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Sexism: A Grave Threat for Empowerment of the Society

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Abstract:

Sexism is nothing new for the society but with the growing time it is becoming the new threat for the development of the society. When the world is talking about women -empowerment, rainbow walk (LGBTs), equality, and justice – somehow sexism is standing having a strong barrier. Every gender holds a basic right to get proper treatment not only from the state but from the society and it should be a part of rules and regulations to provide that. But apart from institutional frameworks, the psychological narrowness should change immediately. Only by making new plans and laws without their proper implementations, it is really difficult to stop the barrier. It is high time to combat such sexist threat and bring social transformation in real sense.

Keywords: Sexism, Equality, Empowerment, LGBT.

“Equality is the soul of liberty; there is, in fact, no liberty without it.”
-Frances Wright

1. Defining Sexism

Sexism in the workplace is not only a common but very controversial, at the same time complicated and subtle too. According to Oxford dictionary, what we mean by saying ‘sexism’ is – “prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex” (“Definition Sexism,” n.d.). Though it typically means women but still it can also happen in the case of men. But its most often expressed toward girls and women. The word ‘sexism’ appears in Pauline M. Leet’s works and she defines this by comparing it to racism. She further said – “When you argue ... that since fewer women write good poetry this justifies their total exclusion; you are taking a position analogous to that of the racist—I might call you in this case a ‘sexist’ ... Both the racist and the sexist are acting as if all that has happened had never happened, and both of them are making decisions and coming to conclusions about someone’s value by referring to factors which are in both cases irrelevant” (“Feminism Friday,” 2007). According to Shapiro the term “sexism” appeared in print was in American author and feminist Caroline Bird’s speech “*On Being Born Female*”, which was published on November 15, 1968. The speech was - “There is recognition abroad that we are in many ways a sexist country. Sexism is judging people by their sex when sex doesn’t matter. Sexism is intended to rhyme with racism.” (“Feminism Friday,” 2007). Another American author Sheldon Vanauken and his idea of “*the sexist myth*” became important in his pamphlet “Freedom for Movement Girls – Now” (“Feminism Friday,” 2007). Though we always define the term sexism by a typical binary, male and female but society shouldn’t neglect ‘others’. Transgender is also the sufferer of this sexist thing. In most of the societies LGBTs (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) are hugely effected by not only sexist jokes or comments but sometimes law (in the case of India, the hugely controversial IPC 377) (“LGBT Section 377,” n.b.). They are treated as something not appropriate for the society and state starts to discriminate them by pointing someone’s sexual orientation. So we must remember that the conventional idea of sexism has rapidly changed. As Terry Eagleton has rightly said “Genuine equality means not treating everyone the same, but attending equally to everyone’s different needs.” (“Eagleton quote,” n.d.).

2. Different Types of Sexism

Gender differentials in education, health and employment can be traced with indicators such as Gender-related Development/ GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (Sudarshan, 2000). Unequal gender relations may rise because of domestic violence or cultural practices of exclusion. Exclusion leads to the unequal position of women in the workplace and gradually this gives birth of sexism in the workplace. Before going deeper in this discussion, there are mainly three types of sexism which are very much seen in society. These are

2.1. Personal Sexism

It starts at home. Starting from the very blood relations to future companion, continuously undermining the empowering capability of a woman develop this type of sexism. It is very difficult to detect a particular reason of this type of sexism but mostly the dominating

temperament towards women is the major factor. Nowadays when social networking sites are the new storm that everyone is facing, personal sexism is also running in the vein. Just like the more spreading of technologies, sexism is also spreading in personal lifestyles.

2.2. Professional Sexism

This includes the workplace issue. It is also known as occupational sexism. It refers to the discriminatory practices based on sex, occurring in the workplace. Wage discrimination is one major type of sexism in the workplace. Last year in an ingenious headline published saying “Not doing enough housework is ‘making women fat’,” in Daily Mail. And that led women down in narrow manner (Macrae, 2015).

2.3. Everyday Sexism

This sexism happens every day’s life. Underestimating because of a person’s gender is part of everyday sexism. This also includes rest two sexism. This type of sexism can be serious or minor one. From the very home matter to job market, everywhere, in every steps they are seen. Commenting on someone’s dress, occupation or simply body language is very much in nature of men.

3. Related Factors

In such context it is very important to analyze why such gender stereotype takes place in our society, but examining how factors intersects with sex and gender is equally important. These factors or variables can be economic, socio-cultural and psychological.

3.1. Economic Factor

The 21st century has seen a dramatic shift in traditional family dynamics and greater recognition of gender-role divisions. As a result, women are far more economically independent and socially autonomous. In the long term encouraging women to participate in the labour market to ensure economic growth at both micro and macro level. People view men as more capable and appropriate for leadership, men are rewarded more highly than women. If you are a mother, your chances of getting the job are reduced by 70% (Player, n.d.). With the growth of globalization all type of media promote a balanced and non-stereotyped image of women in the media. But with such huge economic policies, women are portrayed as commodity to promote a particular product. Advertisement and cinema are the lifeline of the business economy and women (Sharma, n.d.).

3.2. Socio-Cultural Factor

In some studies, have shown that children's upbringing and social environments impacts such gender stereotype tendency. In India sexual stereotype is more in everyday customs or rituals, like – best piece of a fish or meat should be given to the head of the family - man, after marriage man takes responsibility to arrange rice and cloths for his wife, men are born to work and women should stay at home etc. Books like Peggy Orenstein’s *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* and Jennifer Hartstein’s

- Princess Recovery revealed a growing concern for how socio-cultural factors can negatively impact boys’ and girls’ development and raise unending questions about nature versus nurture when it comes to gendered behaviour (Lombrozo, n.d.).

3.3. Psychological Factor

It all starts with the biological factors, which play a huge role in shaping children's physical as well as psychological development. For instance, boys and girls are born with distinctive sexual organs, and become further differentiated when hormonal changes are occurred of these physical differences. Children who are taught that certain activities are appropriate or inappropriate because they are a girl or a boy. For instance, girls who are informed that boys are better at math, pink is the girl colour and blue for boys or boys do not cry like a girl.

4. Extreme Sexism

Some of us – called as too short, not cool, too heavy or overly nerdy – this is how it is to be teased at school. But this go extreme when it ruins someone’s life. When sexism limits out the barrier, it becomes extreme sexism. This extreme sexism may foster sexual harassments like sexist jokes and comments or sometimes sexual violence. Apart from these wage gap, gap in recruitment, denying promotion in the name of gender etc. are also get hampered. Typically, sexist comments are degrading remarks about women or men or transgender. Those comments can be may be directed towards that person or about gender in general. It can be disturbed one person in the name of compliments. Comments like – “beautiful woman has brain too”, “get back to the kitchen”, “beauty is the CV”, “she won’t return after her maternity leave” etc. usually pass by co-workers. People rarely say these to men, but women hear it regularly. Of course, there are women who quit their job by not returning after their marriage or pregnancy, but many, many women return and take up their work as serious as before. Clubbing women together is very problematic, and these kinds of statements can have negative effects for women.

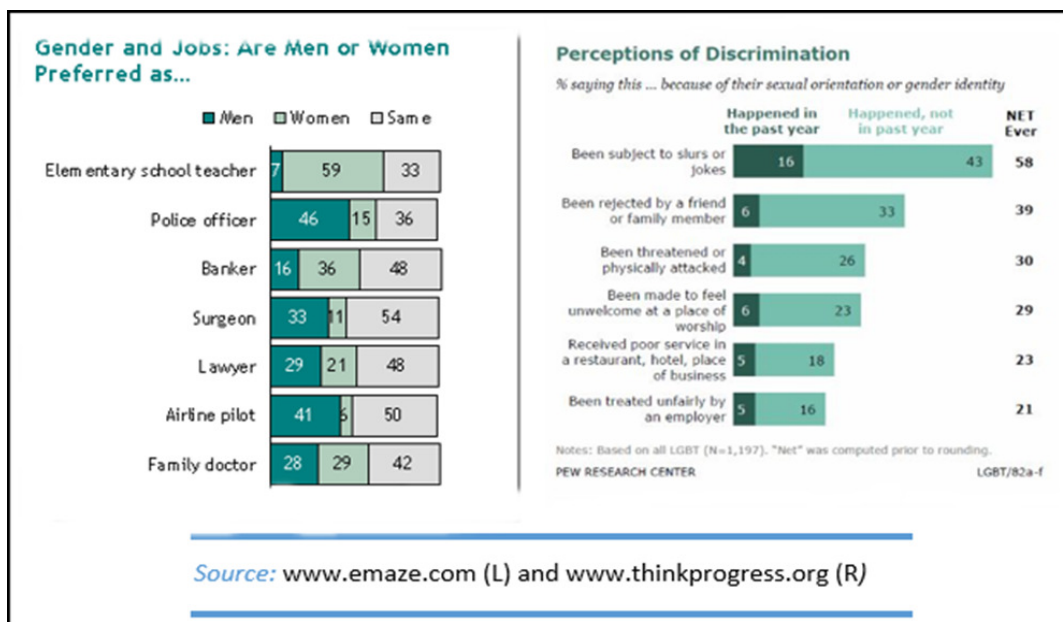


Figure 1

In the case of LGBTs, discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation is the common problem for their community. They constantly heard bigoted verbal abuse name-calling like “homo”, “fag” or “sissy” etc. (“LGBT bullying statistics,” 2015). According to data from Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) 2013 National School Climate survey, the large percentages of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students across America experience physical assault as well as physical and verbal harassment in school. Apart from verbal, they feel sexual harassments too (Klein, 2016). If this is the condition of a first world or most developed country, then the present scenario of less developing countries are unthinkable. Exactly that is what happens in the case of India, where IPC 377 is the biggest sexist attitude thrown by state.

5. Feminism and Sexism

As in simple word feminism talks about the problem of women as well as asks for their rights and justice in the society, should someone say that feminism is sexist? Before providing any statement, let's see the position of these two words. Sexism and feminism are basically two different sides of the same coin. Where feminism refers to the belief that women and men should have equal opportunities in every field of life, while sexism says that the traditional gender role stereotypes and in the year-old inequality between men and women (“feminism and sexism,” n.d.). Feminism has a deep connection with sexism, definitely not to support but to stand against this very idea. Unlike sexists, feminists do not try to maltreat men, rather receive equal opportunities, treatment and compensation. The feminist movement tries to provide the equal opportunities for people (Schemer, n.d.). American actress Shailene Woodley has rightly said, "I think we should all learn to appreciate other humans, without comparing ourselves to them." Feminism helps to decline the level of sexism. So, though feminism stands for women but it provides humanism too and states not to discriminate someone because of his/her gender. The feminist writer Jessica Valenti rightly said, “Feminism isn't simply about being a woman in a position of power. It's battling systemic inequities; it's a social justice movement that believes sexism, racism and classism exist and interconnect, and that they should be consistently challenged.” (“sexism,” n.d.).

6. Combating Sexism

Sexism is the biggest barrier for the society because it excludes the identity of another genders. This world is a gift of human beings but if they constantly look each other with so much hatred, dominating as well as downing mentality then humanity will certainly decrease. In any country only economic development, political dialogues, more and more trade partnerships, industries, business won't help, unless and until there is unity within living genders. To combat sexism, it is very important to note the main issue which I have tried to address till now –the definition has rapidly changed and it is no more the issue of discriminations or prejudices against women but also LGBTs. In different summits, apart from different developmental policies etc. there should be a place to combat sexism. To combat any such stereotype ideas, it is very important to have some basic policies, these are –

- Equal Recruitments Policy– In terms of occupational field, the recruitment policy has to be equal. Just like any other men; women as well as LGBTs should be judged in terms of their merit and skills but not their gender or sexual orientations. Recently many online shopping companies are recruiting women as delivery boy and that is bringing change in conventional recruitment process. Gone are those days when women truck drivers are only seen in western countries. Developing countries are constantly moving towards equal rights.
- Remove Wage Gap in terms of gender– Just like equality in case of recruitment, wage gap should be abandoned with the excuse of gender. Whatever the work a person does, he/she should get deserved equal payment. The heroism in terms of works should not be the criteria for earning more money.

- Maintain proper ethics– In any school, college, university or job market – certain ethics are there which are made to be maintained. But those ethics have to be maintained by all genders. The sexual harassments, cracking dirty jokes or comments should be labelled as against those ethics and effective action has to be taken immediately.
- Legal steps – In any country legal steps – rules and laws to guide the path of equality is very much important. In such case human rights should be stronger enough to look after to such crucial issue in society. Human right is right for all, all human being, where women and LGBTs have full right to receive it. The court-law has to be very active to remove the gender gap from the society.
- Equal social respect, instead of sympathy– Respect is something which has to be earned, not purchase. If a person truly deserves that respect, then there is no place for sympathy or giving extra. The notion is not against men but against sexism. Both genders and others should own that respect if they deserve it.
- Pro-humanistic idea– As I have already discussed that humanism should be head of all things. Being a men or a woman it is very important to show proper respect to women and LGBTs, at the same time LGBTs should understand others. If this society forget about humanism, then sexism will always remain a big trap against social empowerment.

7. Conclusion

Basically it all starts from the very notion of self-realization. With all such big economic growths, political power, plans and policies won't bring change if people realize the need of combating sexism from society. Once Mahatma Gandhi said, "A man is the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes." ("Mahatma Gandhi Quotes," n.d.). It is truly the living fact which will never go wrong. People make this society with their own hands and it is their responsibility to understand the current suffocative gender situation. It is not that men are always at gunpoint, many times LGBTs face tremendous sexist attacks from both men as well as women sides. United Nations has with its report of seventeen sustainable development goals, gender equality and women empowerment has given special priority ("Sustainable development," n.d.). But it is unfortunate that it only focused on the level of women not LGBTs. Most of the time LGBTs are being mimicked and in films or advertisements transgender, real life they are seen as funny abnormal element of this society. These types of mentality not only ruin the social equality of the society but the psychological backwardness too. When former Pakistan's foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar took a visit to India, it was all newspapers, TV channels were talking about her dressing style, her jewellery, her beauty, her heels etc. But she has something more precious to serve the nation which came later. So a society will not able to see its fullest empowerment unless and until there is sexist free gender equality.

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