SOCIAL AND LEGAL IMPACT OF **COVID-19 ON WOMEN**

EDITED BY

Jai Mala, Geetika Sood, Piyush Parimoo

red'shine
Publication
INDIA

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RED'SHINE PUBLICATION PVT. LTD.

Headquarters (India): 88-90 REDMAC, Navamuvada,

Lunawada, India-389 230

Contact: +91 76988 26988

Registration no. GJ31D0000034

In Association with,

RED'MAC INTERNATIONAL PRESS & MEDIA. INC

India | Sweden | UK

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Cover page ©RED'SHINE Studios, Inc, 2022

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ISBN: 978-93-93239-41-9

ISBN-10: 93-93239-41-X

DIP: 18.10.939323941X

DOI: 10.25215/939323941X

Price: ₹ 400

May, 2022 (First Edition)

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www.redshine.co.in | info@redshine.in

Printed in India | Title ID: 939323941X

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book is based on the selected papers of various authors. We are thankful to Prof. (Dr) Sanjay Sindhu, (designation), Dr. Aditi Goyal, Assistant Profesor, Chandigarh University, Ghroun, Dr. Shashi Bhushan, Assistant professor, School of Legal Studies and Governance, Career Point University Hamirpur, Dr. Navpreet Advocate, Punjab & Haryana High Court and Kamal Singh Under Secretary, National Legal Services Authority, Dr. Anupam Bahri, Dr. Virender Negi, Dr Monika Negi. We wish to thank Dr. Rajan, Dept. of HSS, IIT (INDORE) and Research scholars Rohtash, Sandli Brice, Shivanshi, Kalyani Acharya and Tanvi Sharma, Gurwinder Kaur for their contribution to this edited book.

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WARS, PANDEMICS AND WOMEN'S CHALLENGES: A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBE INTO FACTS AND NARRATIVES

Dr. Rajan [1]

Abstract

Any predicament whether it plays out at the level of a whole world or confined to a small area or a single person distresses the emotions and psyche in similar ways. When a crisis leads to a rapid and extensive change in the patterns of our life it is quite disorganized which causes panic. But if such change is accompanied by uncertainty as to when, or even if, things will return to normal, the disorientation can be so extreme as to threaten our sense of ethics and way of life. This thing becomes more severe if such sudden changes fall upon the underprivileged such as women, old and homeless people, and so on. This chapter is basically associated with the challenges and impacts which women face all around the human undertakings during the most severe predicament including the socio-economic and personality-related happenstances. For our identity is built up the social structure and the patterns of our life, be it our habits, our social responsibility, our job, our hobbies or our interpersonal relations, all these things contribute to the creation of our 'ethics' and 'self'. So we can imagine the challenges and impacts of major predicaments such as world wars and pandemics over those who always have been vulnerable to sudden changes due to lack of privileges which are genuinely essential for social justice and individual freedom. As Michael Mahoney explicates: "It is not easy to maintain a coherent sense of identity, self-worth, or competence in the face of multiple and chronic challenges to old

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patterns." [i] During a worldwide crisis like world wars and pandemics, a mass will tend to fear most of the threats that triggered the catastrophe, but depending on the nature of these fears and predicament, it is this existential crisis to our sense of self that may prove most dangerous which we also wish to probe regarding women's self and saturations. Fortunately, with some wisdom of the process that leads to a breakdown, we can find some steps and ways to fortify our psyche. This whole chapter moves around such critical questions and answers to find out the new hopes and ways to empower the most vulnerable including women.

***Keywords**: Women, Predicaments, Impacts, Philosophy, Narratives, Ideological*

Taking about rights and challenges of women is not about the notorious feminist agenda which has been largely despised by the intellectual community to a very large extent; rather it is a more philosophical and moral way of approaching things and social paradigms. There is no doubt that the challenge which women have to face in any society right from antiquity to modern time is non-negligible. It is a different thing that some privileged classes and individual women's didn't have to face the problem which is available in our collective consciousness in terms of molestation, slavery, discrimination, and so on. But they too had their own challenges which have been often highlighted by the representatives of such classes and individuals. Anyway, it is not the theme which we have chosen to disuses but to expose the challenges which women faced and still have been facing in a time of major predicaments such as pandemics, wars, and so on. Our argument follows that exposing such challenges too can help us to strengthen the foundation of women empowerment. But what are those challenges? Although it is not easy to précis all the challenges in a few pages, but still some categories can be put forward in the form of Education and employment challenges, politics, public and

family life customary which include crime against women, prostitution, health, and her overall imagery and the like.

(I) Self-Evident Women's Challenges: Searching for Categorical Facts

George Santayana once said 'those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.'' A few years back Bill Gates also warned us that we are not ready hitherto for any pandemic or epidemic, we didn't pay attention, and here we have the consequences. Perhaps, we forgot the recent predicaments in the form of wars, pandemics, and death camps (gulag and holocaust) which changed the whole structure of human civilization. Actually, the reason to start in this manner follows the fact that acute predicaments such as pandemics, wars, and so on often hit the most vulnerable including women more hardly than anyone else. In present covid crises, when lockdowns were largely imposed all over the world despite knowing the fact that so many developing countries were not fully prepared for any sudden choking of socio-economic activities. Off-course, it was a needed action but we should have taken that decision by keeping the most vulnerable in the center of discussion and research. It again becomes essential when we already have scientific data on how acute social situations affect the most vulnerable. Take, for instance, we knew how the Ebola virus in Africa affected the women's economic condition which may further be long-drawn-out at the global level to anticipate the challenge which covid would have brought. UN report highlight:

The Ebola virus showed that quarantines can significantly reduce women's economic and livelihood activities, increasing poverty rates, and exacerbating food insecurity. In Liberia where approximately 85 per cent of daily market traders are women, Ebola prevention measures (which included travel restrictions) severely impacted women's livelihoods and economic security. Moreover, while men's economic activity returned to pre-crisis levels shortly

after preventative measures subsided, the impacts on women's economic security and livelihoods lasted much longer.[ii]

And it is not about pandemics only, the impacts of wars and other distress also affect the women, children, and old the most. In modern times, the reason may be moral progress and media that any crime against women such as rape and molestation turn into great news acme and justice also being given to some extent. But have we thought of if we encounter one of the most horrific gang rape crimes known to mankind? We are talking about the ugliest crime of all time that so-called European modern society committed and embraced, and in fact, became conformity during world wars. During world war-II, the Fairmont brutal crime was done on two million women together and it was not done with loud music but with bullets and force where there was nowhere left on the body to engrave their letters on. By the end of World War- II and between January and August 1945 Germany experienced the largest mass rape in history. Women, without any mercy on Children and old, were raped everywhere in the streets, in churches, and in squares in front of their children where field execution was a single punishment to women who refused.

It is a typical case that during a hard time, the most vulnerable have to struggle the most. Reasons might be many such as biological, political, and personal too. But questing arises what is our responsibility towards those who are most suitable to the crisis? Of course, we have a sense of what we have to do, but it requires lots of moral courage to execute the plan on the ground. The sacrifices which such acts take are so great that sometimes we have to be ready to Scarface our life as well. Now let's stick to the present world predicaments such as covid-19 for some time. We infect wouldn't make any mistake if we consider covid-19 as a catastrophe of the century as it is much more than a health crisis. It is a human, economic, and social crisis. (COVID-19), which has been characterized as a pandemic, attacking at the core of societies and culture. The impact of the pandemic is visible across the sectors globally, but its impact on marginalized sections, women, and

children has been immense across the globe. This crisis is going to affect the economy as never before leading to massive psycho-social impacts as well. As UN policy report suggests:

A pandemic amplifies and heightens all existing inequalities. These inequalities in turn shape who is affected, the severity of that impact, and our efforts at recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts have created a global crisis unparalleled in the history of the United Nations—and one which requires a whole-of-society response to match its sheer scale and complexity. But this response, whether at the national or international level, will be significantly weakened if it does not factor in the ways in which inequalities have made all of us more vulnerable to the impacts of the crisis.[iii] (UN, 2020)

Women are at greater risk from a health perspective. Homes that were already unsafe along with families living in poor and substandard conditions have added to the social inequities like gender-based violence and child abuse, lack of security, money, and health. As UN Report '*Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*'' suggests the challenges of women during this covid-19 period:

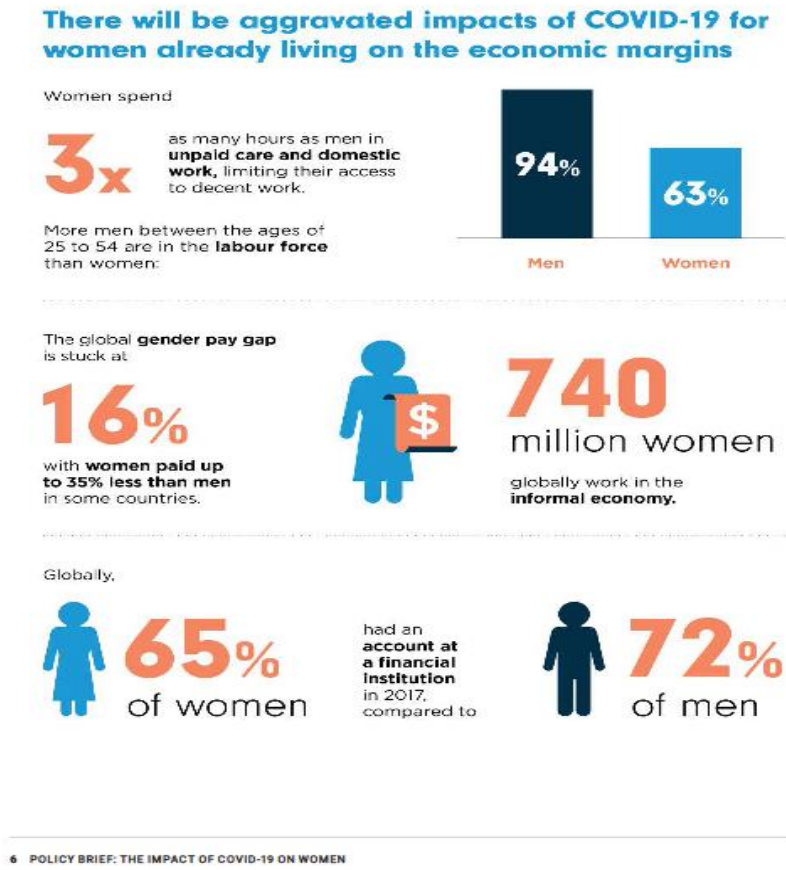
- The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex.
- Compounded economic impacts are felt especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty.
- While early reports reveal more men are dying as a result of COVID-19, the health of women generally is adversely impacted through the reallocation of resources and priorities, including sexual and reproductive health services.

- Unpaid care work for women has increased, with children out-of-school, heightened care needs of older persons, and overwhelmed health services.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, gender-based violence is increasing exponentially. Many women are being forced to 'lockdown' at home with their abusers at the same time that services to support survivors are being disrupted or made inaccessible. [iv] (UN,2020)

Covid-19, like other predicaments, have been really hard on women because the world economy hasn't been flexible to them in some way, and this virus again has increased this tension to a very large extent. We can observe how hundreds of women who were the sole supporter of their family economical management before covid-19 got unemployed and disorganized all of sudden. And this challenge occurred when the Problems which women have to face in the manual labour market have neither been new nor hidden, however, they have been inopportune to address since the foundation and leadership of the socio-economical world is quite immune to her justice, rights and liberties. Who hasn't got the sense that still the larger section of the market and labour deprives women of optimal wages? And sadly if such issues are being raised, which we will discuss broadly in the upcoming section, then allegations such as the feminization of poverty, gender politics and so on have been enforced in one way or another. This thing becomes much more critical when we get to know the data on how the excessive burden of family responsibility in terms of child care, family welfare, and domestic chores and so on seems more burdensome. So yes, it is not the ontological truth only that can be ''self-evident'', rather the empirical and real-world facts too regarding women's challenges which are often ignored by the larger community. as the following UN policy- 2020 data indicates :

[v](UN,2020)

Women have suffered from such challenges to a very large extent since we know that they suffer but still don't get recognized in the social paradigm. Coronavirus pretences overwhelming challenges that have disordered the whole structure of critical health, public-spirited, and empowerment programs. We know what the importance of women nurses in the hospitals is and how they heartily care the humans. But the way covid have affected their over lifestyle in the form of disorganized family life, mental health and so on and, in fact, have taken their lives too, is quite outrageous. As UN policy- 2020 data suggest:



[vi] (UN,2020)

UN and other human rights agency, of course, proposes an agenda that the whole thing we do during and after any predicament including wars and endemics should build ‘‘…more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies.’’[vii] But the question arises how far have we endorsed this idea? How far has it contributed to women’s justice, equality and individuality? If we leave some of the developed countries, still the condition of women need more attention and care. Education, healthcare, and other basic facilities vanish with the very emergence of any catastrophe. Due to the unique health needs of women health issues, particularly during pandemics, can make it more difficult for them to receive the optimum healthcare facilities. Obstructive socio-cultural norms and age-old gender typecasts also limit women’s ability to face the

health crisis. We have seen during current pandemics when lots of post-truth agendas prevailed that women shouldn't take vaccines during menstrual periods, pregnancy, and so on. We have to realize that all of such facts and practices have severe impacts on the health of the most vulnerable part of society. Thus, healthcare crisis, unpaid work, gendered-based violence, and so on are some of the main challenges which women have to face to a very large extent during and after any predicament. We will conclude this section with the challenging fact which afghan women have been facing after the entrance of the Taliban. Reports have been coming out that the rights which women received after a long fight have been wiped out and child marriage and molestation have again, our misfortune, on track. We have to realize that how difficult is it when we just start enjoying freedom and all of sudden a regime or any other external event take that away from us? In Afghanistan, the difficulty which women apparently have been facing in all-round their life is tormenting. What the humanistic sense of the world is doing? At least, we must show some sensitivity towards children and women who are typically helpless. Basic facilities, as noted above, such as finance, medical, food, water, and Sanitization, etc. have been largely collapsed and we are still in normal talk.

In other words, if we haven’t forgotten such instances then, of course, there should have been some serious reaction from the global society over the Middle East issues where a terror group comes and start practising the tyrannical power and Dark Age’s practices. It is really a great crisis that despite performing globalization, present global society doesn’t accept its global responsibility. We didn’t heal enough with covid-19 which has been a global health crisis unlike any in the history of humankind one that taking the lives of people, spreading unbearable human suffering, and upending people’s lives. And still, we indorsed the Middle East predicament (Afghanistan, Gaza - philistine conflict) where thousands of people including women, old and children have been facing unbearable suffering while lacking food, water, and home etcetera. We have to realize the fact that we can’t close our

eyes as a pigeon closes from of a cat; rather we will have to take a global responsibility; only then we can say we are living in human society. The reason to argue in this manner comprises the fact that no one is free until everyone is free. It is also the most convincing aspect of global justice that freedom, rights, and the basic facility should reach the last in the row who are most deprived and molested. Again, economic and health issues may be resolved as these are basically surfaced challenges but the real problem lies somewhere else where the question of identity and stipulation has to be asked. We will discuss this problem in the upcoming section.

(II) Patriarchy as an Ideological Pandemic: Exposing Conformism and Empowering Women

We all are aware of the fact that society and discrimination, both are complex phenomena. The way we can't grasp society from single a single spectacle or a point of view, so through discrimination. Therefore, to uplift, the subalterns including women in any form require a multifold outlook and enough moral courage. Philosophy is a way to contemplate things with a multifold attitude, and therefore, if we relate this assertiveness to the problem of women subjugation and eradication from the basic rights, we find that factors may be different –different worldwide, but there are some certain concepts which dominate all factors, and consequently the role of women in any society.[1] We need to trace those concepts, if we could do that, majority of the problem which women empowerment faces will be resolved. As Gandhian insight suggests:

Women must not suffer any legal disability which is not suffered by men. Both are perfectly equal (Young India, 17th October 1929). Sexual equality does not translate into occupational equality in spite of the absence of a legal bar. Women instinctively

[11] It is worth noting that when we have used the term subaltern to represent those who face multiple discrimination in society, therefore, when we are using the term with women subjection then it represents that women have been excluded from the basic rights which are prerequisite to live a life of dignity and empowerment.

recoil from a function that belongs to men. Nature has created sexes as complements of each other. Their functions are defined as are their forms. (Harijan, 2nd December 1939).[viii] (Nandela, 2007)

If we try to examine one of the most essential values of modern time, we find that tolerance and open-mindedness would be placed at the top of any list. the reason is clear that being democratic and free is the central spirit of man or even every ling creature, so though of women. But there are always some demagogue, conformist, and power medicines who create false law, false boundaries to enjoy the megalomaniac nature. We have pointed this thing because just as there are some dictators (it could be law, cultural value, person, or whatever), so though, there are always some free spirits that give space to every living creature to flourish. This dichotomy between good and evil is a transcendental phenomenon, and have been protecting humanity from antiquity to modern time. The feminist approach is also one of those approaches, which gives preference to tolerance, open-mindedness, new ideas, and empowerment of the subalterns. Although we have seen some misuse of this approach, but it doesn't promote us to reject the whole notion. And perhaps we need to know that it, not the problem with feminism, rather with our outlook and adjustment. As we can trace it in the following expressions;

…anti-androgynists maintain the problem is not femininity in and of itself, but rather the low value that patriarchy assigns to feminine qualities such as "gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassionateness, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity, unselfishness," and the high value it assigns to masculine qualities such as "assertiveness, aggressiveness, hardiness, rationality or the ability to think logically, abstractly and analytically, ability to control emotion. "They claim that if society can learn to value "feminine" traits as much as "masculine" traits, women's oppression will be a bad memory.[ix] (Tong, 1989)

Sultry is quite deep since it is not only the challenges which come in the way to empower the women, we also have some bigots

who even oppose the whole notion of empowerment and therefore misinterpret the whole philosophy of those who favour empowerment of subalterns. Feminism is one of those philosophies which have survived this discrimination academically as well as non-academically in the name of culture, religion, caste, rationality, and so on. As Virginia held put it;

The history of philosophy, including the history of ethics, has been constructed from male points of view, and has been built on assumptions and concepts that are by no means gender-neutral.' Feminists characteristically begin with different concerns and give different emphases to the issues we consider then do non-feminist approaches.[x](Held, 1990)

Perhaps we can imagine the agenda now that even the rational and humanistic enterprise is quite dominated by a certain type of ideology and way of life which gives preference to a certain type of focus. Therefore, first of all, we will have to understand the distinctive nature of men and women to provide the fact and normative truth to empower those who have been subaltern and eradicated from the basic rights, creativity, and so on. In this regard, Carol Gilligan took the initiative in the twentieth century. In her famous work *'In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development'* purposed that –

the specific claim that the way women treat moral problems is, on average, different from (but not inferior or superior to) the way men do and claimed, very roughly, that women tend to think of moral issues in terms of emotionally involved caring for others and connection to others, whereas most men see things in terms of autonomy from others and the just and rational application of rules or principles to problem situations. In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality is concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties

moral development to the understanding of rights and rules. (Gilligan 1982: 19) These two 'voices' have been characterized in terms of an 'ethic of care and an 'ethic of justice, which, Gilligan claims, are 'fundamentally incompatible'.[xi] (Noddings, 1982)

Above is just one area of study how women deal with different –different problems which we can face, and therefore, we need to apply the same attitude to every area of problems. But again, it requires tolerance, open-mindedness to accept the facts and values. Issues are all the time difference, it could be sociological, cultural, religious, economic, and so on. But ultimately what requires us to open up the space for new approaches is open-mindedness, a philosophical sense that new things happen and create. And it is the foundational thing for any sort of empowerment and encouragement in any society. Let's grasp this problem with an example, which we often called the 'public-private problem' in which women are often associated with something private and men with the public, and therefore the goal, purpose, and jobs are defined on this discrimination. But when we try to analyze this discrimination closely, we find that this is basically a result of a patriarchal ideology. As will Kymlicka express;

Like a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may, in general, be understood that she makes a choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call upon her ***exertion***, during as many years of her life as may be required for the purpose; and that she renounces, not all other objects and occupations, but all which are not consistent with the requirements of this.[xii] (Kymlicka, 1990)

The above expression represents the non-academic effect of the 'public-private dichotomy, but there is also another effect of it that we can be a trace in the academic world.it has changed the whole outlook on how we approach ideas and thoughts. As will Kymlicka points out;

One consequence of the traditional patriarchal public-domestic distinction, and of the relegation of women to the domestic sphere, is that men and women have become associated with

different modes of thought and feeling. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, we find political theorists distinguishing the intuitive, emotional, particularistic dispositions said to be required for women's domestic life from the rational, impartial, and dispassionate thought said to be required for men's public life.[xiii] (Kymlicka, 1990)

Actually, it is not the problem with arts and humanities, rather sciences also have been used as a fine medium to tell the 'post-truth. This term tells us a great deal of the truth of the modern time how reality has been mortified and presented as per the domination of power. Subjection, mortification, and other subaltern phenomena have been utilized through the way of post-truth. For an instance, we have been often kept away from the truth and fact that the majority of the poor people in the world are women and girls. Even In developing countries, where the typical occupation for women is daily wages, labouring and agriculture haven't been given the rights which ought to be given to them. It is worth noting that in Africa and Asia, women have been doing the bulk of the labouring, farming, and construction, and yet women are almost and always kept away from ownership over the most important assets, lands, and other basic rights. It is a fact that first of all, we will have to focus on the domestic and local level, then it would be possible to expand its realm. As will Kymlicka highlight;

… Family is therefore an important locus of the struggle for sexual equality. There is an increasing consensus ***among*** feminists that the fight for sex equality must go beyond public discrimination to the patterns of domestic labour and women's devaluation in the private sphere. In fact, Carole Pateman says that the 'dichotomy between the public and the private ... is, ultimately, what feminism is all about'.[xiv] (Kymlicka, 1990)

Perhaps, the ugly and bitter truth is that it is mostly men who are holding women back. Every possible area, where the work of distribution happens, often has been under the authority of males. Men dominate the socio-political policy arena, men control the decision-making at the community and household level, and despite

such facts, and we are forced to believe that 'empowering women' means 'disempowering men'. This harsh and post-truth have greatly infused the position of intellectual and physical violence in the society that even we don't dare to come for the fight for basic human rights for subalterns. Therefore, first of all, we will have to address the misconception that empowering women means disempowering men or feminism means anti-masculinity.it is one of the greatest myths created by the megalomaniacs to keep the patriarchal ideology in domination. It is the ethics taught by every great man, culture, and religion that Empowers one empowers all. This implies that empowering women empowers men, children, families and consequently the whole society. But because it asks for change, and change is always hard and bitter, thus we are struggling to accept it. Some thinkers are quite forward and put plenty of positive analogies to represent that the notion of inequality which has been created in the name of gender is quite mythical and therefore creates more inequality in society. As Janet Radcliffe Richards puts a beautiful analogy;

If a group is kept out of something for long enough, it is overwhelmingly likely that activities of that sort will develop in a way unsuited to the excluded group. We know for certain that women have been kept out of many kinds of work, and this means that the work is quite likely to be unsuited to them. The most obvious example of this is the incompatibility of most work with the bearing and raising of children; I am firmly convinced that if women had been fully involved in the running of society from the start they would have found a way of arranging work and children to fit each other. Men have had no such motivations, and we can see the results.[xv] (Kymlicka, 1990)

We need to realize that any subaltern issue such as social, political, and economical is a humanitarian issue, therefore we all need to take some steps to overcome those issues. Similarly, Women's empowerment is not limited to women only, it's not a women's issue only, and it's a societal issue that suggests us the place of weak and subaltern in society. Perhaps, we need to revisit

our morality to gain consciousness about what kind of injustice has been justified in society merely in the name of race, caste, culture, and religion. This thing can contribute a lot to all over development. And not even the notion of ethics and morality, but plenty of socio-political notions need to be revisited. The social-political notions which need proper analysis and redefinitions are justice, rights, and equality because the largest section of such notions has been contemplated from a certain point of view in which the feminine aspect is largely missing. For an instance, Elizabeth Gross tried to interpret the very notion of equality in the following way;

Autonomy implies the right to see oneself in whatever terms one chooses-which may imply an integration or alliance with other groups and individuals or may not. Equality, on the other hand, implies a measurement according to a given standard. Equality is the equivalence of two (or more) terms, one of which takes the role of norm or model in unquestionable ways. Autonomy, by contrast, implies the right to accept or reject such norms or standards according to their appropriateness to one's self-definition. Struggles for equality ... imply an acceptance of given standards and conformity to their expectations and requirements. Struggles for autonomy, on the other hand, imply the right to reject such standards and create new ones.[xvi] (Kymlicka, 1990)

Above contemplation, might seem a little radical, but in an actual sense, the very notion of autonomy suggests to us that at least we must be free to define our own choices. Where there are restrictions and conformity-based barriers, freedom can’t be traced there. In other words, the social-political role must be defined by an individual autonomy, only it can give us the basic sense of equality and freedom. The basic but the largest challenges which still have in modern society is poverty, food security, job, and work. The same is applied to women's issues. Therefore, whenever we think to empower women, first of all, we will have to tackle the above issues. The role of empathy in modern times is actually critical, no matter how much rational justice we discuss, but until we have a great deal of care and empathy, we will have to struggle. For an

instance, we know that women are the ones doing much, if not the bulk of the construction, daily wages, and farming, even though their role in land and domestic chores, and other productive resources is critically important. And it is an injustice to her rights since we consider such acts as a typical part of our life, we don't pay any attention to them. That's why we need a great deal of empathy and care to realize the pain and struggle of women. It would also be one of the best steps in women's empowerment. As UN policy- 2020 report suggests:

Putting women and girls at the center of economies will fundamentally drive better and more sustainable development outcomes for all, support more rapid recovery and place us back on a footing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.[xvii] (UN, 2020)

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