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Decoding Gender Abstractions: A Study on Gender Sensitization in India and Practice of Gender Reveal in the West

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ABSTRACT

Whenever we think about Gender, or Gender inequality per se, the very first thought that comes to our mind is the inequality between men and women, which itself is indicative of how we have constructed the idea of gender to only mean the categories of men and women. An attempt has been made through this paper to explore the various constructs of gender vis-a-vis some peculiar trends and practices related to gender, especially in the west and contrasting the same position through an Indian lens. One of these practices related to Gender include the "Gender Reveal Parties" which have gained popularity in the west. This new trend of "Gender Reveal" party has become majorly prevalent in the west, in order to announce the sex of the fetus when it is still in the womb of the mother. This paper will explore this new trend that culminated in the west as "Gender Reveal" Parties in the current context of widening ambit of gender and identity issues. Further, this paper will also explore the idea of Gender Reveal in India, its legality in India and shall seek to analyze as to whether the idea of "Gender Reveal" can forward positive attitudes towards the girl child, hence preventing female feticide. The article will do so by focusing and studying sex ratio trends and sex selective abortions in India, in context of social constructs of "Gender".

The second part of this paper will focus mainly on gender sensitization and will systematically analyze the prevailing practices in the Indian society related to gender discrimination and biases. The last section of the paper will try to propose some constructive solutions to the problems and issues so identified.

I. GENDER REVEAL PARTIES

Gender Reveal parties apparently became a trend when Ms. Karvunidis, a California resident, in 2008, made a cake and topped it with pink icing on the inside to reveal the gender of her baby. She wrote a blog about it and thereby fueled a new trend. Gender reveal parties are rejoiced at an early phase of the pregnancy and the gender of the baby is announced at such an

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event, and generally the use of color pink denotes a girl child, whereas blue denotes a boy. Usually, this is a surprise for the parents as well. This trend is particularly popular in the western countries, whereas many other countries like India, China, Australia have banned the practice of pre-natal sex determination. Over the last three years, online shop Party Delights has seen an 87 percent surge in gender reveal-related merchandise, blaming the trend on social media and viral videos.² People have taken Gender Reveal parties to extreme levels and recently in 2020, UAE-based Syrian influences, spent over Rs. 70 Lacs, to reveal the gender of their baby on the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa in Dubai.³ This is a testimony to the fact that gender reveal has become a grand event and the trend is travelling beyond borders now and this trend has established a socially acceptable way of fitting people in gender stereotypical roles.

However, with the revolution of the idea of “gender”, evolving beyond the binary limits and the increased activism of the LGBTQIA+ community, advocating for the recognition of “Gender” beyond only two genders, being on the rise, the entire trend of gender reveal parties should be closely scrutinized as it goes against the very fabric of what the LGBTQIA+ communities and other people in the society advocate for.

The further sections of this article will explore these concerns in depth.

II. GENDER REVEAL IN INDIA

It might come as a surprising fact that gender reveal parties are even happening in India, even though sex determination at the pre-natal stage has been banned and is illegal as elaborated in the further sections of this paper. In one of the interviews organized by “metrolife”, it was found that such parties are a commonplace in India now.⁴ This is made possible in India, when mostly the legal period for abortion is over with. Doctors in India are bound by the code of conduct and the law and thus are not allowed to reveal the gender of the baby. However, there are always ways that can be made available to evade the law, and in many a cases, the radiologist instead of the doctor reveal the sex of the child.

Having regard to this background let us look at the sex ratio and the sex-elective abortions in India.

²Roise Blunt, The dangers – physical and psychological – of gender reveal parties, BBC NEWS, Oct. 30 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50207452>

³Sanya Jain, Dubai Couple Hosts Gender Reveal Event At Burj Khalifa-Video Is Viral, NDTV NEWS, Sept. 11, 2020. <https://www.ndtv.com/offbeat/dubai-couple-hosts-gender-reveal-event-at-burj-khalifa-video-is-viral-2293739>

⁴Sudeep Theres, Is 'gender-reveal' here?, DECCAN HERALD, Sept. 19, 2020. <https://www.deccanherald.com/metrolife/metrolife-your-bond-with-bengaluru/is-gender-reveal-here-889658.html>

III. SEX RATIO IN INDIA

India has been predominantly a patriarchal society since time immemorial and the testimony to this fact is laid down by the skewed sex ratio in India, even till date. According to the census of 2011⁵, the Gender ratio of India was 943 females per 1000 males. In rural India, there were 949 females to 1000 men and in urban areas it is 929 females to 1000 males. According to the report of UN (World Population Prospects 2019)⁶, With 54.20 million males, India has the highest population of males. In terms of female to male ratio, India ranks 189th out of 201 countries. Looking at these numbers it may seem like that the sex ratio has improved however, one need to look into other complexities of these figures. The 2011 census actually pointed towards a growing disparity in the balance between the numbers of girls and boys who are between the ages of 0-6 years, and one of the main reasons for the same could be pre-natal determination of sex with consequent sex selective abortion of female fetuses.⁷ It has been suggested in one of the studies that decline in fertility has also been a contributory factor for India's child sex ratio gap in the current years.⁸ The sex ratio in the tribal population is 990 per 1,000 men, according to a report on tribal health by an expert group under the National Health Mission, which demonstrates that the sex ratio among STs is substantially better than the All India average of 933. It's also an improvement over the 2001 figure of 978.⁹

IV. SEX SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN INDIA

It was in the 1990's when the discussion around female feticide gained momentum and in the background of the same, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen published a ground breaking piece titled "More than 100 million women are missing." which highlighted the issue of sex selective abortions in India¹⁰. With the issue gaining traction, the Supreme Court of India directed the Centre to implement the Pre-conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act in 1994 in its entirety, taking a serious view of the onslaught of sex-selective discriminatory practices by the medical fraternity and the connection it may have with the use of prenatal sex determination. The order came after the Center for the Enquiry of Health and

⁵ Census Report, 2011. *available at* CensusIndia.gov.in

⁶ World Population Prospects, 2019, UN.

⁷ Prabhat Jha, Maya Kelsner, A. Maya, Rajesh Kumar, Faujdar Ram, Aleksandrowicz, Lukasz, Bassani, G Diego, Shailja Chandra, Banthia, K jayant, *Trends in selective abortions of girls in India: analysis of nationally representative birth histories from 1990 to 2005 and census data from 1991 to 2011*, UNFPA, 2011.

⁸ Seema Jayachandran, *Fertility Decline and Missing Women*, AMERICAN ECONOMIC JOURNAL: APPLIED ECONOMICS, 9 (1), 118-39 (2017).

⁹ Report by Ministry of Health and Family welfare, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2018.

¹⁰ Abhishek Singh, Kaushalendra Kumar Yadav, Ajit Kumar; K.S. Jame, Lotus McDougal, Yamini Atmavilas, Anita Raj, *Factors Influencing the Sex Ratio at Birth in India: A New Analysis based on Births Occurring between 2005 and 2016*, Wiley Periodicals LLC (2021).

Allied Themes (CEHAT), the Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM), and Dr. Sabu George, who had conducted substantial research in this field, submitted a public interest appeal.¹¹

Despite the implementation of the law against sex selective abortions, the practice still continues in India given various social and economic factors and the general patriarchal mindset of the people in India. Traditionally, men are seen as an asset for the family, who would grow up and earn a wealthy lifestyle, whereas a girl child is seen as a burden, as the parents would be required to bear the expenses of her marriage and pay dowry when she grows up.¹² There are other socio-economic factors which are income related, education related and even residence related, which determine attitudes and motivations towards aborting a girl child.¹³

In the context of all of this, it is critical to show that the rise in selective abortion of girls is most likely due to a persisting son preference¹⁴ mixed with lower fertility. The UNFPA report makes an interesting observation: son preference is unaffected by education or income, but selective abortion of girls is more common in educated or wealthier households, presumably because they can afford ultrasound and abortion services more easily than uneducated or poorer households., in the rural areas as still in the rural areas, such services are not so readily available and even if they are, mostly people from weak economic background prefer to go to government hospitals and the government doctors are under higher scrutiny if they act against the law. It is also astonishing to thus note that, the recent increases in literacy and per-capita income¹⁵ might be contributory factors to increase in sex selective abortion of girls. The lower sex ratio gap in the Tribal Population is also indicative of the fact that they are less inclined towards sex selective abortions and the rate gets higher in the urban areas.

Thus, talking about the legality of gender reveal parties in India, it is absolutely illegal as the law was introduced to curb female feticide and provide a solution to the countries skewed sex ratio. However, on analysis of the above facts and figures, it is evident that there is still a long way for India to reach a better sex ratio statistics. It is also important to note here how culture and society affects the idea of sex and gender, in the western societies, it is a proud moment

¹¹ Pre-conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, No. 57 of 1994.

¹² Fengqing Chao, Christophe Z. Guilmoto, Samir K.C., Hernando Ombao, *Probabilistic projection of the sex ratio at birth and missing female births by State and Union Territory in India*, PLoS One, (2021).

¹³ Retherford, Robert D., T.K. Roy, *Factors Affecting Sex-Selective Abortion in India and 17 Major States*, National Family Health Survey Subjects Reports (2003).

¹⁴ International Institute for Population Sciences, National Family Health Survey (2005-2006).

¹⁵ World Bank Report, 2021. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS>

for the parents to reveal the gender of their child and celebrate it, irrespective of whether it is girl or a boy, whereas India pre-dominantly being a patriarchal society, the birth of a girl child is frowned upon and the female feticide rate was so high at one point that the government had to introduce a law against it. This establishes that how society and traditions shape mindsets and even the laws and rules of a country. It is nonetheless, inevitable that India has a longer way to go than the rest of the countries in terms of women empowerment and then in terms of accepting non-binary gender identities. Having said that, India is not untouched by the global movement for recognition of LGBTQIA+ communities' rights and the biggest step ahead for the legalization of homosexuality by eclipsing section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Then again, there are prominent people like Vikram Seth, Gauri Sawant and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, who are amongst other LGBTQIA+ community members, breaking the gender stereotypes and trying to make the society more aware and sensitive towards the need of this community. Even the government, through various initiatives have started to be more gender inclusive, for instance a report of Ministry of Social Justice on Transgender people, highlights the need to include the category of "others" wherever a person is supposed to specify their gender. Although there is a requirement to do a lot more, however these little steps will add up to our evolution towards a more inclusive society.

V. THE ISSUES

Gender Reveal Parties can be viewed as a strategy to promote and commercialize what was traditionally regarded as a private occasion in the lives of the parents. This trend has spurred a discussion on gender's normative and limited societal constructs.

(A) Physical harm to the environment

The drive to have the best and the most innovative gender reveal parties have often led to catastrophic consequences in a lot of cases. Ranging from- a woman dying at a Gender Reveal party due to a blow from a homemade explosive which was meant to disclose the gender of the baby, to a wildfire spread across 47,000 acre in Arizona due to a fire shot that missed the target, to a car being set ablaze that was supposed to generate blue or pink smoke.¹⁶ The physical damages of such parties are irreversible and not only this but actually the damages go beyond the physical environment to more psychological and sociological issues.

This entire trend can be viewed as creating a sense of permanence and an air tight compartmentalization of gendered differences in individuals which reinforces the stereotype of

¹⁶Roise Blunt, The dangers – physical and psychological – of gender reveal parties, BBC NEWS, Oct. 30 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50207452>

the adults onto the baby, based on their own limited gendered constructions, reinforcing these stereotypical ideals into the public and the social world.¹⁷

(B) The social and psychological harms- blurring the difference between sex and gender

It is an established fact that “Sex” refers to the categorization of humans based on biological, anatomical or chromosomal sex distinctions. Whereas on the other hand, “Gender” is a socially constructed concept which fits individuals into specific socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions and identities.¹⁸ It basically guides how people perceive themselves and others in the society, which further affects their idea of themselves.¹⁹ However, there is a separate category known as "Intersex." This word refers to a number of situations in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not appear to meet the traditional categories of female or male. For example, a person may be born with primarily male-typical anatomy on the surface but female-typical anatomy on the inside.

The World Health Organization's regional office for Europe defines sex as biologically determined qualities, while gender is defined by socially generated attributes. Robert Stroller invented the phrase gender identity in 1964, and it was used to refer to an individual's unique concept of gender and how they actually felt.²⁰

Having clearly demarcated the differences between Gender and Sex, it is noteworthy to emphasize that gender identity is not same as sexual orientation, as sex is something which is natural and is determined at birth, whereas gender is something which is assigned by the society, based on its own limited perception. With the increased awareness of the rights of people to express their identity in more fluid ways, the traditional notion of gender has gone far beyond the only two gendered identities and has culminated into an entire movement by the LGBTQIA+ communities for social acceptance of non-binary gender identity.

The issue with gender reveal parties is thus evident; it does what society has been doing the best, for years- pushing an individual to abide by the socially constructed notions of self-identification and expression, without giving them room to actually introspect and understand their own self. When such events such as gender reveal parties are held, it further establishes the fact that, an individual is seen and accepted only as a girl/woman or a boy/man. This is

¹⁷ Carly Gieseler, *Gender-reveal parties: performing community identity in pink and blue*, Journal of Gender Studies, 661-671. (2018)

¹⁸ Philip L. Walker, *Brief communication: Gender and sex: Vive la difference*, American Journal of Physical Anthropology. (1998).

¹⁹ CIHR, *what is Gender? What is Sex?* available at <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/48642.html>

²⁰ Stroller R.J., *A contribution to the study of gender identity*, The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 40-5, 220-226 (1964).

something, which can cause great psychological and mental stress to an individual who grows up and is not able to fit into the two binary gender identities. Researches have shown that such individuals struggle with gender identity issues and acceptance from their families and society and this lack of acceptance might force them to lead an unfulfilling and stressful lives where they are not able to reach the level of self-actualization.²¹

Thus, with the LGBTQIA+ communities struggling to fight for recognition of non-binary gender identities, events such as gender reveal is definitely a step backward into time and needs to stop. Even if it continues, then why should we address it as sex reveal and not gender reveal parties. These problems, become more intense in cultures, communities and countries, where even the rights of LGBTQIA+ communities are not recognized and not accepted. The need of the hour is to let individuals explore their own identities and to enable them to express it in their own ways, in order to create a more harmonious society.

(C) Reinforcement of stereotypes of Gender Roles

Further, another stereotype it reinforces is that when these gender reveal parties are organized, they generally associate the color pink with girls and other things like kitchen sets and Barbie dolls and unicorns and cute bows, whereas the color blue is associated with a boy and other things like cars, planes, animals like a lion and tiger, such things are associated with a boy.²² Now, this can also be viewed as an idea culminating out of a pre-dominant male driven society, wherein women are seen as the weaker sex and supposed to work in the kitchen and play with Barbie dolls, whereas men are viewed as someone who is tough and who goes out to work and has a car. When a child, by birth is exposed to such gendered stereotypical ideas, he/she is made to believe that women is the weaker sex and men is the tougher, stronger sex and this is where the root cause of the problem lies and gives rises to great social issues of inequality of the sexes, women exploitation and in general power dynamics in the society. It further perpetuates the deep rooted gender roles constructed by the society. The term “Gender Roles” was coined by John Money in 1955²³, to draw a distinction between sex and gender, but the concept didn’t gain acceptance until the 1970’s. These gender roles, are increasingly come to be viewed as oppressive and limited for all the genders. Thus, such associations at a gender reveal party cause rigid mindsets which become tough to penetrate through as the child grows

²¹ Bernhard Ertl, Silke Luttenberger, Manuela Paechter, *The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on the Self-Concept of Female Students in STEM Subjects with an Under-Representation of Females*, *Frontiers in Psychology*. (2017)

²²National Education Union, *BOYS’ THINGS AND GIRLS’ THINGS?* 2013, available at <https://neu.org.uk/media/2931/view>.

²³ John Money, A.A Ehrhardt, *Man and woman, boy and girl: Differentiation and dimorphism of gender identity from conception to maturity*, Johns Hopkins U. Press., (1972).

older.

Such differences are stronger in cultures and societies which are already more male dominant. Thus, if such trends continue, they can have devastating effects on not only the child, but on the society as a whole, leading to a more dysfunctional and intolerant society.

VI. COULD GENDER REVEAL BE A WAY FORWARD FOR AVOIDING SEX SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN INDIA?

Although, Gender Reveal in India is illegal, one possible argument that can be advanced in favour of gender reveal parties in India, is that, could it possibly a way forward to avoid sex-selective abortions in India. I propose this, on the basis that since parents who announce the sex of their baby, wouldn't be able to abort the child or kill it after birth once they have publically announced the same. This could work as proposing some sort of accountability for what happens to the child when the sex of the baby is told to the parents. However, this proposal would be difficult to implement in practicality and would require an invasive system for implementation. What needs to be done momentarily is to bring about a change in the mindset and attitudes of the people in India, so that they become more sensitive towards the girl child, and start believing in equality of both the sexes. Once, equality is made inherent in the society, the non-binary gender identities would also find more acceptance. Thus, the society needs to be educated and made aware of these concepts and ideas, as at the end of the day, if we were to say that society imposes oppressive gender roles, then we need to introspect who is the society. And in my opinion, it is us who is the society and the change shall start with us!

VII. GENDER INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA

When we talk about gender discrimination and inequality in India, the very first thought that comes to our mind is the inequality between men and women. Even reports of UN and World Bank, have ever since tried to evaluate the inequalities between the two sexes, i.e. men and women. Even on a simple Google search about the same topic, similar results would show. By doing so, we have dismissed the idea of existence of gender beyond the binaries and equated the meaning of gender with sex. Gender is a social construct which assigns certain stereotypical roles to an individual which often create deep rooted prejudices and lead to discrimination and oppression of individuals who don't identify as man or a woman, whereas sex is a physiological and biological determinant.

The struggle of women in India, against gender discrimination and for equality has been persistent through times and ages and till date continues, to this struggle now, the voices of

LGBTQIA+ communities have also joined forces for recognition and acceptance.

Cultural and social norms in India are patriarchal and characterized by patrilineality and function as one of the main reasons for gender inequality in India. The discrimination and inequality between the two sexes has become so internalized in our day to day conduct, that we even fail to see it now. Be it school textbooks, or movies, or media or be it in our own homes, a boy and a girl are always treated differently in India and the mindsets have become so deep rooted that without the dawn of education and awareness, it is almost impossible to penetrate these mindsets and change them. A socially ingrained preference for sons- stemming from the idea that sons will be the caregivers in old age is majorly associated with girls being seen as unwanted. Further, the dowry system in India, furthers the preference for a son as girls are seen as a burden. India is rated behind numerous Sub-Saharan African nations in the UN Gender Inequality Index.²⁴ Despite the fact that India's GDP has increased significantly in recent decades, by roughly 6%, female labor force participation has decreased. The number of crimes committed against women is also on the rise. Effective literacy rates (age 7 and up) were 82.14 percent for men and 65.46 percent for women, according to census statistics from 2011.²⁵

These facts and figures are a clearly indicative of how women are still discriminated against and even though we can argue that women have made great advancements in almost every area of functioning and the modern woman is no more restricted to her household, there are factors and figures pointing out that women face discrimination at workplaces, and even the wage gap between men and women is substantial. We, as a nation still haven't been able to recognize women as an equal gender and thus, the discrimination against other non-binary genders is immense. We as a society on the whole, are not able to accept and integrate the LGBTQIA+ members into the mainstream society. The lack of legal protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, combined with deeply embedded homophobic and trans phobic attitudes toward the LGBTQIA+ community, has become one of the major barriers for people in the LGBTQIA+ community to express themselves and live an equal life in India. Although, homosexuality has been decriminalized and there is a transgender bill in consideration underway, yet these measures are inadequate against what the LGBTQIA+ individuals have to face. One of the gay cross dresser Rajesh Yadav from Bilaspur Bihar who

²⁴ Syed Ejaz Ghani, William Kerr, Stephen o'Connell, *What Explains Big Gender Disparities in India? Local Industrial Structures and Female Entrepreneurship*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 6228, (2012).

²⁵ Fieder, S. Huber, & F. Bookstein, *Socioeconomic Status, Marital Status And Childlessness In Men And Women: An Analysis Of Census Data From Six Countries*. Journal of Biosocial Science, 43(5), 619-635. (2011).

is 25 years of age was gang raped many times and has brutally beaten just because of her sexuality. Not only this, but many other Trans and homosexual people have faced discrimination on the basis of their gender identity, even in the Bollywood industry, which often stands for progressive mindsets. Sushant Divgikar, who was crowned as Mr. Gay 2014, has always talked about the struggles he had to face in the industry and the unequal treatment meted out towards him, despite of his achievements.

These incidents and experiences are testimonial to the fact that, there is an immediate and drastic change that is required to be brought about in order to combat gender based discrimination in India. Laws and policies which are made to fight gender based discrimination, can lead to negative consequences, if the cultural and social norms aren't taken into account. For instance, the ban on pre-natal sex determination, induces the parents to have more children, in the relentless pursuit to have a son. Further, a financial incentive to have only one child, increases the probability of parents to choose a son, thereby inciting them to get the sex of the child determined through illegal ways. It is quintessential to evaluate and predict the unintended consequences a policy can have on the society, especially laws for gender equality as they directly target the deeply entrenched mindsets of people in the background of strong cultural and social norms.

VIII. LAWS AND POLICIES FORMULATED IN INDIA AND AROUND THE WORLD TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY FOR GENDER SENSITIZATION

Promoting Gender equality through gender sensitization and gender mainstreaming has received unbridled attention and efforts by both the national and the international communities and governments. One of the best pathways to gender sensitization is through incorporating a gender neutral and sensitive curriculum during the very formative years of a child's school life. At the primary level, a curriculum should be developed that analyses discriminatory social norms and structures. Gender equality is difficult to comprehend and imagine in a patriarchal society. Girls are socialised to be subservient and shy, whereas boys are raised with a sense of entitlement, dominance, and privilege.

To promote gender sensitization in the school curriculum, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has prepared syllabi and textbooks in a variety of areas. Gender sensitization is prioritised in the design of activities/exercises in textbooks at all levels of schooling. Changing this conceptual framework necessitates a paradigm shift in people's mindsets and attitudes. Disrupting the structures and power networks that segregate women is critical. Students should be encouraged to question preconceived assumptions. Only by

sensitising children about gender justice throughout their early years will they be able to change their beliefs. In the recent times in India, the state and the National governments are coming up with policies for remodeling of curriculum of school on the above stated lines. Recently, the Kerala state Women & Child development Department has launched a gender sensitivity campaign, with a focus on re-evaluation of school textbooks and will begin fixing the textbooks and study materials in anganwadis to make it more gender neutral and sensitive. Even very recently, the University Grants Commission has issued an official recommendation to the Universities to include content on women safety in their curriculum in addition to making it more gender sensitive as well. This came as a response to the report by Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs named 'Atrocities on crimes against women and children.'

As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that implementing a well-defined activity-based systematic curriculum in all state and central education boards will legitimize gender education. However, at this juncture I would like to state that the curriculum shouldn't be focused on sensitization towards only the two binary genders, it should be more holistic and take a human-centric approach to sensitive the society towards all the genders, be it binary or non-binary.

The Niti Aayog's Strategy for New India @ 75, document, also highlights that as per the economic survey 2018, a number of indicators that reflect the position of women in India have moved in the right direction. These include 117 indicators, like labor force participation rate and maternal morbidity rate amongst others.²⁶ This shows a positive step ahead and if we keep working in the right direction, then surely we will be able to achieve equality for all the genders.

Gender Sensitization is the process of transforming both men's and women's stereotypical mind-sets, which hold that men and women are unequal creatures that must operate in separate socioeconomic spaces. Thus, another way to promote gender sensitization is through breaking the traditional stereotypes and that can be done through social and economic empowerment of women. For this, even the international organisations such as the IMF, World Bank and the UNO have taken efforts and initiated programs for women empowerment. . A rising amount of research demonstrates that putting women at the center of the development agenda can boost efficiency in the management of institutions and resources, according to a World Bank analysis. The World Bank's Impact Evaluation to Development Impact (i2i) gender programme aims to close gaps in four categories outlined in the 2012 World Development Report, "Gender Equality and Development": (i) human capital, (ii) economic productivity, (iii) financial access, and (iv) empowerment. Over half of the current i2i portfolio is planning a gender-disaggregated

²⁶ Niti Aayog, Strategy for New India @ 75, (2018).

analysis, and 19 percent of i2i-supported impact evaluation (IE) projects are evaluating gender-specific treatments. In Nigeria, for example, this programme has made efforts to improve women's access to and use of medical prenatal and birth services, as well as community-level interventions to boost the inculcation of disease preventive technologies, with a special focus on women.

Improving women's economic conditions and providing them with access to finance is a big step toward breaking down gender stereotypes. In India, for example, women who participated in a women's empowerment and rural livelihood programme improved their access to loans, accumulated assets, and invested in their children's education, resulting in their empowerment and even the empowerment of their girl child, according to an IE by the World Bank.

With the effects of industrialization and globalization, the role of women in trade as a way to promote gender equality cannot be dismissed. One step ahead of breaking free from the gender norms is that positive examples of women who are excelling in the fields of trade and commerce should be amplified and their participation in trade should be encouraged. According to a World Bank analysis, countries with higher levels of gender equality are those that are more open to trade, as assessed by the ratio of trade to gross domestic product. Liberalization of trade is associated with a greater accumulation of education and skills (human capital) as well as increasing gender equality. Trade can also encourage governments to improve women's legal rights and access to critical resources like education and technology. Women's rights have improved, which has resulted in increased trade. As a result, a virtuous circle of increasing trade and gender equality has emerged. Such a positive trend can be seen in Africa, where the free trade is helping lower the wage gap between men and women.

Even the SDG's lay emphasis on gender equality and seek to change the course of the 21st century. And in furtherance of assistance by the UN, many countries have adopted more gender neutral policies and laws and have implemented methods for inculcating gender sensitivity. Today, our world is full of examples and initiatives like these by women, yet there is still a long way for all of us to go when it comes to gender sensitization all throughout the world.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is the current pandemic situation and although no person hasn't been untouched by the ill effects of the coronavirus in one or the other, it has been specifically more problematic for the women, as stated in the policy brief of UN on "The Impact of Covid-19 on women".²⁷ With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, even the modest gains in gender equality gained in recent decades are under

²⁷ UN, *The Impact of Covid-19 on Women*. (2021)

jeopardy. Pre-existing inequalities are being exacerbated by the epidemic, which is exposing vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems, compounding the pandemic's effects. Further, the health of women, even women healthcare workers was more severely impacted than men due to reallocation of resources which prefer men. Due to the lockdown, the gender-based violence increased as the victim was locked in the same house as the abuser and in most cases victims are women only. Thus, this report laid emphasis on adopting policies to combat these problems and further emphasized on the role that UN can play instructing and guiding these policies.

IX. STEPS AHEAD FOR GENDER SENSITIZATION IN INDIA

Since, Gender biases runs deep in India, there is a need for policies and laws to be implemented which target the root cause of such discrimination, which is the attitudes, mindsets and social norms of the society. A policy such as the “Apni Beti Apna Dhan”, reinforced the idea that women are objects as they are categorized as being the “wealth”, and since under this scheme parents were supposed to get cash benefits on birth of a baby girl and on completion of 18 years of her age., the monetary payments came to be seen as a payment to alleviate the burden of a girl’s marriage and to contribute in her dowry.²⁸ Thus, policies have to be such that they inculcate the idea that women are also humans, just like men and have all the capabilities to achieve and do what men can do.

Instead of focusing, that we need to project a superior image of woman, we need to policies that focus more on the humanistic aspect of a woman and furthers the concept that we all our humans, entitled to dignity and equality.

One way of sensitizing people towards the idea of gender equality and towards recognition and acceptance of non-binary gender identities also, it is important to project examples of people from within the women and the LGBTQIA+ communities, and make people realize of the potential they have and that they are no different from anyone else. This is the only way through which behavioral and psychological change towards all genders can be impacted.

There is a serious need of education and awareness drives to be conducted more rigorously, because the only way our cultural and social norms can progress and become more open minded is through education. Policies which ensure good quality of education to people from every sect of the society should be developed and implemented systematically. Even the sections like that of police, who are at the forefront of policy implementation and are deemed

²⁸ ICRW, *Raising Her Voice-Agency and Aspirations of Adolescent Girls on Marriage* UMANG Report. (2019)

as the protectors of law, should be sensitized towards the needs of women and the LGBTQIA+ communities, as when a crime happens against them, going to the police is the first step and unless the police is sensitized, we will not be able to get justice for all.

It is not a fight or struggle of one gender against the other, it is a struggle for all of us, as a society, to come break free from the shackles of such social and cultural norms which minimize the value of any human.

The Niti Aayog, strategy for India @75 document²⁹, also proposes some ways forwards for gender sensitization in India, which include ensuring gender sensitive legislation and policies, strengthening the legal framework to prevent and eliminate gender based discrimination and to introduce a more constructive mechanism of punishment for perpetrators of such discrimination and discrimination based crimes, encouraging participation of all the genders in industry and enterprise. If we are able to integrate all these strategies in our framework policies, it would be a giant leap towards gender sensitization

It is not that we don't have positive example in our society, India is making great strides towards the implementation of the Transgender Bill and taking all efforts to make it as inclusive and accommodative as possible. Recently, in a family in Rajasthan, a family celebrated the birth of a girl child, by hiring a chopper to get her back home. It was after 35 years that a girl child was born in the family. It is through such examples that give us a hope for a better and an equal society. This also highlights the need to have a more active media and entertainment industry, which is a very good machinery to mobilize and affect the attitudes of people towards all the genders and promote a more equal society.

²⁹ Niti Aayog Strategy For New India @75, (2018).