbalance, men are benefitted and women are usually disadvantaged category. Are we ready to give up the calculative stand, the old values which favour men? Gender gap remains as a curse over decades because it incurs a transaction of profit and loss being regulated by vicious circle of old traditional values and beliefs. Women's work and duties to a family are of tremendous value but remained invisible and the productivity or profit so obtained is rather cumulated to the score of man. A woman is better known by her father or her husband in our society. Gender inequality is also largely determined by the way of socialisation. A boy is taught that a girl should be respected, regarded as a model of goddess, a girl is full of loving, caring and is a suitable helper. In this school of teaching, the achieved status and the ability of a woman is generally underestimated. On the other hand, a girl is taught that men are stronger, to maintain safe distance and to some extent some avoidances and to have great patience. The psychology thus developed in such a different teachings of socialisation has created controversial between the two in later stages. Why do we socially address the wife of Mr. X as Mrs. X but not in vice versa? In Hebrew Bible, God created man first and later created woman out of man's rib? "It is not good that the man should be alone I (God) will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18 & 21). Why man first? The texts were written in favour of man. No doubt man is favoured in most of the epics or texts. In Mahabharata epic Queen Draupadi had been used as a bet for dice gambling; it showed the male hegemony practice towards the woman. The old values are deeply incorporated in belief system and therefore social legislations could not become effective and ultimately inhibits revolutionary steps against gender biasness. It is a tricky thing to promote gender balance by compromising the old values. There could be a range of deviation in expression and presentation while executing gender policies. Wording may change without changing the meaning. There are plenty of politically favoured reactions such as women empowerment, women's seat reservation, gender equality, girl's education but male hegemony could not be changed. It sounds like no visible change is observed in spite of the policies and constitutional acts. Man cannot be always rational and do not want to readily give up the old business, his authority or dominating powers which involve a quantum of loss in transaction. With this trend, there is rise of mental pressures, emotional violence, mental illnesses, conflicts and jealousy in between the two gender categories.

**Keywords:** humankind, profit, gender, socialisation, emotional

### Introduction

Gender inequality is a grave concern of the contemporary human society. It refers to the social definitions and expectations associated with being male or female. It is becoming a quite significant problem in the contemporary modern world with the development of complex societies. Gender inequality describes the gap between male and female which makes either one category of sex is disadvantage. Gender inequalities and its social causes affect sex ratio, health and security, their educational access, and economic conditions. In spite of the fact that natural sex ratio at birth, number of boy is higher than number of girls, many developing countries have low female male sex ratio. India has 943 female per 1000 male sex ratio (census of India, 2011) <sup>[2]</sup>, which is an important indicator of low status of woman. From the economic point of views, gender gap remains sustained over decades because one gender gets benefitted at the expense of the other gender thereby incurring a transaction of profit and loss. Indeed, gender biasness works within the framework of profit and loss, where one gets profit and other gets loss and hence it is very

difficult for an individual to escape from this vicious circle. We all know that household chores done by a woman are of tremendous value to the family, society and state. However, their work and contribution always remained unnoticed when we actually calculate the productivity. Women's duties as good daughters, good wives and good mothers are well defined in the Indian patriarchal society. Wifehood and motherhood are accepted as pivotal roles for women. An ideal woman is referred as sweet, loving, caring and ever sacrificing. The role of woman being described in Sanskrit couplet has quoted 'She is like a mother while cooking and serving food, secretary while he is working, servant at his feet, courtesan in his bed and earth-like in forbearance.' When India's population is examined as a whole, women are at a disadvantage category in several important ways. In India, discriminatory attitudes towards either sex have existed for generations and affect the lives of both sexes. Our experience and literature has enough evidences that women are mostly discriminated and men are benefitted. There is much progress in closing gender gap in various fields such as education, employment, health care etc.

However, gender gaps are still prevalent throughout the world.

In most of the Indian society in particular, a woman after marriage has been culturally taught or licensed to exercise loyalty only to her husband. In Hindu society, wife has to regard her husband as supreme god, by referring the term *Pati Parmeshwor* (husband, supreme god). In no way, divorce is allowed, because the marital tie is made not only for the present life but for seven generations (*Saath Janam ka Bandhan*). Marriage for Hindus is a sacrament but for Muslims it is a civil contract. To a married couple in Hindu society, a woman is instructed not to leave or disobey her husband at any condition. Remarriage is not allowed. She can reach to heaven only if her husband is pleased irrespective of the husband's quality, achievement. She has to bear the destiny. Even if the husband is drunkard, rustic, having extra marital affairs, she has to vow down at his feet. It is of course an obsolete and invalid practice; however, we are not sure that the problem has been eradicated completely. She has been told that all other man, except her husband, should maintain distance and avoidance to some extent. Avoidance is therefore to be practiced by woman as far as possible. In such situation, a woman has been restricted to many events of socialisation. But men have less restriction towards participation in various events of socialisation. Consequently, a woman should have hundred and one reasons to gain trust from a man or remains always with avoidance.

It is natural that human beings do crimes. The act of crime like murder, fighting, snatching other's property is largely determined by biological instinct to meet his needs, self protection or so. These crimes are not confined to man only. Usually, man does crimes in outdoors while woman does the crimes inside the closed door which is then socio-culturally determined. M C Arunkumar (1992) [1] in his doctoral work, 'Womens' Crime in Manipur', states that woman does crimes within a normative culture, crimes committed by woman and man is distinguished by the society. Even the magnitude of penalty is different and favours woman in our society even though it is equally treated in the eyes of constitutional law. Women are considered weaker socially and mentally than a man. In the US, in federal criminal decision, 63% man receive longer penalty sentence than woman (Sonja, 2012) [6]. The reason behind it is probably of her caretaking responsibilities in the society or manifestation of patriarchal form. Patriarchal society manifests certain norms of positive discrimination, such as women reservation in public competition or facilities. However, it also destroys the actual flavour of gender equality. Social legislations have not been very effective in India because of many reasons. One important reason is that most of the women are not fully aware of the measures adopted by the state for their upliftment and even if aware they do not use them because of the old social values that are still persisting. These traditions and values inhibit them to take any revolutionary steps. Legal or legislative sanctions alone cannot bring any substantial change in the downtrodden position of women unless there is a marked change in the attitude and consciousness of men and women both. Even literate women also do not exercise their right of equality wherever it is required.

Thus, the status of women has been raised in the eyes of law, but they are still far from equal to men in every sphere of life. In practice, they continue to suffer discrimination,

harassment, humiliation and exploitation in and outside home. Theoretically, women might have been given more freedom but in practice, they still suffer many hardships, inhuman dignities and unworthy treatment everywhere. Within the home, she is still not treated at par with her male counterpart. Prominent Hindi Poet Tulsidas wrote in his famous epic, *Rama Charitamanas*, "An animal, a rustic, a drum and a woman all require beating" (Verma, 2002 in Yadav Sushma *et al.* 2002) [9]. It means they require to be made perfect by someone and can enhance their values by an owner or husband or a man, otherwise remains incomplete. In the practical level there is a simple gender equation in our society by taking consideration into the status of man and woman and prevailing social gender based barriers. Gender equation is given by

Since, Gender = Women's Vulnerabilities

Status of man, X = gender based vulnerabilities, P + status of women, Y

Gender based vulnerabilities are the prevailing gender based barriers, restrictions, discriminations etc. It is an integrated value of associated factors of gender problems. Higher is the value of P means lowering the value score of Y. There are multiple factors hampering the status of women, the status of woman will equal to that of man when gender based vulnerabilities are completely removed from the society. In a society, P denotes different types of barriers, patriarchy, biasness, restrictions, dowry problems and violence against women etc. Therefore, P is an accumulated value which makes decrease the value of Y.

Desired gender equation, X = Y (removing factor P since P is unwanted factors of gender bias)

Practically, it is very difficult for P to become zero; however, minimizing it as far as possible is a must. It means that women are always away from equal right? In fact, it connotes that women are half built being. In biblical text, god created man first called Adam and later woman (Eve) was created from the rib of Adam. Why God created woman out of Adam's rib, it is because this text is written by human being by keeping woman in a subordinate position. The text further says, 'She shall be called woman for she was taken out of man' (Genesis 2:23). She was formed as a part of the initial man, in order to be a 'helper suitable' for the male (Genesis 2:18).

### Socialization

In all societies, there are certain cultural norms and teachings. Those norms are added continuously and consistently to the individual and to the social group. A man consciously or semi-consciously behaves according to the norms and standards of the society. Within the society, girls and boys are enculturated from two different schools which create a radical gap and controversial when they are grown up and become an able individual. It causes incompatible expectations.

Through enculturation, a girl is taught by her parents, in a pessimist way, that she should maintain safe distance from man; man are physically stronger, avoid lonely mingle and movement with male counterpart except husband or father or brother. The psychology of the girl is developed in such a

way that she view all men in suspicion and conspiracy way, as for instance if a girl is seen mingle with a boy alone, society per se perceives in a wrong way. When she grows up, she has to remain defensive and feel unsafe to all men, feels quite cautious and often tries to stay away to some extent from men which are definitely not a good signs of socialisation. On the other hand, a boy has been taught all good models of a woman, women are pure, special creation of god, motherly, built with modesty, loving and caring. He has been taught not to compete with a woman, but portrait as a tender being who seldom commits crimes.

When a boy is taught that a girl should be respected, nowhere it is mentioned about the girls' ability (of course sometimes better caretaking responsibilities), or achieved status or personalities. He has been just taught that he should regard a girl because she is a girl. The status of a girl is perhaps understood by because of ascribed status not by that of achieved status. Therefore, when a man respect women complying with his cultural ideologies of higher being, man underestimates the ability of the woman practically. Whereas woman may also revert the opposite ideology that she cannot compete as per with a boy due to different cultural syllabus from the same society. A girl or a boy learns the respective lessons accordingly from the same culture. In such situation, the achieved status and the ability of a woman is hardly recognised. Moreover, when the idea of patriarchy is greatly challenged by many women, they open up that why should a man respect a girl as because of her gender. A well qualified woman always ask why should you respect me as woman, you should respect me base on my quality and position. Being a girl or a woman should not be the reason of the respect, but the reason should be something of achieved qualities – beauty, personality, intelligence, skills, knowledge etc.

The aforementioned discussion portrays that a man's regard towards a woman should not be predetermined. The respect as an equal being is very much necessary. The respect will be differentiated again based on the achieved personal qualities. One of the most important concerns in gender issue is our cultural rigid and unscientific norms. A high ranking woman is pre conceived as a housewife. On the other side father kin is consider closer comparatively to the mother kin. These gives significant impact on gender disparity, social institution and structure of the society. Cross cousin marriage is preferred in some societies and on the other hand parallel cousin marriage is strictly prohibited. Since the pairs of chromosomes in human body are made of one set from father and another set from mother, there is no consanguineal difference between cross cousin and parallel cousin.

By considering another point of view, Emile Durkheim (1897) <sup>[4]</sup> in his study on human suicide stated that crime is necessary even though it is socially unwanted. Crime is often generated from certain sorts of imbalance and incompatibility. Man doing crime against woman is a kind of normlessness. When man loses his expectation as prescribed by normative culture from a woman, he has been psychologically insisted to do the crime. In Durkheim's studies, it was found that man and woman have different personalities, attitudes and different suicidal rates. A girl is taught to bear oppressive condition. Hence a woman has more bearing capacity for pressure and tensions, a woman compromises and justifies many odd treatments being done to her. A woman is likely to have great patience enough to

avoid from suicide and lesser rate of suicide than that of man. Man is relatively having lesser patience to social norms, tensions, therefore, either he revolted, or he commits suicide. He has less power to keep silent over the problem with patience. His failure in bearing the distress situations are usually transformed into as crime, violence or suicide. When the social norms are rigid, boys and girls are grown up with different ideologies and these will co-exist if there is sense of complementary, if not, there will be conflict. Woman has more capacity to accept or tolerate suffering, than man because of the different knowledge and ideology gained during various episodes of socialisation.

### **Why gender gap and effects**

It has been taught in modern education that men and women are complimentary to each other. In particular developing country like India lack of modern education among girls, high rate of school drop-out among girls (from 5.2% in 2011 to 4.34% in 2013), disparity in socio-cultural duties of man and woman, son preferences, dowry system, woman stereotypes are some of the reasons and examples of gender inequalities prevalent in Indian society. Women's involvement in the society should be necessarily promoted, credited and acknowledged. Women's participation and inclusion is very much important for a holistic development and progress. In many parts of the world particularly in developing countries like India, women's position is very low which is characterised by –

1. Low level of education such as high rate of school dropout among girls.
2. Dependent on husband for livelihood.
3. Low social status like hardly participation in social activities.
4. Low empowerment because less involved in decision making.
5. Women stereotype: Certain restrictions are imposed on women by culture.
6. Culture of silence: Women don't speak up their problems which overall affect the status.
7. Son preference: Mothers even have partiality or preference for boy child even before conceiving further on in providing food, education and other rearing practices.

Keeping in mind the various concern of gender disparity issues, it is necessary for a researcher to list all the roles and duties of man and woman being prescribed in our cultural norms and traditions. I am sure that all are taught that woman usually commits crimes in a very limited boundary; women are to be given lighter penalty. This is true practically because in most of the legal criminal decision, woman receives shorter penalty sentence than that of man for the same crime. The reason behind it is probably of her caretaking responsibilities in the society or manifestation of predetermined patriarchal form. Because of this complex being manifested by our patriarchal society, the ability and the strength of women are underestimated. Women are often afflicted with depression marked by disorders like slow thinking, decreased energy, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, hopeless and helplessness (Pandya, 1997, p-159) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Dating back to historical scripts, theoretically, women enjoyed the status of devi (goddess) as described in many religious texts of Hindus. Though woman enjoyed the theoretical importance which these texts outline for the wife

who was defined *ardhangini* (better-half), but in practice she had a subservient position than man. She was regarded as a chattel (a corporal movable property) with no rights. In brief, she had no right of her own. She is known by her husband's name such as wife of Mister X is socially addressed as Mistress X but not in vice versa. This was the result of patriarchal code of living. In Vedic times, women were not treated as inferior or subordinate but equal to men in all matters of life. They were given education and had a voice in the selection of their husband. In India, the position of woman mainly deteriorated in post Vedic period. Imposition of Brahminical rules and code of conduct, rigid restrictions imposed by caste system and joint family system were the main reasons for lowering of women's status in this post Vedic (Upanishads, Puranic and Smriti Periods). (Puja Mondal, Women: Essay on the Position of Women in India)

There is increasing international consensus that the abuse of women and girls should be considered as gender based violence, as it largely stems from women's subordinate status in the society in regard to men. In developing countries, like India, women's status is very low in the sense that they are not subject to inheritance of non-movable properties; they are getting low education, affected by son preference. In our society, women even herself has strong son preference, has partiality in providing food, education and other rearing practices between male and female children.

### Women's position in Manipur

Historical records mentioned that Manipuri women took part in both household as well as in the community thereby taking active part in various affairs of the state. Women in Manipur also took various steps to raise the status of common women both during the pre-British and British periods. After independence, they became more aware about their rights and status. Manipur witnessed two *nupi lan* ((*Nupi*-women, *lan*- war) during the British rule in 1904 and 1939. The first *Nupilan* in 1904 and the second *Nupilan* in 1939 are glaring instances of Manipuri women's collective revolt against the political injustices. The two movements have redefined the potential of Manipuri women and their contributions to socio-political reformations.

Manipuri women have been known for their valour, skill and active involvement in social, economic, political and cultural activities. In 1939 also, women revolted against the king and British authority to stop the export of rice from Manipur. That was a great event and came to be known as *Nupi-lan*. In 1904, thousands of women demonstrated in the town to protest and disobey the order of the superintendent of police that public should supply bamboo, cane, etc. to construct the houses of Assistant Superintendent which was burnt down (Singh: 1963) <sup>[5]</sup>. Demonstration with slogan and agitation against water tax in 1932 also witnessed women's active participation.

However, "But in spite of very crucial role in economy, the social position of women was inferior." (Pandey: 1999) <sup>[7]</sup>. Moreover, "women education began lately, i.e. 1891. Before, female education was considered to be a luxury and confined only in the noble family" (Singh, 1963) <sup>[5]</sup>. After the British rule, women of Manipur rapidly advanced in different fields, which was also due to western education. Consequently, women's associations and organizations were set up for the betterment of women. Another feature of

women's role in the community of the state is the introduction of "Women Market" named "Ima Keithel" in Imphal. The market is exclusively organized, controlled and run by women. Historical facts suggest that the *Ima Keithel* is already 100 years old. In this market, women sell fresh vegetables, fish, grain, handicrafts and other household utensils. As observed by one British officer, "all the marketing is done by the women, all the works of buying and selling in public, carrying to and fro of articles to be sold, whilst at home, they are busy employed in weaving and spinning" (Dun, 1886) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Women in Manipur also expand their role in the society by organising themselves to fight some of the malaise of the society such as alcoholism, drug abuse, etc. Two women's movements namely *Nisha-Bandh* and *Meira Paibi* ('Torch Bearers') are examples of women participation in curbing social ills in the society. The emergence of *Nisha-Bandh* movement in 1970s was due to the rise in the sale of liquor and the menace created by men on their wives. In 1980, a stronger socio-political movement by women in Manipur called *Meira Paibis* emerges to safeguard the youth and women from atrocities caused by the security forces such as arrest without any warrant, encounter killings, tortures, etc.

In Manipur, among the Meiteis, woman having a son as the eldest child has a remarkable socio-cultural value as it can be seen in the marriage ceremony. In any marriage procession, a woman having the eldest child a son is entitled to lead the marriage processions (*Heijingpot*), in which she is the *jatra*, the leader. The importance lies in the belief that the newly married couple will also be blessed with a son as the first child. Such beliefs are spiritual and cannot be compromised with the development of education. Women assume subordinate position and are denied equal status with men. Many ancient Indian literatures reported that wives were meant to be beaten occasionally and it was a normal behaviour pattern. It was taken by husband, often as a manifestation of his power over wife, a right which most husbands did not omit to exercise. Man gets benefit at the expense of woman, and through cultural learning woman has been made accustomed to accept the kind of sufferings and keeps remain silent. There are a number of voluntary organisations in India which provide counselling and guidance to families facing marital conflicts. Almost all of these organizations cannot be effective because woman does not readily speak up for family problems and there is low help seeking practices among them.

### Conclusion

It is true that patriarchy is the main reason for gender discrimination, violence including domestic violence. Because of the different teachings through socialisation, man and woman get different concepts towards their roles and rights. The gender gap as we are observing, is not created only by men; women also are responsible for creating such discrimination, stereotype or violence. For example, partiality is found even in motherly between a boy and a girl. In one sense, in socialisation process, woman gets better suited, adapted because they have got more capacity to accept problems with high tolerance comparatively. Boys and girls are brought up in different thoughts and teachings in their respective family and other social institutions. The Smriti (Post-Vedic Period of Hinduism) writers preached that the wife should look upon her husband as God. The concept of *Pati Parmeshwor*, husband the supreme god has

partly no longer observed in towns and cities, but it has been changed to a new fashion without much change to the concept. Because it may be possible that the fashion has been changed or transformed because of new education and technology but the reality of the essence could not be changed. Dowry is prohibited by law however dowry related issues are still prevalent in India. The birth of a female child began to be regarded as a curse. There is a saying spend Rs. 500 female foeticide to save 5 lakhs at the time of marriage in the form of dowry. Sex ratio is declining due to gender inequality and son preference. Well educated family, high status or low or medium, all are trapped in this tradition. We cannot get rid of easily from this social problem because there are many persons who visualise only their short term benefits at the expense of long term future. In some of the Indian states like Punjab, Haryana, sex ratio is very low; number of marriageable females suddenly declines comparatively to the number of marriageable males. So, as a result, one has to go for other states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh etc to find their marriageable brides. This social problem is referred to as marriage squeeze which is characterised by lack of number of brides. This is not a short term effect but it is years-long exposure to low status of woman, lack of inclusion and participation.

In any socio-economic pursuit, no person wishes to go for change in his business which is currently bearing a ceiling profit. Likewise, social norms which are favouring to certain section of population cannot be readily changed such as Brahminism, caste system, capitalism, male hegemony in socio-cultural rites etc. These systems are always connected with something divine and holy sacraments. Karl Marx has pointed out those ideologies are intentionally placed as divine and sacred as superstructure. This made the people to stay in the vicious circle in adherence with the superstructure. Therefore, people underestimated the ill effects and the question of profit and loss being incurred. However, modern education has brought certain knowledge which is quite different from the aforementioned system emphasizing a change to the pre-existing system. When there is a change in an existing system, there are to be held a lot of compromises. All educated people will talk about ill effects of dowry, spousal violence, but he himself is often entrapped with temptation of what is his profit. For example, if I am getting dowry based on my single word answer yes or no, what shall I do. Shall I oppose the social tradition, shall I obey my conscience, and shall I obey the ideology of modern education? Man is by nature has a firm decision on any phenomenon based on his own profit and loss. Most of the old values are in favour of man and are deeply incorporated in belief system. As a result, social legislations could not become effective, inhibits revolutionary steps against gender biasness. It is a tricky thing to promote gender balance by compromising the old values. There could be a range of deviation, dual meaning system in expression and presentation while executing gender policies. Wording may change without changing the meaning.

As of now, man and woman education rate is increasing, but male hegemony could not be easily changed because man cannot be always rational and do not want to give up his authority or dominating powers involving the question of profit and loss throughout the transaction. With this trend, there is uprising cases of mental pressures, emotional violence and mental illnesses. Human being never

compromises at his own expenses. In the eyes of post-modernists, there could be different meanings of a particular social phenomenon. Rationally, mankind dreams to close gender gap but does not want to compromise old values where one gender category is benefitted. Owing to this fact, in practical level, one who is in power has formulated ideal and superficial gender equality which cannot implement effective techniques for closing gender imbalance. Somehow, some sections of our population wish to continue certain traditions in the name of cultural identity and retain the division of gender roles and rights. Women's voices are to be heard aiming to its destination of equality and empowerment. Many argue that exclusive gender policies are also unable in bridging this gap because it rather makes conflicts and jealousy in between.

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