

Gender Discrimination in Odisha: an Overview



Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Since the ancient period the status of women in Odia society and culture is inferior to men. In Odisha, we see several vivid examples of gender discrimination in our daily life both in the inside and outside of Odia family.

The status of women in Odisha is almost the same in modern age as it was in the ancient and medieval period. In this ultra modern age, we see development in every sector but till today both our society and culture favor males and provide several types of privileges to them. Our social system is characterized by patriarchy as a result of which our language is patriarchal and therefore it carries and reflects gender discrimination and gender inequalities. To eradicate gender discrimination from Odisha women's status should be enhance in all sector and they should be encouraged in each and every field.

According to social scientists the all round development and harmonious growth of a society or state would be possible only when the position of women are enhanced and they are considered equal partners with men. Female foeticide, rape, violence against women, sexual harassment, dowry, trafficking and domestic violence etc. are now common social issues as well as problems in contemporary Odia society of Odisha state, which have been affecting the socio-cultural way of life and also emerged as a hindrance in the way of all round development of Odisha. Since recent past till today why the numbers of these types issues enhanced a lot? The common answer to it is the presence of gender discrimination or gender bias in Odia society.

Though ancient Odia literature including puranas and history exhibited various examples regarding the role of women but it also given a less importance to Odia women as a whole. As a result of which from past to present Odia women have been struggling for the survival of their position in society. Even at present in a typical Odia family man always obtain the position of family head, so the age old pattern of discrimination have kept women as second citizen. In Odisan society in all most all fields including politics, religion and service sector women have yet not obtained the equal status to men, which proved that gender discrimination is still existing in Odia society and have been encouraged by male dominated social attitudes. As we all know that culture is transmitted from one generation to next generation, similarly in case of gender discrimination, it is also handed over from father to son and from mother to daughter in our socio-cultural life. "Gender" refers to a set of qualities and behaviors expected from a female or male by society. Gender roles are learned and can be affected by different socio-cultural factors. People are born as female or male, but learn from socio life to be girls or boys, who in course of time obtain the gender identity as women and men. Thus learned behaviors are what makes up gender identity and determines gender roles. Gender identity is defined as a personal conception of oneself as male or female. The gender identity is now being used sociologically or as a conceptual category and it has been given a very specific meaning.

In its new incarnation gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of men and women, the way societies distinguish men and women and also indirectly promote gender bias. Every society prescribes different norms for girls and boys, women and men, who determine almost every aspect of their social-life and their futures; this may be accepted as gender discrimination.

In our society women are expected to have and perfect qualities, such as gentleness, caring and obedience where as men are expected to be strong, self-confident, competitive and rational. Men are considered to be heads of family, owners and managers of property and religion, business, politics and in other professions. Women on the other hand are expected and trained to rear and look after children, to nurse the old parents and does all house hold work properly in time.

Due to the continuity of gender discrimination in our socio-cultural

life women have been suffering much cruelty and exploitation even also in modern Odisha. Even in modern urban Odia family the birth of a daughter is not an occasion of happiness and ordinarily the celebrations of birth of a son are definitely more joyful than those of the birth of a daughter. In a typical Odia family, both in rural and urban areas, the girls are not given equal rights with the son in the matters of food, clothing, education etc. They are often married even without their consent. The daughters remain as a burden on the parents because of the custom of dowry in our society. An unmarried girl of a family may be educated, cultured, as well as beautiful but still the parents of the girl have to arrange dowry in cash or kind for her marriage. Though dowry

Prohibition Act. Passed since long, making the dowry demands in marriage arrangements illegal. However, cases of dowry related murders, domestic violence and suicide have been reported. Often we see both in our electronic and print media that women die every year because of dowry. Again the position of a girl sometimes more painful and fearful in the house of the husband. The husband, the father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and other members of the family consider the daughter-in-law as a servant of the family, whose only duty is to obey everyone, to get up earlier in morning and to sleep late in night, to eat whatever remains after others have eaten and above all not to complain anything about anyone to anybody. Another example regarding the inferior condition of married woman is that, if the husband deserts her or dies untimely, the condition of the woman becomes worst of all, her parents and relatives believe that this calamity has fallen because of her bad luck and despite our so called modernity anyone is reluctant to marry a widow because still widow's remarriage is not considered as a good sign.

Women always face systematic violence at the hands of men and society, which are known as "Gender Violence" and they have little decision making power in social, economic and political institutions, which create gender bias in the society. Since childhood a girl learns from family as well as from outsiders that she is having less power than a boy. Scientifically there is nothing in a girl's body which stops her from climbing trees, playing outdoor games, riding vehicles and there is nothing in a boy's body which stops him from play with dolls, looking after younger members or helping with cooking or cleaning the house. All these differences are gender differences, which are called gender discrimination and they are created by the society. In this ultra modern age, we see development in every sector but till today both our society and culture favor males and provide several types of privileges to them. Our social system is characterized by patriarchy as a result of which our language is patriarchal and therefore it carries and reflects gender discrimination and gender inequalities. Generally we see that often men have vocabulary of their own which women seldom use. Our language are also replace with proverbs and saying which show women to be inferior to men, refer to them as being sinful and mean. "A woman's heaven is in her husband's feet", "women as the door of hell" etc. are the common proverbs repeated all the time in our society.

Gender discrimination transmitted hereditarily in Odishan socio-cultural life and so many examples can be seen in our typical Odia families. In most Odia families, women do not own any property in their own names and do not get a share of parental property generally. Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them, women continue to have little access to land and property. Again the incidents of domestic violence are higher in our contemporary society. Gender violence encompasses violence against women within the family or within the general community including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, forced prostitution and violence perpetuated or conducted by the society, whatever it occurs. Domestic violence means physical and mental assault of women by their male partners which can be easily observed in most of our families.

In our urban life the effects of gender discrimination also can be seen in several ways like molestation, sexual harassment, female foeticide etc. Working women facing harassment at work place is not an uncommon phenomenon for us. Similarly female foeticide is still prevalent in both urban and rural areas secretly, which affected our sex ration. To eradicate gender discrimina-

tion from our society and culture we have to eradicate the causes like educational backwardness, religious beliefs, some beliefs based on our culture and customs.

It is not easy to change gender discrimination suddenly. Massive changes are required including equal accessibility for girls in society for which united efforts of parents, relatives, teachers, media and Government are highly essential. To solve the gender discrimination problem we have to encourage women in the field of education, employment, economic independence, empowerment, self confidence, decision making. In Odisha at present various movements; programmes are being carried out by the State Government, Voluntary Organizations and by lot of social activities for women's development and against gender bias as well as gender discrimination.

Lastly it can be concluded that if we eliminate gender discrimination from our state, Odia women will deliver all the potentials, skills, knowledge to develop the family, as well as our society and culture.

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