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## UNDERSTANDING GENDER JUSTICE WITH RESPECT TO DIFFERENT EMANCIPATORY MODELS AND PRINCIPLES OF GENDER JUSTICE: A CONTEXTUAL STUDY

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### Abstract

The issue of gender justice and women empowerment has been a concern in many nations and in many an arena for some centuries. Though there has been formal removal of institutionalized discrimination, yet the mindset and the attitude ingrained in the subconscious have not been erased. Women still face all kinds of indignity and prejudice. The malady sometimes pounces with ungenerous monstrosity giving a free play to the inferior endowments of nature in a man thereby making the whole concept a ridicule, destabilising the entire edifice. The recent incident in the Capital of the Nation not only exhibits how such treatment is basically an anathema to the concept of gender justice but also exposes the barbaric mindset annihilating the values of basic civilization. The days of yore when women were treated as fragile, feeble, dependent and subordinate to men, should be a matter of history. Gender equality and women empowerment are the call of the day and attempts are to be made to achieve satisfactory results. Everybody should be prepared to fight for the idea and actualize the conceptual vision in practicality. This paper has tried to through light on understanding gender justice with respect to different majors' issues of emancipatory models and principles of gender justice.

**Keywords:** Gender Justice, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality.

### 1. Introduction

'Gender justice' is meant the protection of the rights of everyone irrespective of their sex or gender identity or gender expression, and the prevention and punishment of gender-based discrimination. It also refers to a system of law and its application which is non-discriminatory and fair, and thus gender responsive. In other words, the justice system is attentive to lived realities of men, women and people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions. Gender justice directly contributes to the promotion of gender equality and to security and the rule of law.

'Gender Justice' is a broad term that takes in its sweep up every surface of life. For centuries, we have been living in a patriarchal and feudal society which assigns to women a subordinate position in the social hierarchy. Women may be respected and loved, but they have been confined to home and home-making, and looking after the children, the sick and the elderly in the family, most of the voluntary work in the world is done by women. Their lack of socio-economic independence has led to their exploitation. But a new awareness of this exploitation and need to reorganize society on a more just basis has led to serious attempts to reform and transform our moral, social, economic and political structure, including our legal and constitutional framework. Gender justice and equality of sexes has indeed made very slow progress. The subordination of women to men has subsisted through the millennia in all societies and countries without exception. It is only now at the beginning of twenty first century that these twin factors are being increasingly recognized and rectified.

### 2. Concept of Gender Justice

The gendered division of labor is also at the core of a long-lasting debate about two different models of change, embodied by different strands of feminism. Here is a crude picture. The first model, centered on equality between women and men, consists in empowering women to enjoy all the "good things of life" that men have traditionally enjoyed. The second model, centered on "difference," consists in discovering, explaining and enhancing the value of what has long been deemed "women's lifestyles." Traditionally, women have been associated with the spheres of the family, close relationships, domestic work and with the individual virtues believed to make life in these spheres as good as it can get. Men have been associated with the complementary spheres of politics and commerce and their respective virtues.

#### 2.1. Understanding Gender Justice with respect to different emancipatory models

Since "feminine" as well as "masculine" functional spheres are necessary for individual survival and social reproduction, both emancipatory models proposed by the two different strands of feminism have run into major difficulties. If women and men are to have an equal share of the good things in life by merely opening men's lifestyles to women, the question is: Who will do what it takes to maintain the spheres of family, close relationships and domestic work? Feminists who advocate "masculine" lifestyles for women



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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.12.12>

have been criticized as compromising the quest for equality by relegating “feminine” work to the often-exploited women whose poverty, race or immigrant status pushes them to the margins of society. The alternative possibility, that the entire “feminine domain” be outsourced, looks unappealing to most, and possibly not even coherent. The second solution to gender justice, that is, making women and men equally well off by giving more recognition and economic support to “feminine lifestyles,” was criticized for entrenching the gendered division of labor and therefore curtailing women’s access to “masculine” lifestyles.

These solutions sacrifice either equality between women belonging to different classes/races/national groups, or women’s substantive freedom to choose nontraditional lifestyles. Such sacrifices could be avoided if women and men were to voluntarily share paid and domestic work and their benefits. To some extent this has been happening for several decades, under a combination of pressure coming from markets and individual preferences alike. But women and men are still far from sharing all types of work and benefits equally, and sometimes women themselves seem to prefer the status quo. The question of what a gender-just world would look like is still as yet unanswered: How should women and men share the burdens and benefits of social cooperation, and why? Should we strive to accommodate all individual preferences concerning gendered lifestyles equally, and at what costs? And if all preferences cannot all be equally accommodated, which should be given priority and on what grounds? There is still a lack of normative agreement with respect to these questions. In the ’60s and the ’70s, feminists nourished the hope that men would engage as equal partners in domestic work, and the disappointment that this has not happened sufficiently has labeled feminism a “stalled revolution.”

On the one hand, a new wave of academics from various disciplines seeks to legitimize individuals’ gendered preferences and a society able to accommodate these preferences equally. On the other hand, for almost two decades feminists such as Nancy Fraser have been advocating a universal caregiver model whereby women and men would share equally the paid work and the caregiving, a model fleshed out in the work of Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers. More recently, Ingrid Robeyns has argued that society will be gender just only when women’s and men’s capability sets, constraints on choice and resulting benefits are the same (allowing for inequalities resulting from sexual difference).

When we reflect on ‘what justice is’, then we can start with Socrates question in Republic and his expression in Crito that he will not run away but rather face death. For instance, Plato takes justice not as a particular virtue of institution, but as the outline of all virtues of institution, so that for him a society is more or less a perfect society. In the Republic, Plato holds that justice in the state consists of each part performing its proper function well and outlines what such a society would be like. In this view, a just society is one that passes, to a quite high degree, all legitimate tests. On the other hand, Aristotle treats justice simply as one virtue of institution. In his view, an institution might be just but might fail some other tests. According to him, justice consists in treating equals equally and unequal’s unequally, in proportion to their inequality. The connection of justice with equality and proportion has been elevated ever since as its central and specific feature.

Various political philosophers have the same opinion that justice is one of the most important standards which social and political arrangements should assemble. They have defined this enormous concept in their own ways and have propounded different theories of justice. But in all theories of justice, until recently there has often been a lack of attention to gender and in particular to methodical inequalities between the sexes. If we throw a summary glimpse at the history of the concept of justice, we shall see that in most of the leading theories of justice. There has been a lapse of gender and of much of women’s lives. Where there is a reference to gender, the bias is shocking. Thus, all the rights and needs that they have considered a just society to involve have not been perceived as applicable to the female half of the human race. Therefore, within the traditions of political philosophy and culture, there has been an all-encompassing tendency to make general statements as if human race were not divided into two sexes. They have either ignored the female sex altogether or have proceeded to discuss it in terms not at all consistent with the assertions they have made about ‘man’ and ‘humanity’.

Gender justice requires that nobody should be expected to carry higher overall burdens, or enjoy overall lesser benefits than others, without due compensation, simply because of their gender. But think now of cases in which women and men shoulder the same overall burdens and enjoy the same overall level of benefit by conforming to gendered lifestyles. A good example is a heterosexual family, intact over time, and adopting an equal, but gendered, division of labor. This may come in the more extreme traditional form, with the man as a full-time breadwinner and the woman as a full-time homemaker. Or it may take a more modern shape, with the man holding a full-time job and doing some housework and care and the woman working part time while also managing and doing the main bulk of the housework and care.



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### 3. Principle of Gender Justice

A gendered division of labor, even when it burdens women and men equally, is unjust if it is set in a social context that endorses gender norms that make some choices cheaper for women and other choices cheaper for men. The pressure such norms put on people casts doubt on individuals' freedom to choose certain valuable elements from the lifestyle of the other gender. Sometimes this happens because gender norms make the costs of such elements prohibitive. Even when the costs are not prohibitive, and individuals are free to choose these elements, gender norms compromise the equality of women's and men's access to what they have reason, and sometimes choose, to pursue. Before proposing a principle of gender justice, let me explain how the pressure of gender norms works and what is problematic about it. There are three different ways in which gender norms can interfere with just outcomes through limiting individual choice, all illustrated by the "glass-ceiling" effect in women's careers.

- First, there is increasing evidence that much gender bias operates at the unconscious, and hence not directly controllable, level. Even individuals who consciously reject gender norms tend to unconsciously evaluate women and men according to different criteria and to expect members of each gender to do better in those respects that are traditionally associated with their gender; this is called implicit bias. Often, implicit bias puts people at a net disadvantage due to their gender. Moreover, we are ourselves unconsciously sensitive to gender norms and actually perform worse in environments in which we are expected, on the basis of our gender, to be less successful; this is called stereotype threat. It is not very difficult to see the unfairness of implicit bias and stereotype threat and of the ensuing differential treatment of women and men: They invite unjustified discrimination. Additionally, the imposition of different standards of evaluation of performance on women and men unjustifiably limits the scope of occupational choice, or at least the equality of access, for some. So, part of the explanation of the glass-ceiling effect lies at the level of unconscious discrimination, due to gender norms, in evaluating women. A woman has to prove herself more than she would have she been a man. In order to be deemed equally good as men, women must pay the higher cost of superior performance. If one adds the stereotype threat into the picture, the costs – especially psychological – are even higher, since extra self-confidence is needed to overcome the drawbacks of being perceived as inferior. Some women are unable to pay this price, and their freedom of occupational choice is thereby limited; others are able to pay it but their access to top jobs is unequal to men's.
- Second, it is costly for individuals to frustrate gender expectations (for instance, most men would be mortified to appear in public wearing dresses and makeup). This is particularly true when dealing with the expectations of people we care about (often gay people find it hardest to come out to their own families) and even more so when the expectations are internalized (the urge to please others is more difficult to resist when one's self-perception as an acceptable individual depends on pleasing others). Once someone starts to systematically behave in ways that conform to others' expectations, it becomes increasingly hard for that person to resist them, for two reasons: (a) because it is subjectively hard to break patterns of action that have become part of one's regular lifestyle, and (b) perhaps more importantly, because patterned behavior generates legitimate expectations. Being always there to meet the essential needs of the nearest and dearest, as women are expected to do, or to earn the living of the family, as men are expected to do, results in duties that cannot be dissolved at short notice or with little effort. Both habit and acquired duties curtail one's freedom of choice. A second part of the explanation of the glass-ceiling effect is in the way that gender norms shape the family. A woman with dependents who wants to rise to the top of her profession will have to pay higher material costs than she would had she been a man: She is the main caregiver in her family and so either needs to work harder overall or else she needs to counter social expectations and to overcome habit in order to transfer her care duties to somebody else. The cost, for women, of having a successful career is often prohibitive, and hence they enjoy lesser substantial freedom of choice in this respect than men do and/or unequal access.
- Third, external pressure in the form of gender expectations can generate what economists call "statistical discrimination," which is a structural feature of work markets. If most people from your social group conform to (gender) expectations, others will reasonably predict that you will conform as well, even if in fact you will not, and will treat you accordingly. So, for example, if enough women put less time than most men into advancing their careers because they dedicate their time to meeting essential needs of the nearest and dearest, it may be reasonable for potential employers to expect any woman who has needy dependents to do so. This is the last part of the explanation of the glass-ceiling effect, consisting in how gender norm's structure women's relationship to the labor market. Even if a woman has generally resisted gendered expectations in her family life, and even if such expectations play no role in evaluating her performance, prudent employers will be reluctant to promote her. Employers have limited knowledge, and it is statistically more likely that female employees will lead a gendered lifestyle that prevents them from performing as efficiently as a similarly positioned man. In other words, gender norms also make the costs of promoting women those employers have to pay higher than those of promoting men. This results in market mechanisms that limit people's opportunities, and therefore the scope of individual choice, on the basis of their gender.



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When is the limitation of individual choice, resulting from social norms, unjust? It cannot always be so: Much of the way in which we manage ourselves and our relationships with others is shaped by social norms and, arguably, this is often for the better. It is costly to frustrate social norms, but this does not involve any intrinsic injustice; in the case of general norms everybody's choice is limited in the same ways and to the same extent. Moreover, some of the general social norms that curtail individuals' freedom block access to things that are not valuable. One problem with the majority of gendered norms is that, in general, they make it more costly for women than for men to obtain certain valuable things such as fulfilling careers and self-esteem, and the social recognition that comes with them. Indeed, much of the feminist work on justice reflects this fact, and an analytically powerful way to understand gender itself is by reference to its essential connection to social advantage or disadvantage.

#### 4. Conclusion

However, this is not all there is to object to gender norms. Non-hierarchical gender norms can also entail injustice. In the example of gendered but equally burdening and rewarding lifestyles, gendered expectations may well be as costly for men as they are for women: They make women's access to fulfilling work very costly and make equally costly men's access to fulfilling relationships. Imagine that fulfilling work and fulfilling relationships were equally valuable and received equal social recognition. Even in this case – highly unrealistic as a paradigm of the costs associated with gender in real life! – there is a problem with gender norms. They render people's access to some central components of most, if not all, individuals' ideas of a good life excessively, and unequally, costly; they oppress both women and men, although in different respects. But we cannot choose our sex at trivial costs, nor can we choose how gender norms are to influence our lives. Hence, in a just society nobody should be burdened by gendered norms in the pursuit of things as important as access to work and close relationships – even if everybody was to carry an overall equal burden. One's gender should not block access to any of these, or make it either more or less costly than they would be for somebody similar in all respects but gender.

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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.12.12>

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