

Gender Discriminations in Epic Period

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Abstract: *The paper discusses the issues of [i] parent's preference on birth of children; [ii] education; [iii] marriage and re-marriage; [iv] arrangement of household's works; and inheritance right on property in the epic period. It also examines whether these issues had gender bias in this period. If the issues were gender bias in this period, then it is also examined whether the extent of biases are relevant to the present society in India. Comparing the manners and customs of the present society with the manners and customs of the epic period we have tried to arrive at some conclusions.*

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I. INTRODUCTION:

According to Nobel laureate Dr. Amartya Sen "Gender discrimination or inequality (originating from gender biases) is not homogenous phenomenon but the collection of disparate and interlinked problems". (Reference: Sen 2001, 'Many Faces of Gender inequalities', Front Line Vol. 18)

In the context of gender discriminations or inequalities, a few words should be spoken about how gender discriminations or inequalities are evolved in the society.

The misogynists believe that the girls are lesser than boys. There is not basis of this belief. Because girls have shown more abilities than the boys in many fields.

Thus, the idea that boys are stronger, brave and fearless than girls is wrong. Similarly, the idea that the girls are more kind and sympathetic than boys is also wrong. The truth is that parents impose this sort of idea on them from their childhood. They drew the line of activities for them when they remained children. For example, parents bought a toy car and different toys (creating intelligence) for a child boy. Similarly, they bought dolls and toy utensils for cooking for a child girl. Gradually, an idea was developed in their minds that boys are more intelligent and brave than girls. When they were grown up, they maintained this idea. The parents imposed this idea on them directly and indirectly. This idea is being continued hereditarily. In this way, the gender discrimination or inequality is, perhaps, evolved in the society. However, the idea that boys are stronger, brave and fearless than girls should be eliminated in the society. This is very urgent need for the society. It can be confidently said that the girls are not weak by nature. It should also be wrong to show any kindness towards them. Infact, a fight against gender discrimination or inequality does not mean pitting one gender against the other.

'The gender discrimination or inequality hurts the interests not only of girls and grown up women but also of boys and men through the biological connection (such as childhood under nourishment and cardiovascular diseases at later ages) and also through social connections (including in politics and economics and social life). The gender discrimination in different forms exists in most parts of the world from Japan to Morocco, from Uzbekistan to USA including India'

(Ref. A Sen: Front Line, Vol.18, 2001)

In the present study, the issues of parent's preference for sons, education, marriage and remarriage, arrangement of household's works and the right of inheritance of property have been considered in the context of epic period to discover whether there was any gender discrimination in this issues in this period. An attempt has also been made to know whether the gender discriminations in the issues, if any, in the epic period are relevant to modern society of India. The issues are discussed in the different section separately.

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There are some controversies in the determination of epic period. In spite of controversies, the periods between the 1st century and the sixth century is usually ascribed as the epic period. Because the epic period covers the periods of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The span of the *Ramayana* and The *Mahabharata* periods was the same. This was 400 B.C – 300 B.C. Thus, the periods between the 1st Century and 6th Century is usually ascribed as the epic period. But the events of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* took place in two different places. The events of the *Ramayana* took place in *Ayodhya* and the events of the *Mahabharata* took place in *Hastinapur*, now Delhi.

II. ISSUE OF PARENTS PREFERENCE OR EXPECTATION ON BIRTH OF CHILDREN:

In this section, we enquired about what parents expected or preferred when their children were born in the epic period. Did they expect a son to be born? To know this, some examples from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are cited below.

Dasaratha, the king of *Ayodhya*, had no children. He performed religious rituals for a son. He, being a considerate king, took conscience of Courtiers and discussed his desire with the Vedic scholars of court beforehand. His desire for a son was expressed in the *Ramayana* in the following ways:

“तस्य च एवम् प्रभावस्य धर्मज्ञस्य महात्मनः।
सुतार्थम् तस्य मानस्य न आसीत् वंशकरं सुतः॥

-Ramayana, 1, 8, 1

i.e. the great souled king *Dasaratha*, a dynasty enriching son is not begotten, though his heart is burning to beget a son. The above verse clearly expresses his desire for a son (not for a daughter).

It is found in the *Ramayana* that *Sita*'s father, *Janaki*, became very eager when his daughter *Sita*, attained the age of marriage. His anxiety for *Sita*'s marriage became so much strained as if he lost all his little money like a poor man. His anxiety is expressed in the *Ramayana* saying as

“सदृशाचापकृष्टाच्च लोके कन्यापिता जनात्।
प्रधर्षणमवाप्नोति शक्रेनापि समो भुवि॥”

- Ramayana, 11, 17, 35

i.e. in spite of occupying a position like a king of gods, a daughter's father faced insults not only from his equals but also from his inferiors. In this context it can be said *Janaki* would not bear any anxiety if he had a son. Thus, in this verse *Janaki*'s pain indirectly expresses *Janaki*'s desire for a son.

It is known from the *Ramayana* that sixty thousand sons of the great souled *Sagara* crossed over the sea of mortality and on a par with gods, they could transit to heaven. This aspect is expressed in the *Ramayana* saying as:

“तारिता नरशूल दिवस यात्रां च दैववत्।
शक्तिं पुत्रं सहायि सागरस्य महात्मनः॥”

- Ramayana, 1, 44, 3

In the above verse, the nobility of being a son is expressed. This verse perhaps, indirectly expresses the parent's preference or expectation for a son in the epic period.

Ramayana tells us *Diti*, the wife of sage *Kashyapa*, wanted a son to kill *Indra*. Because *Indra* killed her demonic sons. She requested her husband to permit her asceticism and further requested him to accord pregnancy for a son. Her son would be a king of the whole world by killing *Indra*. This aspect has been expressed in the *Ramayana* saying as:

“সা অহম তপঃ চরিয়ামি গর্ভম্ মে দাতুম্ অইসি।
ঈশ্বরম্ শক্র ইন্তারম্ ত্বম্ অনুজ্ঞাতুম্ অইসি।”

- Ramayana 1, 144, 3

The braveness of a son is expressed in the above verse. *Diti* preferred a son not a daughter to kill *Indra*. This reflects the preference for a son in the epic period.

The parent's preference for a son is also expressed in the *Mahabharata*. *Mahabharata* tells us that the son is the hope of the family and the daughter is the source of trouble to it. This fact was expressed in the *Mahabharata* saying as:

‘আত্মা পুত্রঃ সখী ভার্যা কৃচ্ছুং তু দুহিতা নৃনাম্’

- Mahabharata, 1, 72, 16

i.e. people consider the sons as their souls, wife as their friend but the daughter is just a trouble to it.

Again, *Mahabharata* narrated the son rescues the spirits of the deceased ancestors. A son rescues the ancestors from hell ‘put’. Thus, a son is termed as ‘putra’(rescuer from the hell ‘put’.) By a son one conquers the three worlds (*swarga, marta* and *patal*). By a son's son (i.e. grandson) one enjoys eternity. By a grandson's son great grandfathers enjoy everlasting happiness. She is true wife who gives birth to a son. (Ref. *Mahabharata*, 1, section LXXIV). From the examples cited above in the different paragraphs we are led to conclude that the parents in the epic period would prefer or expect a son to a daughter directly or indirectly. Thus, the natality inequality (i.e. parents wanting a new born baby to be a boy over the girl) is noticed.

III. THE ISSUE OF EDUCATION:

This section deals with whether there was any gender inequality in education in the epic period. Before dealing with this issue. A few words should be spoken about the ideals of education in the Vedic days and epic days. In Vedic days, the morality was the main ideal of education. Thus, it was the first duty of a teacher to build character among the pupils based on morality. Because without morality a man is not able to differentiate between good and bad. In Vedic days teaching was considered a holy duty of a man and it showed the world how much responsible was a Vedic teacher as compared to modern days. Infact, a moral education makes a man civilized and cultured. In Vedic days education was for everybody for becoming cultured. It was not for making money. (Ref. Zahoor Ahmed Rather – relevance of Vedic ideals of Education in the modern education System).

In the same way, in the epic days, also the ideal of education was to build character among the pupils through the morality lessons. In the epic days, the self-controlled Brahmin teachers taught the students. They were absolutely principle minded when they received donation² for education.

This fact has been evident from the Ramayana (1, 16, 13) saying as:

“স্ব কর্ম নিরল নিত্যম্ ব্রাহ্মণানা বিজিতেন্দ্রিয়াম্।
দান অধ্যয়নঃ শীলা প্রতিগ্রহে।”

Now we deal with whether there was any gender inequality in education in the epic period. In this period *Takshashilla* was a noted centre of learning. *Dhaumya* was one of teachers in *Takshashilla*. He had three disciples *Upamanyu*, *Aruni*, and *veda*. ‘Ashramic’ education prevailed in the epic days. The hermits lived in different *ashrama*'s! The pupils (both boys and girls) would go to the different *ashramas* for instruction from famed teachers. The names of those *ashramas* were ‘*Naimishaashrama*’, ‘*Kanva'sashrama*’, ‘*Vyasa's ashrama*’ and ‘*AshramanearKuruksheetra*’.

² Donation. The self-controlled Brahmin teachers accepted donation like coins. Coins etc. from befitting students. If they would take donation other than the befitting students, they would go to hell. Another kind of donation is referred to ‘*danadhyana*’, i.e. when the teachers accepted donation from the righteous sources, they would donate something to others. Thus the words ‘*dana*’ and ‘*pratigraha*’ mean all the rules are applied to accept donation.

A brief account of the above mentioned *asramas* presented below to know about whether there was any gender inequality in education in the epic period.

Naimisha Asrama

This 'Ashrama' was a forest university.

The presiding personality of this 'ashrama' was *Saunaka*. He had the designation of the *Kulapati*. He was the preceptor of 10000 disciples. His disciplines included both boys and girls.

Kanva's Ashrama

This 'ashram' was another famous centre of learning. This was situated on the bank of *Malini*. *Malini* was a tributary of *Sarayu* river. This 'ashrama' was solitary 'ashrama'. *Kanva's ashrama* was a full-fledged 'ashrama'!

This 'ashrama' consisted of several departments such as the department of fire worship and prayers, the department of Veda, the department of teaching *Rajni*, *Arthaniti* and *Varta*, the department of military, the department of Astronomy, the department of physical science, the department Botany, the department of transport and conveyance and the department of Military organization.

There were specialist teachers in each of the departments. The teachers of Veda department taught four *Vedas*. They also taught literature, art, *Kalpa Sutra*, *Chandra* (metrics), *Vyakarana*, *Nirukta*, *Logic*, *Naya*, *Dialectics* etc. In the same way, the specialist teachers taught other subjects in their respective departments. Both boys and girls would go to *Kanva's* full-fledged 'ashram' to earn higher knowledge in different subjects.

Vaysa's asrama

It was another seat of higher learning. *Vayasata* taught the Vedas to his disciples. The disciples were *Sumantra*, *Vaisampayana*, *Jamini* and *Paila*. Perhaps one of this disciples was *Fanine* (lady). They were highly blessed by *Vayasa*, *Jamini*, *Sumantra* and *Vaisampayana* were famous for their wisdom. *Paila* was famous for his great ascetic merit. Afterwards, they were the disciples of the sage *Suka*. And *Suka* was the son of *Vaysa*.

Asramanear Kurukshetra:

This 'ashrama' deserves special mention. Because this 'ashrama' produced two noted women hermits. One of them was a Brahmin maiden. She observed *brahmacharya* from her youths in this 'ashrama'. She was crowned with ascetic success. She ultimately acquired 'yogic' powers. She became 'tapasidha'. Another woman named *Sandilya* came to this 'ashrama' to live the life of celibacy. She attained spiritual preeminence.

From the brief account of the different 'ashrama's in the epic period, it is clear that the education was not gender bias. Both boys and girls would go to the different 'ashramas' from the distant places to earn higher knowledge in different subjects

(Ref. <http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Educationonancientindia.htm//Education%20in%20the%20Epics>)

Marriage:

Marriage is a social process through which a man and women are legally united. In the epic period marriage was compulsory only for women, but not for men. It is known from the *Mahabharata* that the Sage *Dighatamas*, who laid it down that woman, ought never to remain unmarried in future. Because the unfortunate of a woman starts when they remain unmarried. *Mahabharata* expressed this fact saying as:

“अपतीनां तु नारीणामद्यप्रभृति पातकम्”

- Mahabharata 1, 114, 36

Elsewhere (i.e., *Mahabharata* IX. 33) the epic illustrates the same principle (i.e women ought never to remain unmarried) by a simple and innocent story. *Suhhru* was the daughter of sage *Kuni*. *Kuni* the father of *Suhhru*. wanted to give her marriage. But she did not give her consent. She practiced severe penances and remained unmarried for all her life. One day at the time of her death, she learnt to hear great surprise that she could not go to heaven. Because her body was not consecrated by the sacrament of marriage. She induced the sage *Sringavat* to marry her and stayed with him for one night. Then she was enabled to go to heaven.

The compulsory marriage for girls was necessary in the epic period because there were more pitfalls in the path of unmarried girls than the married men. However, as a result of the compulsory marriage for girls. negligent parents had become more alert in arranging the marriage of their daughters.

It must be admitted that the compulsory marriage for girls in the epic period crushed the literary and spiritual ambition of the gifted section of the fair sex. Further, it can be pointed out that it led to grave abuses when pre-puberty marriages started to be insisted upon from the beginning of Christian era.

Remarriage:

Rigveda (IX, 188) tells us that widow remarriage took place in the Vedic period. The proposal of widow remarriage in this period would come at the funeral of her husband. The proposal was expressed saying as “oh lady, get up, come back to the world of living. You are lying by the side of a dead man. As far as they wifehood to thy husband, who had seized thy hand is concerned, you have it out completely.”

-Translated from Rigveda, IX, 188

Infact, the Rigveda sought to dissuade the widow from burning herself on her husband’s funeral pyre due to the Sati custom which had gone out of vogue.

Though the widow remarriage prevailed in the Vedic period, this system gradually came into disrepute and ultimately the widow remarriage was eliminated in the epic period. The disrepute towards the widow remarriage in this period can be traced from *Duryodhan*’s statement when he was urged to make peace on the last day of *Kurukshetra* war. His statement was expressed saying as,

“ক্ষীরत्नां च पृथिवीं हतस्त्रियपुंगवाम।
नहूतसहस्राहं ভেদুং বিদবামি যোষিতমা।”

-*Mahabharata* IX, 31, 45

i.e. *Duryodhana* was declined to enjoy the earth as a man to marry a widow.

The exception was in the case of a child widow. She was permitted to marry again if the previous marriage of a child was not consummated. This was view of *Vasistha*.³ *Laghu-satatapa* held that a child widow was, indeed, a virgin. The sons of a married child widow fully entitled to offer oblations to God and manes.⁴ *Mahabharata* tells us that a child widow was permitted to participate in religious activities with their heirs which was expressed saying as

‘পুনভুরপি সা কন্যা সপুত্রা হব্যকব্যদা!’- *Mahabharata* XIII, 55, 7.

Thus, it is clear that with the exception of a child widow the widow remarriage was not permitted in this period. But there was no bar of remarriage in the case of widower. Thus, marriage and remarriage were gender bias.

IV. ARRANGEMENT OF HOUSE HOLD’S WORKS.

In this section, we enquire about whether the family arrangement of household’s works was unequal in terms of sharing the burden of household’s works and child care in the epic period this is important to examine in the context of gender discrimination.

Many societies have granted that men will work outside the home and women can also work outside the home performing various unavoidable and unequally shared household duties. This is sometimes called “division of labour” though women could be forgiven for seeing it accumulation of labour (ref. Amartya Sen: *Many Faces of Gender Inequality*’- *Indian National Magazine*. Vol. 18. 2001)

Whether there was an unequal share of burden of house works between the husband and wife in the epic period can be traced to the married life. In the epic society, the husband would fully depend on his wife in the married life. Indeed, the house would become empty to a husband in the absence of his wife though the house was full of sons, daughter, daughter-in-law, grandsons, wives of sons, servants etc. The emptiness of the house without wife is expressed in the *Mahabharata* saying as

³*Vasista* was a revered sage of Hinduism. He is one of the *Saptarishis* (seven great rishis) of India. His ideas have been influential and he was called as the first sage of Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy by *AdiShankara*. He was credited as the chief author of *Mudra 7* of *Rigveda* (Ref. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/vasistha>).

⁴ Manes: souls of departed ancestor

“पुत्रपौत्रवधुभृत्यैराकीर्णमपि सर्वतः।
भार्याहीनगृहस्थस्य शून्यमेव गृहं भवेत्॥”

-Mahabharata, XII. 4, 4

The reason behind the husband's dependence on his wife can be inferred by the fact that the wife had duties and obligations towards her husband. Indeed, she would do all the works of her husband. She led the life of an ideal 'pativrata'. She tried her utmost to promote her husband's happiness which is expressed in the Mahabharata saying as

“सा हि स्त्रीत्यक्त्वन्त्या यस्यां भार्या तु त्र्यति”

-Mahabharata, XII. 144. 20

Besides the duties towards her husband, the wife took care of his own children. Like the Vedic society, she would look after the husband's old parents.

The household management was also the duty of a wife in the epic society. She framed a proper annual budget and regulated the daily expenditure according to the budget framed. She made purchases when provisions were cheap and store them properly for the consumption of the whole year. She was the paymaster of the household. She looked after the general need and comfort of the servants by giving them old cloths and articles. She had general supervision over cattle. If the family was an agricultural one, agriculture came within her jurisdiction if, the family was poor. She helped her husband by giving her own share in the manual labour of the household. When the husband was away, she took all responsibilities of the household. The household decoration was also her duty. Her husband only supervised her duties and obligations (Ref: A.S.Altakar: The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Pre-historic Times to Present Day". Page 98). From the above, it can be safely concluded that the arrangement of household works in the epic period was quite unequal in terms of the sharing the burden of household's work between the husband and the wife.

Though the wife would bear most of the burdens of the household works, the wife would consider her husband's little help valuable. She thought that it is not possible to get such valuable help from her father, mother, brother, friend etc. Her thought was expressed in the Ramayana saying as

“न पिता नात्तजो नात्मा न माता न सखीजनः।
इह प्रेत्य च नारीनां पतिरेको गतिः सदा॥
मितं ददाति हि पिता मितं भ्राता मितं सुतः।
अमितस्य च दातारं भतरिं का न सेवते॥”

-Ramayana. II. 37. 6: 11. 40. 3

i.e to a woman, father, or son or self or mother or female companions are not the recourse. Husband alone is forever the best recourse either in this world or after her death

Indeed, the real happiness of the wife in the epic period was centered in her husband. This is expressed in the Ramayana saying as

“न अतस्त्री वाद्यते वीणा न अचक्रं वर्तते रथः।
न अपतिः सुखम् एधते या श्रुत् अपि शत आत्तजा॥”

-Ramayana. 2. 32, 22

i.e., Vina (Indian lute) does not resonate without chords. Chariot does not move without wheel. Now can a wife bereft of her husband even if blessed with hundred children, will not lie happily in comforts.

V. RIGHTS OF INHERITANCE OF PROPERTY OF WOMEN:

The rights of inheritance of property of women have been discussed in this section under the following heads.

Rights of the Wife:

In the epic period, the wife didn't get the inheritance right over the property. She was only a good manager of her husband's property. For example, *Draupadi* was a good manager of her husband's property. She never considered her husband's property as her own. She always thought that the owner of the property was *Judhisthira*, her husband (Ref: S.Joyal The Status of Women in the Epic Age' page 224: *Mahabharata*. III. 233. 56). The wife could only give away wealth given to her by her husband. For example, *Kaikayi*, in the Ramayana presented a necklace to *Manthara* when *Manthara* informed her about Ram's coronation (Ref *Ramayana* 1 1. 7, 32). But she had only the full rights over *stridhana*⁵ (Ref: *Bhalakar*, UP-*Mahabharata* Men Nari. P 261). Thus it is clear that wife had no inheritance rights over property. She could only enjoy the property and give away wealth to anybody.

Rights of the Daughter: Daughter with brothers

In the epic period, the daughter could not claim any share in the patrimony as long as she was supported by her brother. Though the unmarried daughter didn't claim her share in patrimony but she had the right to inherit her mother's '*jautaka*' (Ref. *Mahabharata*. III, 45 .12). The word '*jautaka*' in the epic period was different from the dowries in the modern days. In the epic period, the word '*jautaka*' meant the separate property of the mother. Thus, the daughter had the right to inherit mother's property. In the case of mother *jautaka* as a property she received from her father which devolved from the mother on the daughter (Ref: *Mahabharata*. XIII. 47. 25).

Rights of the brotherless daughter:

Epic did not give the daughter equality with the son if the right of the brother-less daughter to succeed was recognized. The son of the brother-less daughter had the same rights in the property of his maternal grandparents (Ref: *Mahabharata* 1-120-33-34; XIII. 5, 11).

The *Anusasanaparva* of *Mahabharata* scrapped the difference between appointed⁶ brother-less daughters and the unappointed brother-less daughter. Because the sons of both appointed brother-less daughter and unappointed brother-less daughter inherited the maternal grandfathers' property. The appointment of a daughter as '*putrika*' was declared through a ceremony. Later on, the ceremony gradually disappears. Because any brother-less daughter (appointed or un-appointed) was considered a '*putrika*'. Though any brother-less daughter was considered a '*putrika*' yet an appointed brother-less daughter had the superior claim as compared with an adopted or purchased son as her right could not be overlooked even after the birth of a brother (Ref: *Mahabharata* XIII, 45, 147). There was no difference between son's son and daughter's son (Ref: P.C.Roy's English translation of the *AnusanaParva*).

In the case of '*Asura* marriage'⁷ a son of a daughter if sold could neither inherit nor performed funeral rites of his grandfather as the father had sold the daughter (ref *Mahabharata* XIII. 45. 15). A '*putrika*' could inherit in her own right (Ref: *Mahabharata* XIII. 33. 45; II. 12).

Rights of widow:

It is known from *Mahabharata* that the husband would give his wife three thousand coins (*Mahabharata* XIII, 47, 22. 23). The husband allowed his wife to spend three thousand coins as she liked. From this fact it may be inferred that such a right was exercised by the widow as well. In *Ramayana*, it is noticed that *Kausalya* enjoyed this right of spending after the death of king *Dasaratha* (Ref. *Ramayana* VI. 123, 36).

Thus from the above, it is not clear that whether a widow had right of inheritance. Indeed, a widow's right of inheritance in the epic period remained unrecognized, But the exception was in the case of a childless widow. She had the right of inheritance. They inherited all the riches (*Mahabharata* XIII. 47, 23, 24). However,

⁵*Stridhana*: It includes those properties which a wife received by way of gifts from the parents, relatives etc. at the time of her marriage. It included mostly moveable property such as ornaments, jewelry and dress. In addition, gifts given to her at the time of her bridal procession also constituted *Stridhana*.

⁶An appointed brother-less daughter: When a sonless man appoints a girl as his daughter

⁷*Asura* Marriage: In the case of '*Asura* marriage' the husband would pay a reasonable price for a bride. There are few cases of '*Asura* marriages' recorded in ancient Indian tradition. In the case of '*Asura* marriage', son-in-law is described as a '*Vijamata*'.

the position of a widow was insecure in socially and economically. Though the practice of *Niyoga*⁸ is recognized in the *Mahabharata* the protection of the widows was considered a king's duty.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The following conclusions have been drawn on the basis of the present study.

Parents in the epic period preferred a son rather than a daughter. Thus, their preference had gender bias. A daughter was unwelcomed not due to the much hatred to her sex, but due to a daughter not having much right in the society compared to a son. There were no references to the female infanticides in the epic period. Though the daughter was unwelcome, they were considered the useful members of the family. The usefulness of a daughter was noticed when *Kunti*, the mother of *Pandavas*, saved her adopted fathers, *Kuntibhoja* from the anger of *Durvasa*.⁹ when he visited their house. Infact, the main reason behind the parents' preference for sons was in the parent's thoughts. The parents thought that the sons are physically stronger than daughters. And sons could save them from the danger when they would become old.

The preference for a son rather than a daughter is still relevant to the present society of India. The sex selection abortion supports the preference for a son. Prof. Amartya Sen's observation needs to be mentioned in this context.

"The sex selection abortion has been common in many countries like India due to the availability of modern techniques to determine the gender of the foetus. It has been statistically evident phenomenon especially in India and South Asia."

(Amartya Sen: Many Faces of Gender Inequality, an essay. Front/line volume 18, 2001)

Again, Sen coined the term "missing women". There must have been many Female foetus" destroyed and there were many females who succumbed to death due to gender discrimination. Arnartya Sen argued that in natural circumstances, where the females are given equal opportunities, number of females compared to the number of males would have been more, as age specific survival rate is more among females than males. But, in real life we see the female male ratio' is much less than one in most of the developing countries. This gap between what should have been the number of females and actual number of females is termed as missing women.¹⁰

The conclusion derived from the issue of education is that in the epic period both boys and girls had equal access to education (Described in the text). Thus education did not have gender bias.

Unfortunately, education is not free from gender bias in the present society. Because girls have less opportunity of schooling than the boys. In this context Prof. Sen's observation deserves to be mentioned. He observed, "There are many counties especially like India where girls have less opportunities of schooling than boys". He also observed gender bias in higher education.

Marriage had gender bias in the epic period. It was compulsory for women due to the unexpected danger or difficulty they would face otherwise.

A compulsory marriage for a woman is not relevant to modern society in India. Now, a man or a woman may marry or remain unmarried throughout his or her life. Thus, marriage is not bias to any gender. But, there are still dowry system imposed on the bride's family.

The widow remarriage did not prevail in the epic period. The exception was in the case of a child widow who could remarry. Though the widow could not remarry in the epic period, the widower could marry.

⁸*Niyoga*: If the husband is impotent or die without a child, then the women can appoint a close relative usually a brother-in-law to produce offspring. (Ref. Dr. Rai Khanagai, '*Niyoga*' (levirate) social policies in Ancient India: Reflection on the Indian Epic").

⁹*Durvasa* : He was an ancient Rishi one night he demanded food at the odd hours of night when he visited *Kuntibhoja*'s home. But *Kuntibhoja*, the adopted father of *Kunti* could not give him food. *Durvasa* was very angry. But *Kunti* obeyed *Durvasa*'s order quietly. Then, *Durvasa* was satisfied and did not curse *Kunti*'s father. He rewarded *Kunti* by teaching '*Atharva Mantras*'. *Kunti* could call any god at any time with the help of '*Atharva Mantras*'!

¹⁰Missing Women: It refers to the deviation to the actual sex ratio from expected sex ratio.

Now in the modern India, both widow and widower can remarry. Thus, there is no gender bias in remarriage in the present day society.

So far as the arrangement of household's works is concerned it was unequal in the epic period in terms of sharing the burden of households works between husband and wife (Described in the text). This inequality has been partially relevant to modern India in the cases of poor families. It has been observed that a housewife of a poor family bears extra burden in household's works in addition to his daily cooking and other household's works. For example, a housewife of a poor family takes their children to a school (at least up to class V) and bring them back from a school. Besides, a housewife takes care of her husband's parents by taking them to a doctor's clinic for treatment when they become ill.

The conclusion drawn from the inheritance rights on property is that with some exceptions women (as a wife, daughter with brother, daughter without brother, widow) had no inheritance rights over property. Only sons enjoyed the inheritance rights over their paternal property. Thus the rights of inheritance on property was gender bias in the epic period.

The inheritance rights over property has now become gender indifferent because both sons and daughters have equal rights over parent's property.

Though women (as a wife, daughter with brother and without brother and widow) has earned the same rights over property like sons according to law it is doubtful whether the rights of inheritance are properly implemented. In this context it should be mentioned that a married daughter often sacrifices her right of inheritance over property.

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