

Tracing the Psyche of Gender Discrimination in Rural and Tribal Communities of India

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Discrimination on the basis of gender has been an age-old social evil in our country. It is one vice of our society that has changed forms but has remained in all walks of life. There is a prejudice against women and they are often deprived of advantages which are provided to the males. Ours is a patriarchal society which follows the principle of favoring men over women everywhere irrespective of circumstances.

As per 2011 Census of India, out of the total population of 1210.19 million, the female population comprised of 586.47 million i.e., 48.5%. Thus, making for almost half of the population of the country, which lags behind greatly in terms of development, even though the constitution of India has granted men and women equal rights. They are not able to fulfill their basic needs and rights, such as education, health care, employment etc. This not only violates their fundamental rights but also human rights. Even though, the laws on rape, dowry and adultery have women's safety at heart, but these highly discriminatory practices are still taking place at an alarming rate.

This problem is even more severe in the Rural and Tribal communities of India. The number of girls dropping out of school far exceeds the boys because girls are expected to help at home, either with household work like washing and cooking or with taking care of younger siblings. Since girls spend more time performing domestic duties and this increases the gap between female and male equality in rural parts of India, it perpetuates the myth that education is of no help to the girl and her primary job will be to look after the household work, get married early, have children and then raise them.

Moreover, land and property rights are weakly enforced in practice, especially with the customary laws being widely practised in rural areas. Women do not own property under their own names and usually do not have any inheritance rights to obtain a share of parental property.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dunn, D (1993) has drawn from both ethnographic and statistical sources, a descriptive profile on the status of women in the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India. Census data reveal extreme degrees of gender inequality among the scheduled groups: relative to men, women in these groups have far more limited access to both educational and employment resources.

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Singh, Amar Kumar and Rajyalakshmi, C (1993) have discussed the status of tribal women in terms of their demography, health, education and employment. Despite constitutional protection and assurances, their status is found to be lower than the women of general population and Scheduled Castes as well as lower than the statues of tribal men. They also suffer from over-work, invasion of sexually exploitative market forces in tribal society, illiteracy, subhuman physical living conditions, high fertility, and high malnutrition and near absence of modern health care facilities. The impact of development programmes on tribal women is also discussed and an early intervention is emphasized in order to improve the status of the tribal women.

Ghosh, G K and Ghosh, S (1997) have defined the term 'Dalit' and described the historical background to the castes and the status of Dalits since ancient days. They argue that the position and status of Dalit women is vulnerable as they are deprived by their gender and caste. The authors have discussed the position of Dalit women in Dalit society and general Indian society along with the laws passed to safeguard the rights of the Dalits. The book also covers the different aspects related to Dalit housewives, Dalit Artisans, Dalit employees and Dalit women in rural and urban areas.

Fariyal, F F and Pasha, O (2004) have argued that the life advantages which women from developed countries enjoyed are not seen clearly in the society where gender gap against women persists widely. The study showed that sex selective abortions, neglect of girl children, reproductive mortality, and poor access to health care for girls and women are some basic reasons in perpetuating gender discrimination in the developing countries of South Asia. The authors have urged the policy makers and social workers to pay attention to the detrimental health effects that gender plays throughout the life cycle as the women in South Asia are mostly disadvantaged in terms of healthcare, education, dignity, and, are the victim of violation of human rights.

Singh, Archana (2007) observes that the tribals represent the weakest section of India's population from the ecological, economic and educational angles, constituting the matrix of India's poverty. From the historical point of view, they have been subjected to the worst type of exploitation and social injustice. She presents the statistics of tribal women related to the poverty conditions, occupations, work participation, education, etc. It reveals that tribal women are most backward in socio-economic aspects and there is need for their empowerment. In this respect, the strategic approach must be based on the principle of making the tribal women aware and eager for their own development, by involving in education and employment.

Asfaw, A, Klasen, S, Francesca and Lamanna (2007) have investigated whether there is gender discriminations in the Health Care Financing Behavior of household for children below the age of nine years, in India. The findings of the study reveal that no discrimination among boys and girls is found, while the households use current income to finance inpatient health care expenses. However, significant gender discrimination is found in health care spending for children while the households face resources scarcity. He further proves that the probability of households to sell assets and borrow money to cover the inpatient costs of girls is 4.3 percent less than that of boys. The study suggests two specific ways to reduce gender gap in healthcare spending, first by easing household budget constraints, and second, by introducing some specific healthcare insurances.

Parveen, Shahnaj (2007) has highlighted the social status of women in the rural parts of Bangladesh. The research has been conducted taking a sample of 156 women from three villages under the district of Mymensingh. She argues that personal income and physical beauty of women determine a relatively higher status of women in the household and community as compared to the women who are distressed, mentally and physically disabled, illiterate and infertile. The study suggested that there is a dire need to improve women's condition in terms of literacy levels, access to information and resources as well as participation of women in social

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activities. The author finds that this can be achieved by establishing women's organizations in the locality.

Kumar, Vivek (2009) observes that the Dalit women in Indian society are triply exploited on the basis of caste, class and gender. After defining the term "Dalits" sociologically; the paper attempts to establish that Dalit women are different from general caste women on the basis of their structural location, their occupations and the treatment towards them by society in general. The paper captures the existing prejudice and contempt against Dalit women which in a way gets articulated by the atrocities committed on them by the so-called upper castes.

Polit, Karin M (2012) draws upon her seven years of rural fieldwork in Uttarakhand, India, to describe and analyze how gender performs a decisive role in the daily lives of Dalit women living in the District of Chamoli. She argues that through the flexible medium of ordinary gendered performance embedded in a particular place, Dalit women exercise collective agency and thereby shape lived experience in Chamoli. Her work is intended to counterpoint stereotypes of Dalit women as mute, powerless, and limited to exercising agency only as resistance.

DEFINING GENDER

"Gender" is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex (i.e., the state of being male, female or an intersex), sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life.

In the English language, the terms sex and gender are often used interchangeably. However, in a technical sense, these words are not synonymous. Gender comes from the Latin word *genus*, meaning kind or race. It is defined by one's own identification as male, female, or intersex; gender may also be based on legal status, social interactions, public persona, personal experiences, and psychological setting.

Sex, on the other hand, is derived from the Latin word *sexus*, which means the state of being either male or female. It is generally assigned at birth by external genital appearance, due to the common assumption that this represents chromosomal or internal anatomic status. Thus, a person's sex is a primary state of anatomic or physiologic parameters. A person's gender is a conclusion reached in a broad sense when individual gender identity and gender role are expressed.

Sexologist **John Money** introduced the terminological distinction between biological sex and gender as a role in 1955. Before his work, it was uncommon to use the word gender to refer to anything but grammatical categories. He observed that sex which is the anatomy of an individual's reproductive system and secondary sex characteristics, is different from gender which can refer to either social roles based on the sex of the person (gender role) or personal identification of one's own gender based on an internal awareness (gender identity). In some circumstances, an individual's assigned sex and gender may not align, and the person may be transgender, non-binary, or gender-nonconforming, while in other cases an individual may have biological sex characteristics that complicate sex assignment and the person may be intersex.

However, Money's meaning of the word did not become widespread until the 1970s, when feminist theory embraced the concept of a distinction between biological sex and the social construct of gender. Today the distinction is strictly followed in some contexts, especially the social sciences and documents written by national and international organizations.

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The World Health Organization describes gender as follows:

“Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places. When individuals or groups do not “fit” established gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion – all of which adversely affect health. It is important to be sensitive to different identities that do not necessarily fit into binary male or female sex categories.”

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender discrimination, also known as sexism, refers to prejudice or discrimination based on gender, as well as conditions or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on gender. Sexist mindsets are frequently based on beliefs in traditional stereotypes of gender roles and are thus built into many societal institutions.

Gender based discrimination against female children is pervasive across the world. It is seen in all the strata of society and manifests in various forms. Female child has been treated inferior to male child and this is deeply engraved in the mind of the female child. Some argue that due to this inferior treatment the females fail to understand their rights. Gender discrimination in modern society is a very important issue, both in terms of societal impact as well as the law.

Gender discrimination is prevalent both in rural as well as urban societies. In urban areas, women face discrimination in terms of employment, promotions, sexual harassment at work place etc. The United Nations had concluded that women often experience a “glass ceiling” and that there are no societies in which women enjoy the same opportunities as men. The term “glass ceiling” is used to describe a perceived barrier to advancement based on discrimination, especially gender discrimination. In the United States in 1995, the Glass Ceiling Commission, a government-funded group, stated: “Over half of all Master’s degrees are now awarded to women, yet 95% of senior-level managers, of the top Fortune 1000 industrial and 500 service companies are men. Of them, 97% are white.” In its report, it recommended affirmative action, which is the consideration of an employee's gender and race in hiring and promotion decisions, as a means to end this form of discrimination.

In addition, women are found to experience a sticky floor. While a glass ceiling implies that women are less like to reach the top of the job ladder, a sticky floor is defined as the pattern those women are, compared to men, less likely to start to climb the job ladder. A sticky floor is related to gender differences at the bottom of the wage distribution. It might be explained by both employer discrimination and gender differences in career aspirations.

However, the situation is much more severe in rural societies. Women don’t even get their basic requirement fulfilled such as education, health care etc. This is more predominant in India as well as other lesser developed countries. Sex selection before birth and neglect of the female child after birth, in childhood and, during the teenage years has outnumbered males to females in India and also in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and South Korea. There are 1029 women per 1000 men in North America and 1076 women per 1000 men in Europe, but there are only 927 women per 1000 men in India. These numbers tell us quite a harsh story about neglect and mistreatment of the female child in India. Women have a biological advantage over men for longevity and survival, yet there are more men than women. The figures above support that gender discrimination of female child is a basic facility area. Though the demographic characteristics do not show much or in some cases, anti-female bias, there is always a woman who receives a small piece of the pie.

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Nobel laureate Dr. Amartya Sen has pointed out two main kinds of inequalities, viz, educational inequality and health inequality. These are the indicators of a woman's status of welfare. In India irrespective of the caste, creed, religion and social status, the overall status of a woman is lower than men and therefore a male child is preferred over a female child. A male child is considered a blessing and his birth is celebrated as opposed to a female child where her birth is not celebrated and is considered more of a burden. Therefore, education and health care of the female child in India is an important social indicator to measure equality between men and women.

GENDER STEREOTYPING

Gender stereotypes are simplistic generalizations about the gender attributes, differences, and roles of individuals and groups. They are preconceived ideas whereby females and males are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their gender. Stereotypes can be positive or negative, but they rarely communicate accurate information about others. When people automatically apply gender assumptions to others regardless of evidence to the contrary, they are perpetuating gender stereotyping. Many people recognize the dangers of gender stereotyping; yet continue to make these types of generalizations.

Gender stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of girls and boys, women and men, as well as their educational and professional experiences and life opportunities in general. Stereotypes about women both result from, and are the cause of, deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices against women. They are used to justify and maintain the historical relations of power of men over women as well as sexist attitudes that hold back the advancement of women.

The weight of scientific evidence demonstrates that children learn gender stereotypes from adults. As with gender roles, socializing agents—parents, teachers, peers, religious leaders, and the media—pass along gender stereotypes from one generation to the next.

Traditionally, the female stereotypic role is to marry and have children. She is also to put her family's welfare before her own; be loving, compassionate, caring, nurturing, and sympathetic; and find time to be sexy and feel beautiful. The male stereotypic role is to be the financial provider. He is also to be assertive, competitive, independent, courageous, and career-focused; hold his emotions in check; and always initiate sex. These sorts of stereotypes can prove harmful; they can stifle individual expression and creativity, as well as hinder personal and professional growth.

Besides this, people who are threatened by gender stereotyping, may act upon their insecurities by exaggerating the stereotyped behavior through *hyper-femininity* or *hyper-masculinity*. Hyper-femininity is the exaggeration of female gender stereotypes. Hyper-feminine women, gay men as well as male-to-female transgender, believe that they are boosting men's egos and pleasing them by acting too naive, too pious, too passive, too domestic, too flirtatious and too nurturing.

On the other hand, male gender stereotypes may result in hyper-masculinity. Hyper-masculine men, lesbians as well as female-to-male transgender exaggerate the stereotyped masculine behavior. They believe they are supposed to be dominant and in charge to impress other women by being too aggressive, too sexually active, too physically imposing, too macho, too obscene and too violent sometimes, making them a danger to themselves and to the society.

Whether this is their true nature or a tactic to please society, hyper-feminine and hyper-masculine individuals are obliterating their own identities and becoming clones from the mold that was prepared for them.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN TERMS OF EDUCATION

Despite the worldwide expansion of education during the second half of the 20th century, discrimination and inequalities of access persist nearly everywhere. These are also due to selective education systems, which so operate that from primary level to university level, young people from the most disadvantaged economic, social and cultural backgrounds are rejected or discouraged. All these factors are often found in various combinations, which perpetuate and aggravate inequality and discrimination. Female students face traditional access issues such as perceived stereotypes and a lack of positive role models in all areas of their education.

According to a study, disparity in higher education exists in rural areas of India which on many grounds affects gender development. For females there is no equal opportunity in higher education in the rural areas of India. Females are facing difficulties in getting education because of gender discrimination. Gender equality in education can help in reducing the economic problems and can plane the path of gender development.

Gender discrimination in education is applied to women in several ways. Firstly, many sociologists of education view the educational system as an institution of social and cultural reproduction. The existing patterns of inequality, especially for gender inequality, are reproduced within schools through formal and informal processes.

Another way the educational system discriminates towards females is through course-taking, especially in high school. This is important because course-taking represents a large gender gap in what courses males and females take, which leads to different educational and occupational paths between males and females. For example, females tend to take fewer advanced mathematical and scientific courses, thus leading them to be ill-equipped to pursue these careers in higher education. This can further be seen in technology and computer courses.

Cultural norms may also be a factor causing sex discrimination in education. For example, society suggests that women should be mothers and be responsible for the bulk of child rearing. Therefore, women feel compelled to pursue educational pathways that lead to occupations that allow for long leaves of absence, so they can be stay at home mothers.

A hidden curriculum may further add to discrimination in the educational system. Hidden curriculum is the idea that race, class, and gender have an influence on the lessons that are taught in schools. Moreover, it is the idea that certain values and norms are instilled through curriculum. For example, history of the United States often emphasizes the significant roles that white males played in the development of the country. Another part is that the topics being taught are masculine or feminine. Shop classes and advanced sciences are seen as more masculine, whereas home economics, art, or humanities are seen as more feminine. The problem comes when students receive different treatment and education because of his or her gender or race. Girls may be encouraged to learn skills valued in female-dominated fields, while boys might learn leadership skills for male-dominated occupations.

Educated female always play a significant and essential role in all fields of life. The development of female education practices has led to worldwide discussion of how to convey an equal education opportunity for all without any sort of discrimination. The female education is left behind in spite of the fact that it is most effective and smart investment for economic growth of and development of any country around the globe.

Due to all this, the female population lacks behind in terms of health, as there is bias and discrimination towards them, and so they are far away from development and are not even able to get their basic rights.

FACTORS CAUSING GENDER DISPARITY

There are many factors causing gender inequalities and discrimination. Some of them are discussed below:

Poverty

In India of the total 30 percent people who are below poverty line, 70 percent are women. Women's poverty in India is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process. The situation of women on economic front is no better and men still enjoy a larger share of the cake. Thus, poverty stands at the root of gender discrimination in our patriarchal society and this economic dependence on the male counterpart is itself a cause of gender disparity.

Illiteracy

Despite the notable efforts by the countries around the globe that have expanded for the basic education, there are approximately 960 million illiterate adults of whom two thirds are women. Educational backwardness of the girls has been the resultant cause of gender discrimination. The disparities become more visible between male and female literacy rate, during 2001. The literacy rates for males increased from 56% in 1981 to nearly 76% in 2001. The corresponding change in female literacy rate from 30 to 54%. On the whole the decline on gender gap peaked in 1981 at 26.6% and was 21.7% in 2001 is less impressive. The interstate variation in literacy rate for males was much lower in comparison to females. At the state level female literacy rate varies from 35% in Bihar to 88% in Kerala In states like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan, the female literacy rate is below 50%.

The progress towards education by girls is very slow and gender disparities persist at primary, upper primary and secondary stage of education. Girls account for only 43.7% of enrolment at primary level, 40.9 % at upper primary level, 38.6% at secondary level and 36.9% at degree and above level. More over girl's participation in education is still below 50% Gender differences in enrolment are prevalent in all the state at all levels. They are not able to realize full identity and power in all spheres of life only due to illiteracy.

Lack of Employment Facilities

Women are not able to resolve the conflict between new economic and old domestic roles. In both rural and urban India, women spend a large proportion of time on unpaid home sustaining work. Women are not able to respond to new opportunities and shift to new occupations because their mobility tends to be low due to intra-house hold allocation of responsibilities.

Rights and obligations within a house hold are not distributed evenly. Male ownership of assets and conventional division of labour reduce incentives for women to undertake new activities. In addition, child bearing has clear implications for labour force participation by women. Time spent in bearing and rearing of children often results in de-Skilling, termination of long-term labour contacts. Thus, women are not being able to be economically self-sufficient due to unemployment and their economic dependence on the male counterpart is itself a cause of gender disparity.

Social Customs, Beliefs and Practices

Women are not free from social customs, beliefs and practices. The traditional patrilineal joint family system confines women's roles mostly to the domestic sphere, allocating them to a subordinate status, authority and power compared to men. Men are perceived as the major providers and protectors of a family while women are perceived as playing only a supportive role, attending to the hearth. Boys and girls are accordingly drained for different adult roles, status and

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authority. In Indian culture since very early periods, men have dominated women as a group and their status has been low in the family and society.

The preference for sons and disfavour towards daughter is complex phenomenon that still persists in many places. Sons especially in the business communities are considered to be economic, political and ritual assets whereas daughters are considered to be liabilities. Thus anti female social bias is the main cause of gender disparity in our society. The boy receives a ceremonial welcome on his birth where as everyone is sad at the birth of a girl child. The preference for male child is due to lower female labour participation, prevalence of social evils like dowry and many others causes. The typical orthodox mentality is present even in this modern era leading to sex determination tests and abortion in an illegal way.

Parents often think that teaching a girl child to manage the kitchen is more important than sending her to school. Many feel that it is an unnecessary financial burden to send a girl child to school as subsequently she will be married off and shifted to some other family. This orthodox belief of parents is responsible for gender disparity.

Social Attitude

Though many social activists and reformers have carried their crusade against all social odds to restore honour and dignity to women, attitudinal disparities still haunt our rural masses. Despite pronounced social development and technological advancement, women in our society still continue to be victims of exploitation, superstition, illiteracy and social atrocities.

The social stigma that women are housekeepers and should be confined to the four walls of the house is perhaps a viable cause of gender disparity. They should not raise their voice regarding their fortune for the sake of the prestige of the family. In patriarchal society a lot of weightage is given to men.

In the health and nutritional field, male members of family are supposed to take fresh and nutritious food in comparison to women because either they are earning members or head of the family or they are supposed to be more important than female members. This type of social attitude is conducive to create the problem of gender discrimination.

Lack of Awareness among Women

Most of the women are unaware of their basic rights and capabilities. They even do not have the understanding as to how the socio-economic and political forces affect them. They accept all types of discriminatory practices that persist in our family and society largely due to their ignorance and unawareness.

Article 15 of the Indian constitution states that the state shall not discriminate any citizen on the grounds of sex. The irony is that there still is widespread discrimination which is a form of injustice to women. Hence at the onset of the new millennium let this generation be a historic example by putting an end to the gender – based discriminations by unfurling the flag of gender justice in all our action and dealings.

Co-Education

A significant and increasing proportion of higher education institutions have been established by the private sector, and most are co-educational. This inhibits the access of women and girls from traditional communities. In some areas there are many co-education institutions where female/males can get higher education but due to strict family, tribal and religious customs prohibit female to get education with males. This is main hurdle in female higher education which creates differences.

Interface between Gender and Wealth-Based Disparities

The inter-relationship between poverty, livelihood and investment decisions at the household level operate in different ways in different societies. In some, parents do not invest in the education of their daughters and in very poor households, girls are withdrawn from school.

Mostly of the families do not allow and invest on the girls higher education but give preferences to invest on boys because according to them instead of girls, investing on boys is beneficial output because girls are not permitted to do job so its waste less investment on them.

Security Issues

The location of educational institutions, especially if remote, affects girls more than boys, in particular in countries where roads and public transport have not penetrated rural and remote areas. Availability of schools/universities within reach is an important determinant. Travelling long distances in public transport is an important security issue and this is particularly significant in societies where girls are not permitted to travel alone or have to be escorted. Moreover, female teachers, as well as students, can be the victims of violence. It has been found that female teachers were frequently threatened or assaulted in the rural areas or far flung areas where they work and are frightened to leave the institute. This will discourage other women from working as teachers, which in turn further damages girls' educational prospects.

Early Marriages

Early marriage, household responsibilities, pressure to work, family honor and related issues inhibit girls and women from access and completing school. Early female marriage is based on the assumptions that good marriage is the most important way to secure a girl's wellbeing, security and respect. Marriage of a girl is the second name of respect and fulfillment of desires and emotions in Muslim community. Additionally it is consider the duty of parents to make an early arrangement of marriage to fulfill the responsibility of being as parents in most of areas in India.

In many societies a young woman's place is seen as in the home after minimum education. Yet, she is doubly disadvantaged because her youth reduces her status within her household and community. Because she does not have the same standing as her male peers, she is not perceived to have the same skills or capabilities, higher studies, and so there is less value in educating her for higher studies. This inevitably contributes to the view that a 'good marriage' is the most important way to secure a girl's wellbeing.

For families facing chronic poverty, marriage often seems like the best way to safeguard girls' futures and lighten their economic burden. The high costs of higher education and the perception of girls' potential to earn an income as comparatively poor, pushes girls out of their homes and schools and into marriage, marriage of school-aged girls was considered the main barrier to achieving higher education and promoting gender equality for girls.

Son Preference

One of the better documented cultural norms that augment gender disparities in health is the preference for sons. In India, the 2011 census recorded only 94 girls per 100 boys. While, in certain parts of India, such as Kangra and Rohtak the number of girls for every 100 boys can be as low as in the 70. The increasing number of unborn girls in the late 20th century has been attributed to technological advances that made pre-birth sex determination, also known as prenatal sex discernment, such as the ultrasound test more affordable and accessible to a wider population. This allowed parents who prefer a son to determine the sex of their unborn child during the early stages of pregnancy. By having early identification of their unborn child's sex,

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parents could practice sex-selective abortion, where they would abort the fetus if it was not the preferred sex, which in most cases is that of the female.

Additionally, the culture of son preference also extends beyond birth in the form of preferential treatment of boys. This preferential care can be manifested in many ways, such as through differential provision of food resources, attention, and medical care.

Violence and Abuse

Violence against women is a widespread global occurrence with serious public health implications. This is a result of social and gender bias. Many societies in developing nations function on a patriarchal framework, where women are often viewed as a form of property and as socially inferior to men. This unequal standing in the social hierarchy has led women to be physically, emotionally, and sexually abused by men, both as children and adults. These abuses usually constitute some form of violence.

The sexual violence and abuse of both young and adult women have both short and long-term consequences, contributing significantly to a myriad of health issues into adulthood. These range from debilitating physical injuries, reproductive health issues, substance abuse, and psychological trauma. Examples of the above categories include depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and drug use and dependence, sexually transmitted diseases, and suicide attempts. Other forms of violence against women include sexual harassment and abuse by authority figures (such as teachers, police officers or employers), trafficking for forced labour or sex, and traditional practices such as forced child marriages and dowry-related violence. At its most extreme, violence against women can result in female infanticide and violent death. Despite the size of the problem, many women do not report their experience of abuse and do not seek help. As a result, violence against women remains a hidden problem with great human and health care costs.

CONCLUSION

In India, discriminatory attitudes towards women have existed for generations and affects women over their lives. Although constitution of India has granted women equal rights but gender disparities remain. There are limited opportunities for women to access resources such as education, health care services and job opportunities. The demand for sons among wealthy parents is being satisfied by the medical community through the provision of illegal service of fetal sex-determination and sex-selective abortion. Education is not widely attained by the Indian women. Although literacy rates are increasing, female literacy rates lags behind the male literacy rate. Discrimination against women has led to their lack of autonomy and authority. Although equal rights are given to women, it may not be well recognized. In practice, land and property rights are weakly enforced, with customary laws widely practiced in rural areas. Women do not own property under their own names and usually do not have any inheritance rights to obtain a share of parental property. Apart from limiting women's agency and freedom substantially, there are consequences of gender discrimination for society as a whole too.

The solution to this problem can be attained only through education. Female education has been an orphan child in our society due to the double standards. We cannot progress economically, socially and spiritually, until and unless we involve females. Gender equality is a key to all kind of progress. No country has progressed without involving women in education. The educational policy must focus on gender equality. Therefore, in order to bring gender equality, it is essential to provide equal opportunities to both; men and women in education and higher education and to make female equally empowered as men in decision making in every mode of life. It is very essential to educate women in male dominated society such as India because *“educating girls delivers a high return than other investment in the developing world”*.

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❖ **Recommendations**

- Education of women should be given paramount importance, and steps should be taken to ensure proper education to females.
- Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
- Strict implementation of laws, schemes and policies should be ensured to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.
- Government should ensure equal and easy access to gender responsive health and education services more widely
- Law and order enforcing agencies along with both marriage registrars and birth registrars should be more efficient and sincere in order to end violence against women and girls at home and in the communities
- Early marriage and dowry, which are two root causes of gender discrimination, need to be countered.
- Mass media and social media should come forward in order to build mass awareness against dowry, early marriage, son preference, and violence against women. They should also take pragmatic steps in raising voice for women regarding women's legal rights, better education, nutrition, reproductive health, and access to better opportunities.
- Gender issues, especially social and cultural education regarding early marriage, sex biasness, dowry system etc. should be incorporated in school curriculum in order to build gender awareness among the young generation.
- Local government, institutions, NGOs and community leaders jointly can organize counseling sessions for parents focusing on importance of maternal health, women's education, bad effect of early marriage and dowry system.
- Documentaries, YouTube videos, short films and commercial films based on positive image of women can play a vital role in changing the mind set of common people.

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Conflict of Interest

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