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**QUESTION: IS GENDER RELATIONS CHANGING IN THE 21ST CENTURY? WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF CHANGE AND FACTORS DRIVING THE CHANGE**

Gender Relations refers to the social and economic relationships that exist between men and women in any family, community, workplace or society. Gender refers to the social roles men and women play and the power relations between them, which usually have a profound effect on the use and management of natural resources.

Gender is not based on sex, or the biological differences between men and women. Gender is shaped by culture, social relations, and natural environments. And thus it depends on values, norms, customs and law. Hence, different parts of the world have evolved different gender roles over time. This paper identifies the areas of change in gender relations and the factors driving these changes.

Gender roles are gotten from norms, and norms bend, relax, evolve and change over time. Norms change when people challenge or cross boundaries or traditional gender roles or conduct. When this happens people adopt new roles, but these roles do not always set the new standard.

The 20th century could be seen as the bedrock of gender revolution. It began with the international suffrage movement and ended with transnational feminist activism, working at global and international levels to secure women’s rights the spread of women’s voting rights, labor force participation, the expansion of political engagement and participation and increased roles in public affairs. Despite these little successes, there remained the issues of underrepresentation, occupational segregation, wage gap and inequality. The 20th century was a period of persistent inequalities among sexes, through patriarchal exploitation, opportunity hoarding and social emulation.

The 21st century could be termed the era of “Gender democracy”. Yes, gender relations are rapidly changing as we speak due to certain defining factors driving such changes. Therefore, the areas that have seen changes include public participation, domestic division of labor, occupational structure, sexuality and gender diversity, pay equity. By the 21st century only ignorant minorities of people still hold that women should be subordinate to men

The most significant drivers of change can be studied through history, and include economic change, education, migration, technological change, legal change, exposure to new ideas via the media or other communication processes.

* **ECONOMIC CHANGE**: Greater economic opportunities and an expanding source information and support can promote women empowerment. The increased physical mobility that comes with employment puts women in contact with a new set of individuals at work and at large. This contributes largely to changing gender norms and relations. Better economic opportunities can promote acceptance of women working outside home.
* **MIGRATION AND URBANISATION**: Migration is another factor for change in gender relations. Most often migrants tend to adopt the socially accepted standard of gender norms after leaving their location of origin. Migration leads to change in gender norms by exposure to new ideas. Migration influences gender roles either entrenching inequalities and traditional roles, or challenging and changing them. Migration brings about exposure to more gender-egalitarian practices through mixing with other social groups in the society.
* **TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE**: Technological change also fosters changes in gender relations; technological change motivates impacts on the economic opportunities and leads to greater access or exposure to information. The information and communication technology (ICT) sector in certain parts of Asia, including India, could be attributed to lead greater investment in girl’s education and changing norms about unmarried and married women’s employment.
* **LEGAL CHANGE**: Legal change has a potential contribution to gender roles and equality, equality laws on ownership rights and assets improves the legal status of girls by increasing their value. Reforms in inheritance laws would empower women largely.
* **EDUCATION**: There exists a direct link between higher education and decision making power. Women with more education are less likely to seek permission from their male counterparts on issues they have the educational capacity to handle.
* **SOCIAL MEDIA AND ACTIVISM**: Social media platforms enable the spread of ideas and knowledge on gender equality and women’s rights.

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