Gender Intolerance Workplace Discrimination and Women's Empowerment

Posted on September 21, 2018

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Historical Patterns of Gender Intolerance

Throughout the history of the world, women have been subject to discrimination and intolerance based on their gender. Despite the technological and intellectual advances of the world's population, conditions may be a little better for women, but they still are not what they should be. Certain high-end jobs in multinational and major companies are still reserved for men, although women might have the same qualifications. Women experience high pressure in married life, as all the responsibility for caring for children is expected to fall on women. The condition is especially dire in Islamic countries, like Pakistan, where the society views females as inferior to the male gender (United Nations, 1979).

Women are discriminated against in a variety of ways in all walks of life. Since birth, a girl is told to behave in accordance with society's expectations of her gender. It is evident from the fact that the parents of the girls give them toys like dolls and dollhouses that focus on nurturing. She is taught to be compassionate and caring, and girls who do not conform to these societal standards are frowned upon and viewed as deviant. Such stereotyping of the female gender is further perpetuated by the media, which portrays women in secondary roles to men and as incapable of performing intellectual tasks (World Health Organization, 2021).

With respect to employment, employers are generally intolerant towards women. There are a variety of ways in which women face intolerance and discrimination at work. The foremost form of intolerance is the exclusion of the female gender from certain job descriptions solely based on their gender and the perception that they are incapable of performing important tasks as compared to men. There are numerous cases in which the women who apply for a certain job are not hired, although they may have the same qualifications and work experience as the men who have applied for the job. Moreover, this issue of unequal treatment of women further extends to the salary offered to women. They are paid much less than their male counterparts. On the same note, men have better chances of being promoted as compared to women (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

Pregnancy Discrimination and Inequality in Employment

Furthermore, women are also not preferred for jobs because they may become pregnant. It is a significant issue that many pregnant women are either not hired or demoted and even fired. Such women are further denied returning to the same job description upon returning from maternity leave. The primary reason cited by the male employers of these women is that they are not able to perform their jobs efficiently due to their gender, and their leave has a negative effect on their performance. Another reason stated by employers is that upon giving birth to a child, a woman would no longer be interested in the job and would have to care for her child. However, such an assumption is ridiculous. Women have never been found to be less efficient than men, and they deserve the right to be treated equally.

The conditions for women are especially outrageous for the women of Islamic countries. Many Muslims view women in a negative light due to their inadequate interpretation of Islamic texts and jurisprudence. One example is the case of Iraq, where women are killed or beheaded merely for not covering their heads in public places. The same concept applies in the case of honor killings of women in Islamic nations. Any woman perceived to be engaging in activities deemed immoral is killed without even the requirement of any evidence. In certain instances, the faces of females are disfigured by throwing acid, or their hands or feet are cut off as punishment for acting “immorally.” Although law enforcement officials say that they do not support such brutality, they take no action to support their verbal claims.

The majority of the Muslim nations regard women as detrimental to Islamic society and a cause of chaos or “fitna.” The patriarchal society of Islam thinks of women as sexual objects made for the purpose of serving men. An excessively strict interpretation of Islamic laws and jurisprudence has led to the imposition of severe restrictions on the free movement of women in many Islamic countries. Any female questioning the righteousness of the compulsory veil is branded as an infidel and a threat to the Islamic way of life.

Religious Principles and the Misuse of Tradition Against Women

However, contrary to the popular belief of Muslims in these countries, the holy scripture of Islam, the Holy Quran, also instructs people to treat women equally. It views males and females in the same light and exclusively states that what really matters in the eyes of God is not gender or social status, but the character and the good deeds of humans. In fact, the Quran mentions the historical figure, Queen of Sheba, in a very positive light and commends her intellect and fair treatment of her subjects. The Quran has also celebrated her leadership skills.

The same intolerant conditions prevail in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The legal and societal system of Pakistan is a dysfunctional one. A report by the International Crisis Group noted that despite the announcement by the then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, to introduce legislation to end intolerance towards women and empower the female gender, the condition has still not improved. One of the main reasons behind this failure is the dysfunctional legal system that is generally unwilling to enforce any legislation regarding the empowerment and progress of women. Although the family law of 1961 can be regarded as a positive step towards equal treatment of women, it is just limited to words.

However, an important step towards mitigating intolerance toward women was the requirement that political parties allocate seats proportionally to women in the parliamentary elections of 2004. It was an important step by the government and established a sense of responsibility. They took it as an opportunity to prove themselves, and they indeed did. The 2012 report of the Human Rights Commission highlighted the fact that all the legislation on. human rights was introduced by female politicians.

Women's Empowerment and Institutional Responses to Discrimination

The "Women's Empowerment Program" by the Embassy of the United States, Islamabad, Pakistan, is also a very significant step in this regard. It comes with a set of objectives and aims that it seeks to achieve by providing funds. One of the main objectives is to focus on the empowerment of women and girls in order to promote their social and economic development. However, the Women's Empowerment Program would have been presented better if it had emphasized the need to promote women's rights rather than presenting them merely as a means of development.

Another reason that will reduce the likelihood of achieving the objectives is the condition placed on not using the funds to purchase and rent new buildings or space for program activities. Restrictions will hinder program effectiveness, as organizations that have strong ideas for women's empowerment in underserved geographical locations but lack resources, especially an office in which to conduct activities, would not be able to benefit from it.

In conclusion, women are the marginalized majority throughout the world. However, Islamic countries face even more intolerance as compared to non-Muslim nations, especially the West. The world's society, in general, views women as incapable of performing well and handling pressure. This perception is far from the truth, as evidenced by the women performing in high-responsibility positions. Women are equal to men and should be treated so. What is needed is to educate society and change its perception of women.

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