

# Equity, Equality, Empowerment Triangle

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## ABSTRACT

21st Century world has shown different strains of thought and among them the predominant being liberalism- the emphasis on individual dignity and freedom as paramount interest. Gender has always been a ubiquitous factor in shaping social relationships, and above all society in general. In the light of this situation, gender equity entails not only an equality of men and women, but also an equality of opportunity and at the same time a fair social justice meted out. While gender stereotypes and gender roles continue to influence people's opinions, modern liberal ideologies emerge as a new social force. This force has to be dealt with keeping in mind circumstantial requirements of present day, needs of the hour and reactions of society to present legislations. One of the parallel factors instigating liberal thought process is an emphasis on Human Rights-the basic fundamental rights which form a skeletal framework for preserving individual dignity.

## 1. Gender Equity as a Liberal Product

The conception of a healthy and well functional society entails a degree of compatibility between the genders and different sections of the society, together with a standard of equity that would guarantee a sense of security to the pursuits of people living in the society. Equity is the perfect condition for an appurtenant social harmony in which the sectors of livelihood are open to personal choice of people, in which individual liberty and dignity assumes paramount interest.

Liberalism as an ideology has impacted the way of life of people, it has made an individual an entity in itself that is to be primarily recognised with respect to the essential requirements for not just an existence but also a healthy and dignified existence. This idea ensures that men and women need to be endowed with equal opportunities, and it is equity in the social sphere that is more important than equality. While equality strives at similar benefits for both men and women, equity prescribes equally fair conditions to both men and women to prosper accordingly. Gender is different from the biological sex-gender is about identifying the self with a pre-established social image of being a male or being a female, it is more about the socio-cultural attributes prescribed on a particular gender. In this sense there was a crystallisation of gender roles in which activities carried out by men and women became rigid schemas of evaluation, frameworks that seemed unbreakable and indissoluble. With such an orthodox conception, the floodgates of education and modernity became an exclusive privilege of the men, who rejoiced in the patriarchal domain. On the other hand the womenfolk not only got confined to household but were also undermined and underestimated in their capacities. This stagnation of gender roles and these thick barriers of gender stereotypes were soon bombarded with liberal strains of thought that brought an individual up as a priority, which did not concern itself with distinguishing between men and women, rather trying to create a new forum in which equity would thrive perfectly.

Equity is a global concept that is not restricted to any particular culture and religion and it is ubiquitous to the socio-

cultural fabric concocted into the matrix of the interpersonal relationships which men and women share. It was also acknowledged by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) –

UNDP supports partners to eliminate gender inequalities through targeted, gender-focused programmes and by working to ensure that all development efforts take into account the experiences, needs, and contributions of women. By removing structural barriers to gender equality and promoting women's participation in the decisions that affect their lives, success in eradicating poverty and inequality, building resilience to disasters, climate change and conflict, and driving sustainable development can be achieved.<sup>1</sup>

Gender Equity does not confine itself to establishing an equal status among men and women only, it is rather a modus operandi of demolishing traditional barriers to women and at the same time establishing equal courses of action for the social beings to follow. Equity does not let go off the differences inherent between men and women, it is rather appreciating them and striving to ensure that those do not come in the way of progress as a hindrance. In this sense, liberalism perpetuates itself at the very roots of this thought. The idea or the conception of a welfare state as a political model of statehood counts upon the individual wellbeing of people- that comes as a natural consequence from their success in endeavours and trials in any field of their choice. At the same time, equity serves to guarantee dignity, that a society has gender equity connotes the independence and freedom of people at their individual level and it is here that emancipation rests. Functionally genders are different, their needs are different, situations demand them to work but according to their individual variations entailed thereof, and Equity gives recognition to this. It is indeed a product of liberal

<sup>1</sup> UNDP, <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/gender-equality.html>

thought process that makes it indispensable in the present society and at the same time fundamental to the rights which people have.

The recent development in this field is about the Transgender or third gender as another gender identity which demands equity again as a fundamental precondition to their well being in society. Not only were they exploited and denied liberty of existence, but their queer physiological structure made them an object of ridicule subject to the menial mentality of people. Gender Equity as the umbrella term does not restrict its ambit; it extends to the third gender as well. The overwhelming principle of Equity has paved the way for assimilation of transgender into the traditional Male- Female complex; it has carved out a new niche in the social and occupational domains that recognises them on the basis of their abilities, potential and not stereotype them for their gender.

Gender Equity has taken up a very important question- this is about the identity of people on the parameter of gender- whether it should be given precedence or not. In this sense it can always be formulated that Gender as an identity is important to acknowledge individual differences, but more than that it is a fundamental right, a human right that should be secured at the micro level to all individuals to guarantee a macro level national progress.

## 2. Human Rights and Equality Quotient

Human Rights come as a thoughtful reaction to some of the grievous war crimes perpetrated out of national animosities. While people need rights to survive, rights also have another pertinent function embedded in its fabric- empowering factor. It gives a legislative shield to people, enable them to remove any hindrance to their way of improvement and helps them attain development. As a positive consequence of these rights thereof comes the phenomenon of woman empowerment- the process of upliftment of the status of women not simply in work or professional sectors, but in leading the life they want, the life they dream to live and lead. Women empowerment comes as a poignant reply to centuries and ages of patriarchy, defies it and connotes an equal status for them. Hence human rights, equity and empowerment are necessary branches emerging out of the root of the liberal thought process.

Fundamentally while dealing with Human Rights, the basic principle that gets emphasised and elaborated upon is "dignified existence" and recognition of the basic dignity with which a human being is rightfully entitled to sustain his/her own self. Human rights and its conception have been greatly cradled by the backdrop of atrocities and inability to live, enforcing the right to life in its ambit, but equality in existence also assumes similar overtones. Enforcing human rights with a vendetta of furthering equality and intertwining gender with it was indeed a highly subtle development. While on one hand equality of both the sexes came up as a glaring issue, the cause of women to fight out the shackles and restrictions on them as a means of gaining a human right came to be recognised.

## 3. Emancipation – Giving Her The Wings

The inherently patriarchal domain existing in the society had long denied an equal status to women and considered it their monopolistic entitlement to enjoy the privileges of controlling the socio-political reigns of the country. The degenerated status to which womenfolk were subjected to, was indeed a sheer manifestation of the prejudiced outlook of considering women as the "second sex" or worse still inferior to men in their physiological and psychological potency. Ever since this view began gaining a momentum, the freedom and liberty of women started declining steadily with an ugly culmination of them being hedged up in households. Winds of change were already set in motion by daunting luminaries who made their mark from time to time by setting up examples of achieving perfection despite the shackles limiting them. History is a timeline of revelations that never fails to provide a pedagogical experience to people who seek to learn from it. Even in case of women it has been no exception. Time and social order had at times stifled its orthodox control on women notwithstanding which they have fluttered their way out.

*"Though the sex to which I belong is considered weak you will nevertheless find me a rock that bends to no wind."*<sup>2</sup>

Said Queen Elizabeth, the Regina who fabricated an age to perfection and ruled with excellence, who had deftly dealt with all the opposition to turn out as the opposite candidate landing on the throne. In the medieval era of male domination and malevolent patriarchy, it was a shining example of empowerment.

In the Indian context, while at one hand Patriarchal domain was very strict prescribing only limited liberty to women, on the other hand, caste system and caste endogamy prevalent in the social fabric further subjected women to the complete domination of men. When education was a privilege too far for a woman to imagine and conducting oneself at par with men a distant dream, we find examples of undaunting spirit and perseverance in the embodiment of Razia Sultana, a ruler of Delhi Sultanate, Rani Durgavati who rose in defiance to the domination of Mughal empire under Akbar, Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi, who fearlessly guarded her empire against British East India Company's domination of her estate, to name a few. It is evident that circumstantial conditions and unceasing capacities of women had already set proper examples to inspire women to come out of the drudgery which a male chauvinistic society inflicted on them.

The phenomenon of women empowerment encompasses in its gamut a holistic social, occupational, political and economic emancipation of women which is a gradual and universal process. As the socio-political structure of the world underwent a metamorphic change with a clash of ideologies of colonialism, imperialism, socialism, capitalism and democracy, and supported by the two world wars as its uncouth revelation, women enunciated their urge to be free, and rise above their dominated position to be at par with the men folk. Beginning with suffrage and right to vote to becoming partners in occupations and politics, women trudged a tough path up to success. The waves of feminism, with the first one being initiated by Betty Friedan inspired women that even they

<sup>2</sup><https://www.marieclaire.com.au/famous-women-in-history>

could get a chance to pull up their lot. As Civil Disobedience Movement had engulfed North America demanding equality of races, women found avenues to mobilise them socially and politically. In case of India, the mass movements during freedom struggle had paved a path for women to sacrifice their lives for a cause and gain political empowerment. In these ways, women charted their paths to freedom in a steady and gradual way. Although circumstances did have an important role to play, but the instigating force behind this was undoubtedly liberalism. Liberal ideology soon spread like dominos falling on one another, to political systems of the world, it was modern scientific and rational thought in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal Society which brought in Renaissance and a successful end to social evils like Sati, Child marriage thereby helping to elevate the standard of women. Western Liberal Education produced a class of conscious citizens who became aware of the basic rights of existence, the fundamentality of liberty and gender equity in our lives. Hence although situations were favourable, but the push came from within minds were soaked with ideas of liberalism.

In Indian scenario, the post Independence phase was appurtenant in further development of status of women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts, introduced reservation of seats for women in the local bodies at the grassroots levels of administration. Women, now politically aware could contest for seats and hold offices. A professional accomplishment further fuelled their freedom in households as well. As women became partners of men in legislative and administrative bodies, there was a phenomenal growth in their participation in other occupational activities, together with a boost to their education at the same time. They started expanding their involvement in different directions and activities, emerging victorious with zeal. From space travels to cab driving, fighting at the war fronts to dealing with personal integrity, being role models in education to posing with agility in sports, their feats of success have

perpetually added feathers of pride to the crown of the country. Empowerment today is no longer just about equality or pushing women beyond their boundaries, it is more about the liberty of choice, it is connoted with the basic freedom of choosing what women want for them, what they wish for, and the security of the ways in which they can work and fulfil them.

#### 4. Conclusion

A careful and thorough analysis of our research work has specifically pointed out that the ambits of Human Rights, Gender Equity and Empowerment are intertwined, coalescing their broad domains around the nucleus of liberalism. While human rights are rightly the basic rights as prerequisites of a dignified individual existence, Gender Equity is an essential condition required for social progress. From among these two a phenomenon emerged manifesting itself as emancipation of women. Our hypothesis stands proved as the association between these three stands proved, and that there is a consonance between the claiming of rights to development of equity in the way of Empowerment, and what relates them is the connection of liberalism, not just a political ideology but also as an emphasis on individuals and guarding their dignity as of paramount interest.

There is a triangular correlation of the mutual association of three distinct phenomena – Equity, Equality and Empowerment. While Equity and Equality draw the base, Empowerment extends from the base as the projected vertex-the phenomena which actually gets powered by the base. This system works or rather got initiated due to Human Rights, expanding on their ambits and assimilating wide topics in its domain.