

Women Empowerment Starts with Men

It is one thing to talk about gender equality and another thing to practice it sincerely in your own life. I often encounter well-educated men who have favorable opinions about gender equality and women empowerment. However, these seemingly strong liberal feelings are often just skin-deep and wear off quickly when it comes to walking the talk in their personal lives. Most men don't want to lose the upper hand they have been traditionally enjoying over their female counterparts. This is sheer hypocrisy and needs to be dealt with squarely to get true support of men in this noble movement that is beneficial for the society as a whole.

True equality can be achieved only through an unconditional acceptance of the fact that men and women *are* equal as human beings and differentiating them on the basis of their gender is utterly nonsensical. Unless men understand – and digest – this basic fact, all their support will be just a façade.

In today's article, I am going to throw some light on the role of men in empowering women in the society and how their heartfelt support can truly uplift the spirit of women and help them acquire their much-deserved, equal and respected position in the society.

The age-old tradition of gender inequality

The problem of gender-based prejudice is nothing new. Perhaps the physical strength of the male gender naturally bestowed him with an upper hand over his female counterpart. Also, the male hormone called testosterone makes men more aggressive by nature.

In the earlier stages of human evolution, the main source of food was hunting. Fighting with other groups for survival, territories, possessions – and of course, women – was a way of life. It is no wonder that physical prowess and aggressiveness was much respected. This gave men a natural advantage over women and consequently a superior position in the family and the society at large.

Our ancient texts and historical literature is full of evidences of male dominance and female oppression. We have often heard the term 'Pati-parmeshwar'. Have you ever heard a term "Patni-parmeshwar"? Husband has been given the status of god, why not the wife? In the epic Ramayana, it is Sita who had to face the fire-test called Agnipariksha, why not Rama? In Mahabharata, Pandavas offered their wife Draupadi as a bet in the game of Dyuta, as if she was an object or commodity in their possession.

What can be more insulting than that for a woman? And don't forget that these women were the queens or princesses in their times. If they were treated like that, what to say about the common women?

Also, since nature has placed the responsibility of bearing a child on the woman's loving and reliable shoulders; she had to take the responsibility of performing more domestic duties like child-raising, cooking, cleaning, etc. – while her man was running behind deer and boars in the woods, to bring food to their plates. Being more gentle, passive and accepting by nature, women accepted a more subdued and secondary position in this male-dominated social set-up.

So whose fault is it after all?

Should we blame men for this unequal social arrangement where men enjoy definite advantages over women? Or should we blame women who meekly accepted the male dominance?

You see, men are hormonally different than females. Testosterone not only makes them more muscular but also more aggressive. They are hardwired to think, feel and behave the way they do. Their physiology – as well as psychology – makes them the way they are, i.e., more dominant and aggressive.

Also, it is difficult for them to truly understand what a woman goes through when she has to face inequality and harassment in her day-to-day life due of gender bias. They never have a firsthand experience of the physical and mental torture she faces. Unless a man is sensitive enough to empathize with a woman's plight, it is difficult for him to know what it is like to live as a woman in a world full of gender-based discrimination. I totally understand this and don't really blame them for it.

In that sense, men are not the culprit. In fact, they are also as much a victim of this whole gender biased mentality as we women ourselves are. Just as we have – or at least, many of us have – accepted the superiority of men without any question, most of these men are also been spoon-fed the prejudice against women and their superiority over them from their childhood by their parents, relatives, teachers, peers and the society as a whole.

Why support from men is so important for women empowerment

Human society is made of two basic elements, men and women. These two are like two wings of a bird. Without one, the other cannot function. They are co-dependent and complement each other in such a way that they help the society function properly and evolve towards a better future. In order to make the social structure work smoothly, it is important that both these elements are happy.

It is the responsibility of the society as a whole to make sure that the needs of both men and women are met properly so that they can contribute to the betterment of the human race. Even if one of them is ignored, oppressed or weakened, the whole society will have to suffer the consequences of the imbalance.

A man is a woman's best friend and vice versa – at least that's how it should be. But this can happen only if they work together to make each other's lives a little better. Men can contribute in many ways to help eradicate gender discrimination and uplift the status of women in the society. And this change begins with the change in their mindset.

One of the very first things men should understand is that empowering women will not only make the lives of women better but will also make their own lives happier. A frustrated, nagging and complaining friend is never a great company to be with. But if you want that friend be good to you, you should address the cause of her frustration and help her get over it.

Whether it is a husband who lends a helping hand to his wife in doing the household chores or a co-worker who stops his male colleagues from passing derogatory comments towards a female co-worker

or a superior who wholeheartedly appreciates the work of a female employee; the effect is evident and invariably boosts the morale of the woman in question. It sends a strong message to the other men who are (or pretend to be) oblivious about these issues. If enough men will come in support for women in distress, the rest of the society will have no other choice but to take notice and mend its demeaning and disrespectful ways of treating women.

Since currently the society is majorly male-dominated, support from men will have a huge impact on the women empowerment movement and bring about the change towards equality much more rapidly. If the oppressing element itself (in this case men, who knowingly or unknowingly been enjoying a superior position over their female counterparts) accepts the freedom and equality of the oppressed element, the very root of the problem is effectively resolved. Support and encouragement from men themselves will go a long way in making the world less gender biased and more balanced and happier.

Role of men in women empowerment in the modern times

With the changing times, many age-old social beliefs and prejudices are being tested for their validity and appropriateness. Gender inequality is one of the most prominent of issues among them that is a subject of hot debates among people. The suppression and exploitation of women is no longer acceptable, justifiable or tolerable.

What is more noteworthy is that, not only women but many men are also coming out in support of this important change. Some are actively participating with social groups or organizations that work for women's personal safety and empowerment. Many strongly put forth their opinions when they see a woman being socially harassed or traumatized – this includes men from politics, media, entertainment industry as well as common people.

There are men from every social level or profession who sincerely want to help women get their due rights and place in the society on par with their male counterparts. Be it the home or the workplace, these men are not shy of raising their voice in support of their female family members or co-workers. They are openly supporting women who want equal opportunities for education or work, equal wages and a safer and more secure social life for themselves.

In conclusion, if men will take an active part in helping women achieve their due place in the society, that change will bring more peace, joy and satisfaction in their own lives as well. An empowered woman will be a happier and more companionable partner to them. This is a truly welcome sign and will certainly go a long way in bringing more balance, equality and fairness in the society.