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**QUESTION**

Is Gender Relation changing in the 21st century? What are the areas of change and the factors driving the change?

Gender relations refer to relations between men and women that are socially determined by culture, religion, or socially acceptable ways of thinking or being. These relationships between men and women, as they exist in most societies, are characterized by the marginalization of women in decision making and other forms of power sharing in the home and places of authority.

Gender relation is different in the 21st century or has improved from how it was in the 19th and 20th centuries. Looking at the struggle for feminism by feminists scholars and activists in the waves of feminism that took place from the 19th century. Their struggles were on gaining legal rights, fight against discrimination in workplaces and in broader society, pay equity, domestic violence, reproductive choices/ rights and many other issues they fought for, and they achieved their goals to an extent for example the first wave feminism ended when women led by Susan B. Anthony made some legal gains that granted women the right to own. Their fight for gender equality has been making progress since then and in the 21st century is getting better.

 There are those who argue that gender inequalities around the world are getting less. Dorius and Firebaugh, in their 2010 study, investigated global trends in gender inequality. Using data to research developments in gender inequality in recent decades across areas including the economy, political representation, education, and mortality, they conclude that a decline in gender inequalities can be seen which spans diverse religious and cultural traditions. Despite the fact that population growth is slowing this decline, as population growth is more prevalent in countries where there is most evidence of gender inequality.

The recent World Inequality Report (WIR2018; Avaredo et al., 2018) is a major systemic assessment of globalization outlining income and wealth inequality, and documents a steep rise in global economic inequality since the 1980s, and this is despite strong growth in many emerging economies.

Looking at **education**, systematic educational inequality between boys and girls is now much wider at the level of secondary education. In many countries the introduction of free primary education led to a significant increase in enrollment. This in particular enabled access for girls, poor people and other marginalized groups. There has been steady progress over time in women’s access to education, with the sharpest increase in countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Certainly, it is undeniable that a number of factors still exist worldwide that prevent girls from access to schooling due to issues, for instance, of girls leaving education on becoming child brides in countries such as Zambia, the sexual harassment and violence girls face in countries like South Africa, and the impact of war on girls’ education in places like Rwanda or the Sudan (Ringrose and Epstein, 2015). Clearly, these issues are complex and vary across time and geographical location, but, even in the Global North, gendered inequalities in education still endure.

In accordance with the sustainable Development Goals, donors have committed themselves to contribute to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, devoting an increasing share of aid to the education sector.

 Another issue which has been highlighted by both scholars and activists is the enduring aspect of **violence** against women in its many manifestations. Such violence includes Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), rape and assault, trafficking and honor-based violence, sexual violence in countries undergoing conflict, domestic violence, violence and the issues of migration, asylum seeking and the refugee crisis. The focus has also been on how the political responses to these diverse areas are gendered and impact on women’s identity and relationships with others, as well as on the unreported, everyday acts of violence in both the Global South and the Global North. This is, however, a gender inequality which has been much targeted by global activism to combat these diverse manifestations of violence and their unequal effects on women. In addition, in the last decade, there has been more of recognition than hitherto that men, though in the majority of perpetrators of violence against women, in certain contexts and age groups also face violence, most notably from other men. A timely example of this is that currently, in South Africa, the highest cause of mortality among poor young black men is violence, including murder at the hands of other men, often linked to crime and gangster-related activities.

This more comprehensive approach to combating violence can be seen in the example of the existence of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, in 2016, which was then followed by Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. What is particularly interesting in relation to this initiative was that the violence toward women was acknowledged and debated in the context of its impact on women, men, and children. Further, it was recognized that both women and men strive to help both victims and perpetrators, as well as challenge global violence in all its forms.

In the aspect of **political participation** there has been great impact in women representation over the years, both in the Global North and the Global South. Developments in Scandinavian countries have for example been characterized as “incremental”, indicating that they have been outstretched over a long period of time. I would be using Sweden and Rwanda to illustrate the increase in women’s participation. Sweden crossed the threshold of 20% women in the national parliament; the proportion climbed past 30% during the 1980s and 40% during the 1990s. The current figure as of late 2009 is 47% women in the Swedish national parliament. For Rwanda, in 1994 women made up 17.1% of the national parliament. After elections in 2008 the number rose to 56.3%. According to the list compiled as of 1st February 2019 by the Inter-Parliamentary union, Rwanda ranks the 1st country in the world with 61.3% of women in their national parliament, in their election in 2018 and Sweden ranks the 5th country with 47.3% while Nigeria ranks 180th country with 5.6% women in their parliament as of 2015. We still have a long way to go but we are making progress.

In conclusion, gender relation is changing in the 21st century, in my work I made reference to 3 major aspects; Education, Violence and Political participation and I can say that there is progress and the women have elevated from where they were in the 90s. My concluding contention is that, in going forward, we can usefully focus on three aspects to continue to address the global issue of gendered inequality in innovative and more fruitful ways. These are: to further the contemporary debate and emphasis on intersectionality in relation to gender inequality; to highlight the increasing academic focus on masculinity and gender relations and its relation to feminism; and to rethink activism and its connection with the academy and others involved, especially in the light of technological advances.

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