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## VULNERABLE WOMEN NEED A RAY OF HOPE

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**Abstract:** “Education of a boy is education of a person, but education of a girl is the education of the entire family”. Education is indispensable for Economic development of a country, and women constituting half of the global population as well as that of any individual county including India, educating women too is indispensable. Formulating and implementing a gender impartial educational policy and achieving higher and higher levels of educational development without any sort of discrimination between male and female has been on the agenda of Government of India since independence. However, the age old social traditions and beliefs deeply embedded in Indian society to some extent did over power the efforts of Government for many decades. This indeed is an unfortunate fact. Indian women, particularly the rural women are essentially religious minded, given this fact accepting anything new is not that easy for them. Given this mentality and owing to this primarily till today many Indian families in rural and semi urban India are leading a life unaware of the developments happenings of the modern world.

Keywords: Woman folk, gender, education.

**Introduction:** Biologically, most human beings are categorised into male and female genders and the genders classify a man and woman in the society. Based on his/her genders people see themselves and how the society sees them. It is largely culturally determined and has no clear biological explanation. I mean to say that men and women are controlled by gender and not by biology. The role of individuals is defined by different societies in their own way. And it may vary. Women are seen as being fit for only certain types of roles, such as taking care of the home, cooking, and being a mother and wife. Men are seen as the providers of food and shelter and the protectors of family. People, who do not cross the boundaries of these roles, are questioned and discriminated against by society. Children, as they grow up, absorb these stereotypes and perpetuate them. Obviously, gender discrimination is rampant all around us. The Role of gender keeps changing over time. Since the Vedic times, it is believed that women, were at par with men in all spheres of lives. At one point of time, they had the right to Hotr {i.e., right to perform sacrificial rites}, study the Vedas, be gurus, have equal share in family property and even marry more than one husband (polyandry). Scholars like Maître, Gorge, Lopamudra and Visvsvara were great scholars. Women could also perform the funeral rites of their fathers if there was no male issue. In the course of time, the balance tilted against women. Manusmriti, the book of Hindu laws, authored by the sage Manu, and the Arthasastra by Kautilya, propounded the theory that ‘Woman is created for the sake of sons’. Also, it was said that to get moksha or salvation on one’s death, the last rites had to be done by a son. This made the desire to have sons even greater among Hindus. Such works paved the way for a redefining of gender-roles. From the time they are infants, boys and girls are treated differently within

most Indian families. Boys are pardoned the most mischievous of antics on the ground that ‘boys will be boys’. The birth of a son is greeted with great joy, while the birth of a girl is seen as something to be sorry about. The daughter of the house is often treated as a burden. Since a girl leaves the house after marriage, investing in her welfare is considered to be a waste and she is seen as ‘paraya Dhan’ i.e. someone else’s wealth. Once married, girls leave the house of their parents and move in with their in-laws. This fact has coloured the treatment of girls for centuries. Investing in a boy’s future made sense as parents felt that later the son would become the bread-winner of the family and would support them in their old age. As a consequence, female children are often neglected. Most of women suffer from various health problems as a result of rising bias in terms of providing food and healthcare. It may even go to the extent of dropping them out of schools so as to confine them to homes. Gender-based inequality can often turn fatal. In several parts of India, female infanticide and female foeticide, are common practices. Such practices show that the life of a woman has no significance or value. Across India, girls are victims of discrimination and bias when it comes to their school education. Traditionally, educating women was considered unnecessary and a waste of time and money, as it was assumed that women would only be taking care of the house and not going out to work. When resources were limited, most people would choose to send their sons to school as they were as the future wage earners for the family. Girls are also needed to help with the house work and to take care of the younger siblings. It was also believed that it would be difficult to marry off a woman if she is well-educated with higher degrees. Gender discrimination is more often seen in rural areas than in cities and towns. In most of the rural

parts of India, women were traditionally expected to stay within the four walls. They were discouraged from interacting with people other than family members. Women, who choose to travel on their own especially after the dark, are viewed with suspicion and often subjected to unwanted attention and comments. Muslim women in many parts of India are expected to wear a burkha or cover their heads with a scarf when they step out of homes. For centuries, gender bias continues to affect lives and growth of rural pockets due to the failure of governments to implement effective rural education policies. Rising illiteracy, blind beliefs, malnutrition among women, poverty, etc., particularly among the women folk are a result of lack of effective education. With women folk staying homes and men deprived of good education in rural areas, the life has given haywire across the rural segment. Lack of sex education resulted in population explosion and forcing the women further back on the wall. An ignorant man is putting woman in more serious problems. Women are totally unsafe with such men. Unsafe sex which men indulge in a drunken state not only add to population growth but also puts women into health hazards. A system of education which imparts basic human values among rural folk is the need of the hour and must be implemented effectively. Most of the problems relating to healthcare, sex, poverty, hygiene, population, etc., could be overcome through a systematic education policy. The basic education at the primary level should help in eradicating gender bias and bring both men and women equally into the society's mainstream. Once the primary education is designed to strengthen the rural life, it is possible to avoid major problems relating to gender bias effectively. Lack of hygiene has been a matter of grave

concern in rural India with the failure of local governments to provide a clean life. The rural areas are increasingly becoming breeding grounds for various diseases due to lack of education. As part of the curriculum, the schools and colleges should also have scope to organise awareness programmes and training workshops for people to ensure hygiene in the vulnerable areas. Girls and women are getting vulnerable as soon as they step out of their homes, whether they are in schools, on streets, markets or other public places. Women are victims of atrocities and rapes even now at all places whether it is rural or urban area. Incidents of crimes perpetrated on women are unfortunately more in an educated society than in rural areas. Intellectuals and policy makers have to come out with answers on why the most affluent society too is indulging in such crimes. Some of the horrifying and grave crimes against women in the country have taken place in the so-called most-developed cities of Delhi and Bangalore and not the most-neglected and illiterate rural segment in this nation.

**Conclusion:** Although, education is the key to resolve most of the problems pertaining to gender bias and discrimination, more rational approach is needed to make the nation a better place. Human psychology, behaviour and mindset is something that needs to be changed which comes not only through education.

Finally, both men and women have an equally responsible role to play in making the lives of women safer. The women should come out of their shells and attempt to enter the society's mainstream by taking men into confidence. To help women grow in the society and fight injustice, their men must support them lending their helping hands.

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