

Gender Equality and Feminism in Contemporary India: A Balanced Perspective from Tradition to Modernity

Dr. Vinod Girder¹, Dr. Yograj Goswami²

¹Principal, M.D. B.Ed. College, Sriganganagar
Email: vindoarora07[at]yahoo.in

²Lecturer, M.D. B.Ed. College, Sriganganagar
Email: dr.goswami2402[at]gmail.com

Abstract: *In an ideal society man and woman are considered two equal wheels in carrying chariot of a family and society being a crucial part of a society at large and any one of these wheels come out of order the society as well as the economy of any nation cannot move in the proper manner. Therefore, both spouses are equally important in terms of respect, dignity and freedom. In the same manner if any one of the spouses in the marriage institution does not perform or fall short in dignity, in his or her duties and expected position, the chariot of family; even the community cannot advance smoothly in the proper direction contributing effectively and efficiently in the said society or nation. In Hinduism, man and woman represent the two halves of the divine body. There is no question of superiority or inferiority between them rather they are entitled to enjoy equal rights and perform duties bestowed on them by the nature. To harness full love, peace and prosperity there must be harmony and peaceful living between both genders. Without existence of one another's existence cannot be imagined on the globe to fulfill the almighty's will to maintain this creation. The present paper tries to find the answer the question whether we shall be able to achieve so called and so much discussed worldwide issue, Gender Equality by lowering the dignity and natural position of male and highlighting, excessively empowering women without any curb in all the sphere of life. Would it not disrupt the balance of chariot of society, where both wheels represent the male and female having equal responsibilities and duties besides their rights? How can gender equality be acquired by drawing a line much longer than the another; here one line of course represent of the female against male while each one equally supposed to stand up against any injustice done to the other gender. Thus, this paper is aimed to examining gender equality and feminism in contemporary India through an analytical and comparative lens, drawing on Hindu philosophy and historical context from the Vedic period to the present. It argues that equality in true sense require balance approach where neither gender is elevated at the cost of the other. Critiquing modern feminism's tendency to prioritize women's empowerment over mutual dignity. By exploring legal, social and cultural shifts; the present study questions whether current efforts risk creating new inequalities; advocating for a harmonious and balance co-existence that respects the complementary role of men and women as envisioned in ancient Indian Scriptures.*

Keywords: Family, Indian Society, Gender equality, empowerment, injustice, male and female, feminism, Hindu Philosophy

1. Introduction

We are living in the 21st century and have witnessed remarkable advancements in education, energy telephonic advancement or transportation, production or manufacturing, soil or space, pattern of business or pattern of social living etcetera. Far much advancement whether it is education or sources of energy, Now the question has not been remained to fundamental facilities; rather; it has spread its wings to making itself alike the global standard that is fast everchanging phenomena visible everywhere on the earth. Everyone, irrespective of gender, is chasing a goal; a rat race to become more advance than the anyone else.

If we delimit our study to India, here too, we can see same chasing, chasing after money; no matter by hook by crook. Further again if we particularly delimit our study to youth sector of the India, again we will come across the peculiar situation where each one whether he or she is chasing for money making that's why the ratio of educated and uneducated has been decreasing year by year. Artificial demand for many articles, things and food items has been adding fuel to the fire that have reduced the education from a pious profession to a crooked business and the people involved in the process seems to have been vowed not only truly educating the youth but extorting money in the name of

education. 'Half knowledge is a dangerous thing' is being proved. Degrees are being sold like hot dogs due to many lucrative job offerings and in the present age both the genders He and She are participating with the almost same gist and zeal are trying their best. All this shows the deteriorating status of education polluted mindsets of the youth who are now not able to understand the true sense of society and moral and intention envisaged in our Vedas and other scriptures like Ramayana, Mahabharata and Gita etc.

In the matter of getting education in the modern era women hold an advantage, receiving privileges under various women's empowerment schemes. This indicates the totally changed scenario regarding the condition and situation of today's woman of 21st century who has been made equipped with all legal and constitutional privileged tool of which man; the other wheel of chariot has been made deprived of in the name of make woman powerful or equal to man; that is considered ever stronger and tyrannical in all the ages the societies of India has be traversed putting the real factors as authors of this paper consider on the basis of analysis from the Vedic age to present age where women no longer has been kept deprived of neither education nor job opportunities leaving her on their own to decide. Apart from this there are special constitutional and legal rights have been provided to woman who can claim them against man trying to push her

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back and harass her in any way. But the question still remains here that if it was the true and inherent meaning of Gender Equality. Does Gender equality mean only surpassing of woman over man? Will it not imbalance the ideal and natural god-gifted chariot of two wheel named after man and woman who only were created by the Brahma (Creator in Hindu Sculpture) to take this beautiful creature further in smooth and well-arranged manner? If the Gender and Sex are distinct terms and Gender inequality is social-created then what about the word 'Gender' that is also devised by some so-called scholars who might have find it less offending in an ideal society? Are we not heading towards another form of inequality as gender equality envisages in itself both male and female and anyone of them if legs behind; definitely it cannot be said gender equality as to smoothly run an ideal society both are equally needed; and that has been intended in all the scriptures of Hinduism in Bhart Varsha (India). All the above question and more others are responsible to make the author forced to think of the present work drawing the sincere attention towards what we, as a whole society, may not be able to see.

2. Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative comparative analysis, synthesizing historical texts such as the Righveda and Upnishads with contemporary legal and social data to assess gender dynamics in India.

A comparative and analytical traversing of woman-status till today in India

Women have been an integral part of India's culture and society since ancient times. The status of women in India has been a topic of debate and concern for many years and it has been shown every time the miserable and neglected condition of female in India since old age that is particular in the view of the authors only imposed image to tarnish the glorious image of the Indian culture and history. That kind of history and culture never had been in India whether it was Vedic Period or Pre-Vedic period woman in general and in scriptures and in teaching had not been revered given a worship able and valuable place that till today in our scriptures like Ramayana or Mahabharata can be traced.

In Indian culture from the ancient time women are regarded as pious and valuable creature without her no religious rituals and activities could be performed and she, in pure culture, is considered as a better half of the man. There no need to prove as we already find in Indian religious scriptures not only Gods but Goddesses also are given proper place and their names are chanted before Indian Gods as Seeta-Ram, Radhey-Krishna etc. which shows that we neither had not have any intension to disrespect them but there had been a time when some outside powers had invaded on India and tried their full to tarnish the pious image of India and create terror for woman in particular that from middle age that the elder and old people put some restriction that time only to save the purity and chastity of the women from the evil eyes that later had become a custom. No doubt they took a very long time to get freedom from such outsider and foreign evils but till then and even now just like the Sahstramukh Rawana they are continuously active to impose their culture and tarnish the originality of the typica India and this is the cause we failed to understand.

It has not been denied that earlier there were lack of much education though females were never denied of education as witnessed in the Vedic and pre-Vedic age and they were giving equal knowledge of Shastras. Diverse views on women and their roles exist within Hinduism. The Devi Sukta hymn of the Rigveda declares feminine energy to be the essence of the universe, the one who creates all matter and consciousness, the eternal and infinite, the metaphysical and empirical reality (Brahman), the soul (supreme self) of everything. The woman is celebrated as the most powerful and empowering force in some Hindu Upanishads, Sastras and Puranas, particularly the Devi Upanishad, Devi Mahatmya and Devi-Bhagavata Purana. Vedic-era Hindu texts did not mention dowry or sati, which likely became widespread in the second millennium AD. Throughout history, Hindu society has seen many female rulers, such as Rudramadevi, religious figures and saints, such as Andal, philosophers, such as Maitreyi, and female practitioners/conductors of Vedic Hindu rituals There are major goddess-centric Hindu traditions and denominations, such as Shaktism. Numerous matriarchal Hindu communities were existed.

Coming to education Women were mentioned and were participants in the philosophical debates of the Upanishads, as well as scholars, teachers and priestesses during the Vedic and early Buddhist age. Among women acknowledged in the Upanishads are Gargi and Maitreyi. In Sanskrit, the word *acharyā* means a "female teacher" (versus *acharya* meaning "teacher") and an *acharyini* is a teacher's wife, indicating that some women were known as gurus. Female characters appear in plays and epic poems. The 8th century poet, Bhavabhuti describes in his play, *Uttararamacharita* (verse 2–3), how the character, Atreyi, travelled to southern India where she studied the *Vedas* and Indian philosophy.

In Madhava's *Shankaradigvijaya*, Shankara debates with the female philosopher, Ubhaya Bharati and in verses 9–63 it is mentioned that she was well versed in the *Vedas*. Tirukkoneri Dasyai, a 15th-century scholar, wrote a commentary on Nammalvar's *Tiruvaayamoli*, with reference to Vedic texts such as the *Taittiriya Yajurveda*.

Coming to freedom of work earlier if we trace history we will find that that time economy was so limited that most of the work was done manually that needed much time and hard labour for that men were found as per social norms to do such work as moreover they have to go far for that and that time no much transport facilities were available that's the reason ; as per the social norms female has to stay home for domestic chores and that was not any kind of slavery but the need of the time and one should not mistake to understand it as a woman's disrespect.

Coming to dignity in India Hinduism does not regard Women as lacking dignity. there are many references in the primary and secondary Hindu texts that affirm the dignity of women. Many stories from the Upanishads of female scholars, such as Jābālā's tale, Maitreyi, Gārgī, Lopāmudrā, and Haimavati Umā, demonstrate the dignity accorded to Women. According to verse 6.4.17 from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the birth of a female child who would be scholar is desired. The quote prescribes the specific rituals for obtaining a learned daughter.

“अथ य इच्छेद्दुहिता मे पण्डिता जायेत्, सर्वमायुरियादिति, तिलौदनं पाचयित्वा सर्पिष्मन्तमश्रीयाताम्; ईश्वरौ जनयितवै ॥ १७ ॥ (Verse 6.4.17 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad) “atha ya icchedduhitaa me panditaa jaayet, sarvamaayuriyaaditi, tilaudanam pachayitva sarpishmantamashniyam; eeshwarau janayitava” i.e. one who wishes that a daughter should be born who would be a scholar and attain a full term of life, should have rice cooked with sesamum, and both should eat it with clarified butter. Then the creators (would-be parents) would indeed be able to produce such a daughter.” That shows birth of female child were desired.

Will Durant (1885–1981) American historian says in his book *Story of Civilization*:

“Women enjoyed far greater freedom in the Vedic period than in later India. She had more to say in the choice of her mate than the forms of marriage might suggest. She appeared freely at feasts and dances, and joined with men in religious sacrifice. She could study, and like Gargi, engage in philosophical disputation. If she was left a widow there were no restrictions upon her remarriage”¹

There are such more citations which carry the due dignity of female in the Bharat (India) that is not possible for author to cite here but the main purpose of the present work of the author is to make the public at large clear the picture for the fair sex that has been served by the intruders in India and that has been being spread through the text books taught in the school college. as media and other sources which make the tender minds to jump to a conclusion that constantly pushing the male figure back or behind the curtain that neither Brahma nor the nature at the outset had intended. All these were started with the intruders in middle age and with the coming of Britishers who started poisoning the innocent minds in India who were leading a happy and pious life irrespective of male or female.

Here author is not trying to incline toward the male and deny the miserable condition of the female that had been continuing and for that far so much has been done towards this in recent years and the progress is still going on in an intensive progressive way. In recent years, there have been many positive developments in India's efforts to empower women. The government has implemented several programs and policies aimed at improving women's health, education, and economic opportunities. There has been a significant increase in the number of women participating in the workforce, and women have achieved high positions in various fields, including politics, business, and entertainment². All these measures have been raised only to overcome the root cause in the name of Gender Gap. The root causes of gender inequality that have been sought after gender bias and tilted social norms that restrict women's rights and opportunities, which, together with preference comparative advantage between men and women, are considered the root drivers of gender gaps.

As gender bias and restrictive social norms against woman has been taken the main causes of gender inequality till today since old ages; and it has been often presented woman as under privileged, destituted, ignored, poor and innocent

creature of nature. Gender equality is believed to bestow benefits men and women in all their diversity—but for too long till now, it has been being taken as solely a women's issue and for that women not only in India but all over the world have been provided various legal rights over the year to promote gender equality and protect their interests while a more equal world is one where people of all genders can live their lives freely, and realize their full human potential.

Present scenario of women

Women in India have been granted various legal rights like Right to Education, Right to work, Right against sexual harassment, Right to property, Right to marriage and divorce, Right against domestic violence, Right to health etcetera over the years to promote gender equality and protect their interests. Although the women in India have come a long way in terms of legal rights and protection but the question of gender equality stands as it stands and the only change that we can see is only a U-turn as over protecting one gender and totally neglecting the other one no one can achieve gender equality in any society or country or world as a whole. If one can suppose gender equality only providing the women all the facilities where it is society, economy, education, job opportunity etc. and keep the men deprived of such things. Is it not betrayal with nature the almighty or Brahma who in the very beginning of this creation would not have been thought like that and created them as complementary for each other without one of them no one can imagine such beautiful creation that has been on the stake only due to selfish powers.

Modern feminism: A threat to men in particular and society in general

Modern feminism, as known as third wave feminism, appears to have traversed too far within the past decade or so. Specifically, modern feminism is a threat toward free speech as it is immediately dismissed as bigoted or sexist case of dissenting opinion directed towards feminists; no matter even if you are only offering facts and statistics. Feminism of today has reached at such a point where it uses silencing and shaming tactics along with shoddy statistics to steamroll their opponents instead of having rational discourse while in the previous generation, like those from the 60's, appear to have shared their ideas, but they were also open to hearing opposing ideas and having discourse.

Modern feminism promotes the usage of buzzwords and myths to shame and silence opponents instead of engaging in rational argumentation and discourse. This teaches some young impressionable girls and women to be professional victims and ideologues. This behavior is insane or unhelpful at best, and it is threat to young women feeling like they have no agency over their lives. This kind of behavior is also a threat to impressionable young men if and when it was to convince them that they are unknowingly caught in some kind of twisted cycle in which they are threat of oppression to women. Undoubtedly that society would surely thrive if we prioritize equal rights and opportunities for both genders over identical life style outcomes. Original intent of feminism like equal rights and opportunities for man and women must be equally and strictly followed. In fact, going deep into the matter we will come up with a conclusion that we are still far

¹ Durant, W. (1935) * Story of Civilization. *

² Times of India (2023, March 13) * Status of Women in India*

from a true equalitarian society for both men and women. We must remember than feminism is not the antonym for the term “male chauvinism”

Women’s struggle for education, independence, and equality that we see in the modern time isn’t a demand for something new; rather It’s just a demand for retrieval of something lost. A restoration of a balance that once existed in ancient India but was broken by time, power, and politics and moreover by intruders.

Here author in no way is condemning the idea of feminism and denying restoring the women’s dignity in true sense as it was immemorial time age when Brahma created male and female as complementary for each other for assisting Him in the formation of this beautiful creation that only we as human being have make to the modern era and all the discrepancies and contradiction and contentions are selfishly made efforts that are farther aired by the selfish politicians and media; and other crooked people who have spoiled such a beautiful creation in the form of male and female by the God.

According to the Center for Social Justice’s research, boys are lagging behind in school, struggling with their mental health, and being drawn into the darkest corners of the internet, where misogyny and radicalization thrive. And when it comes to work, young men are far more likely to be unemployed than their female peers.

Gender equality never means that where one must succeed at the expense of the other. Gender equality originally never meant to aim at creating the opportunities for female and lessen ones for the male. How can we suppose this beautiful creation with of the other; both are need, both are required to take this creation further, advancement and innovation with modernity does not only mean for female on the ground of so-called feminism or gender equality. Here; author is unable to understand what type of the equality we want to bring while it appears only leading to another form of inequality. The aim was targeted what we lost to regain; bring the females just equal to male as in the course of time in middle age and afterword what male has quickly gained keeping the female behind what so ever reasons might be but today, in the modern era where education undoubtedly spread much far away reaching to the door steps without any restriction and distinction between male and female. Far much of the opportunities have been created and opened for females where they can enter on their own symbolizing a sign of freedom but recently for some year it has been perceived that some selfish people under the particular banner trying constantly pushing the men on the backfoot ignoring the ability, capability, qualification, education, knowledge and skill etc. all are being ignored just on the name of gender equality or feminism.

the growing divergence in male’ and females’ outcomes does not only apply to education and employment but also widening the divide in the social and political attitudes of the sexes. Not in India but the countries like Britain also young men are increasingly drawn to conservative, traditionalist or right-wing political movements, whilst young women become ever more liberal and left-progressive. In an increasingly online existence, male and females no longer

walk the same path from childhood to adulthood, with their interests, values and aims in life increasingly incompatible with each other. The situations have now become worse to the extent that witnesses now Indians with an epidemic of family breakdown, millions of young males are deprived of any positive model of manhood. The ideal culture, structure and pattern of Indian societies and families are getting ruined day by day. Inferiority complex is flourishing in the minds of men; and on the other had female, in the shield of feminism or gender equality, by hood or by crook are progressing in every field even with less qualification, knowledge, skill with more relaxation etc. is this what we imagined the kind of gender equality? Does gender equality means taking the female advance and pushing the male to backfoot? Does gender equality only focus on female sex as almost all teachable textbooks present? Will it lead us to a healthy and wealthy society in true sense?

3. Conclusion

Feminism was always intended to be about the liberation of all genders, yet we have neglected the other half. To any ideal society both genders are necessary. It cannot be denied there had been a time that the natural balance of male and female impaired in medieval age only because of outsiders or foreigners who spoiled the basic culture of Bharat(India) and Hinduism for which our governments, politicians, various organization and groups tried their best at their level to bring lost particular image and dignity of women equal to male but in that process; perhaps we have forgotten that continuously taking one gender higher and higher keeping another at the same stand or pushing back never be able to bring equality; rather it will lead us a new kind of inequality; a fresh struggle and movement that is waiting in the form of frustration, desperation in the men. In present day time we cannot shut our eyes on the increasing suicides committed by the male in desperate manner even leaving a message raising the question over the legal rights and law especially enacted for female for restoring their past dignity but being misused by them against innocent males just for snatching or extorting money or wealth or keeping their own way at their will with behaving in line with the social and family norms in name the freedom, feminism or gender equality. It is time we must awake of slumber to save our ideal society and culture that once imagined in our Vedas and we lost because of the mis-influence of intruders or some selfish people and groups. Male and female both are the two wheels of the chariot form of creation and any family, society, country and the world at large cannot flourish and proper with advancement in keeping another leg behind. We cannot achieve gender equality on the cost of another as both are crucial part with particular purpose in the society. Gender equality does not refer to only woman or only men rather it embraces both the sexes with some natural God-gifted traits undeniable.

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Author Profile



Dr. Vinod Girder, Principal, M.D. B.Ed. College,
Sriganganagar. Email: vindoarora07[at]yahoo.in



Dr. Yograj Goswami, Lecturer, M.D. B.Ed. College,
Sriganganagar. Email: dr.goswami2402[at]gmail.com