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women too in each field have to overcome their inflicted stammer and then rise to heights.

## Gender inequality : An overview

Taking India to direct the discourse, it is well understood that the issue in question is largely the result of the creation of 'narrow domestic walls' in every sphere of life. The division of the world into gendered public and private spheres was a staple feature of the subcontinent's social and political thought from the earliest documentation of history. 'Ghar' and 'Bahir', the former being the domain of material (economic, political) belonged to the man while the latter domain comprising childbearing and homemaking was identified with the woman.

Recently, the UNFPA report highlighted that almost 60% of women in developing countries suffer crimes against bodily integrity.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates the average income of women to be only one-fifth that of men. A survey conducted by the CMIE stated that women suffer three as

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much as men on major indicators of well-being as a result of the pandemic showing the fragile nature of our social structure.

The phenomenon of intersectionality by which social outcomes depend upon the aggregate of all types of social disadvantages is empirically borne out by data. A woman from the lower castes suffers more with regards to health, social standing, income. The disabilities associated with gender is a tool on the already disadvantaged.

### Women Movements: An Unfinished Agenda

In the late 19th century, the Western nations witnessed a movement demanding greater political empowerment of women which came to be called the First Wave of Feminism.

Recognizing political power and representation as a robust means to emancipation, women across the world echoed this call. Like any reform project, there was stiff opposition from groups that put forward their arguments glorifying the status quo.

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The most common of such arguments was the 'Separate Spheres' theory which laid down a natural division of functions between men and women due to innate biological differences. Men representing the physical and intellectual while women possessing mostly 'domestic virtues' ought to have a functional separation. Hence the discrepancies or inequality between sexes was only as a result of the natural.

However, nothing could be further from the truth. Writing way back in the 1880s, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in his book 'Samya' rejected the theory of natural differences attributing the root cause of the problem to faulty social rules reflected in the institutions of marriage, education, widow rights, etc. In fact he stressed on the need to disconnect RIGHTS from NATURAL DIFFERENCES, i.e., acknowledge the FACT of DIFFERENCES but reject the SALIENCE or social relevance of those differences. It simply means, it is our duty as a society to support equal rights for all irrespective of any pre-existing characteristics.

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In 1920s, a report by the British Franchise Committee stated its endeavour to elect the members of the Viceroy's council directly by the PEOPLE on as broad a franchise as possible. The franchise-deprived women of India rested their hopes on a delegation led by Sarojini Naidu to Lord Montagu demanding the right to vote. Avoiding all complex justifications, she simply enquired, "When a franchise is being drawn up, we pray that women may be recognized as PEOPLE".

Such instances have served as inspirations for many which culminated in the adoption of our Constitution which guaranteed the Right to Equality <Article 14> as well as Absence of Discrimination <Article 15>. The text sought to serve as a Book of Instructions highlighting our goals. Extension of franchise as well as provisions to make special rules for benefit of women <Article 15(3)> were few progressive provisions expected to be a panacea for our ills with regards to gender. However, although much has been done, the progress is marred by the lack of inclusivity and determination.

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## An Unfulfilled Dream

The social norms dominating an area have the potential to bend rules. To highlight an example, Article 15 ~~prohibits~~ states that the "State shall not discriminate on grounds ONLY of religion, race, caste, sex...". A formalist reading of this provision prevents discrimination on many grounds mentioned in the text ONLY. This fact was used as an argument in Air India vs Nargesh Mishra (1982) which required air hostesses to retire at first pregnancy which would reduce efficiency. According to courts, this stood the test of Article 15 as the discrimination was due to efficiency and not SEX. These ~~appalling~~ moments have hindered progress.

What we require is not a Formalist but rather a TRANSFORMATIVE interpretation of the Constitution which desires better social outcomes. Such reflected in progressive judgements such as Joseph Shine vs UOI (2018) which struck down S.497 of IPC and decriminalized adultery. For effective results, romantic paternalism has to give way to affirmative action and holistic progress.

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The burden of unpaid domestic work is a major source of disabilities for women in our country. The Time Use Survey by NSO estimated that women spend nearly 6 hours a day on unpaid work while for men this barely touched 80 minutes. The World Bank estimates the net value of this unrecognized contribution at \$ 600 bn annually. Words of Gandhiji at a CWC meeting hold a special significance here who after the Quit India struggle stated, "I have brought women out of their homes, it is now our duty to ensure they do not walk back in."

Agriculture in India has been witnessing a phenomenon which economists call the 'Feminization of Farms' giving larger participation of women due to migration of men for better jobs. However such women lack land rights or an effective role in procuring farm inputs which remains the trade of farm men which sumanis the trade of men. The MS Swaminathan Committee has recommended 'pattas' / title for women to their lands for creating women agri-businesses.

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In the formal sector, a woman finds it much harder to progress to the top compared to men. A Forbes report estimates that only 19% members of the Boards of major companies are women. They are often subject to workplace harassment, outright sexism. Such victims are too oft rendered helpless given the social stand regarding such issues. Recently, the verdict of the Supreme Court in Priya Ramani vs MJ Akbar (2020) offers much hope.

The Education sector too is characterized by discrepancies such as the relatively lower participation of women in STEM fields. Given that these sectors offer quick employability, it is time we create an equal classroom structure that offers opportunities for all.

Although am all time high, our Parliament has only 13% female legislators leading to an insufficient articulation of gender based issues.

The Bill reserving seats for women MPs seems to have lost political will and it is high time we debate this matter of urgent concern.

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## Women Empowerment: The Road Ahead

Economist Shamika Ranjith highlighted the phenomenon of a Silent Voter's Revolution among the Indian women since 2010s whereby women of our country are playing a decisive role by deciding election outcomes via their franchise. Only a strengthening of this trend can create political scenarios and ecosystem salubrious to female aspirations.

Sociologist Diane Elson gave the 3Rs formula: Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution to lessen the burden of domestic chores among women where assertive females can progress in their quest for affirmative action.

Finally, a COMMUNITY led approach which aims to create greater consciousness among all participants big be it children, adults or elders, with regards to gender stereotypes that have a heavy inertia in our mindset given their nurturing over generations. Only conscious Humans can

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create a reformed HUMANITY.

## Conclusion

'I believe if a pebble is thrown upwards  
I can pierce the heavens  
And see angels at play  
I believe I can soar to heights  
Amidst Human Angels  
But I firmly believe I have to complete  
The role assigned to me here  
Where I dream and Breathe'

These lines by poet Brucallish K Sangma  
aptly reflect the conflicting or diverging  
paths between what she 'can' and what  
she 'must' do. Mankind must endeavor to  
construct a bridge connecting the two.

Finally, we ought to remember that change  
can come from anywhere. Human  
rights are to be dealt only via Human  
institutions and not necessarily the West  
or Northern ~~buddha~~brethren. Eleanor  
Roosevelt, wife of the US President, while  
drafting the Universal Declaration of Human  
Rights (1946) concurred with Jefferson's <sup>on</sup>  
Declaration of Independence.

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the opening text as 'All men are created equal'. However, Hansa Mehta from India, ~~who~~ a member of the Committee, changed it to, 'All Human Beings are created equal' showing the need for gender equality. Her example must inspire every individual that humanity and not modernity is the force consistent with progress. All Women Empowerment needs • is a warm hug of Humanity.

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3. Our greatest ability as humans is not to change the world, but to change ourselves

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our Nation, was instrumental in India's struggle for independence. Through his charisma and unique methods, he was able to bring about a significant CHANGE in our quest. Satyagraha, mass participation, Civil disobedience were techniques that would forever change India's trust with destiny. However ~~the~~ these methods emanated from Gandhi's own experiments at a micro level that brought about the creation of a MAHATMA and an INDEPENDENT India.

The above example is apt for understanding the significance of positive transformation at an individual level which combined with large scale co-operation can aggregate to a macro-level change. In this essay, I wish to lay out the journey of the human race from apes to Homo Sapiens through changes within ourselves that led to the creation of our world that we take pride in.

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## Human Change: An insight

Nobel prize winning economist Richard Thaler popularized the concept of 'Behavioural Science' which puts large emphasis on human behaviour and attitudes as a catalyst for change. According to Dr. Thaler, public policy must strive to 'nudge' humans to alter their ways to guide the society towards the desired goals.

In a study, Abhijit Banerjee leading a team of J-PAL distributed mosquito nets to a village in Congo failing with large number of malaria cases. Normally, this would solve to solve the issue. However because of a lack of nudge in human behaviour, most villagers began using the nets to catch fishes thus prioritizing economic gains over larger social costs of malaria. This outcome sowed as a valuable lesson for our world during the COVID-19 pandemic as wearing masks and regular handwashing were oft rejected as major guidelines.

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The pandemic has shown the world how individual actions can either make or break efforts in our war against the coronavirus. Positive human change at a microlevel was crucial in breaking the chain of transmission. The flagship scheme, 'Swachh Bharat Mission', is aimed at Behavioural change striving to transform our attitudes towards individual hygiene and sanitation. Only then could we have ODF and ODF+ towns, cities or villages.

Historian and thinker, Yuval Noah Harari, explains that long before we built pyramids, undertook voyages or walked on the moon, there was nothing special about us. In fact, pre-historic humans were insignificant creatures with impact on ~~near~~ surroundings as limited as gorillas or a fish. Only when the humans underwent a cognitive revolution did we gain an edge over our rivals and began to shape the world.

Our ability to think, understand and process information led to the beginning of our journey as a superior race. Human cognition combined with collective learning enabled us to share, co-operate, connect enabling the organization of humans into nations, religions, cults or companies.

The Industrial Revolution is considered as a pivotal moment for the world as it popularized trade, enterprise, production thus completely changing the world. However, this change was not as significant as the change in humans which allowed the many industrial revolutions to occur in the first place. Marred in centuries of stagnation during the medieval period, few individuals desired change for the better. Using their cognitive tools they began questioning norms and took

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onward to science, rationality, individualism  
leading to Renaissance and reformation.

Soon humans undertook voyages, created  
factories, exchanged currency and the  
Modern World was born. The power of  
human imagination combined with our grit  
to realize our imaginations rendered us  
the dominant force.

For the sake of illustration, in his famous  
essay, 'I Pencil', Leonard Read brought  
forward the wonder of cooperation and  
collaboration between people cutting  
trees, mining graphite, working in  
factories, marketing, designing and  
managing, just to produce a single  
pencil. Similar mechanism have created  
cars, buildings, cities, aircrafts, satellites  
and most significantly, our present world.

## Human Change across the World

An infant devoid of any notions, ideology and bias grows up in the shelter of his home learning and re-learning from his surroundings. Generally he or she grows up either compliant or defiant to the existing social norms. A grown-up who is a result of a web of complex relations becomes an integral constituent defining the world we live in.

In 1893, an Indian carrying a first class ticket was thrown out from a train in South Africa's Petermaritzburg station because the compartment was 'whites only'. That incident led to the beginning of a movement that would not only alter norms but shake to destruction powerful empires and rigid social evils. Through

his experiences, Gandhiji changed how he saw the world and in doing thus he helped change the world.

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The direction of reform however is not always towards the good. It is astonishing to note how a society can produce a MALALA on the one hand and a KASAB on the other. While the former agitated for her right to education, demanded equality, even taking a bullet to prove her determination, the latter preached hatred, segregation and factionalism. The world must mend ways to create more MALALAs who can help change the KASABS to create harmony.

Global fight against racism proves how only changed perceptions and not laws can make a difference. The virus that is racism has been weakened through the sacrifice of greats such as Martin Luther, Malcolm X and Fred Hampton to name a few. Humanity has expanded its arsenal to create awareness. Cricketers taking the knee in support of #BlackLivesMatter show how sport

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could be a trailblazer for an era of social enlightenment : Black Lives have always mattered.

## Leveraging our capacity for change

Our life has come far but not far enough, things are better but not good enough, humans have indeed changed, but not enough. Our greatest weapon must be spent not in creating newer conflicts but rather firefighting the misfors that ail living.

Women rights and empowerment, caste and its negative manifestations, religious factionalism though prohibited in their negative forms are yet to disappear.

Traditional regressive customs still linger on among many breaking the chain of positive transformation. Only a sufficiently changed society can lead to sufficient reform. To ensure this,

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our policies must aim at educating and changing individuals at a micro level respecting the behavioural components and its potential.

Climate change and the global fight against extinction suffers due to several climate change deniers unwilling to make efforts. Globalisation seems to have reached a point of fracture and protectionism, hyper-nationalism, xenophobia dominate. A handful of vested interests insist on undying off major gains that humanity has overtime achieved.

These forces must be countered by rationality at an individual level. In times of digital media, fake news and free flow of ideologies only our own understanding and not censorship can help. Indeed these are testing times and it is one test that we must pass.

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## Conclusion

Historian Jared Diamond has called the Agricultural Revolution (Neolithic), the biggest mistake committed by mankind.

According to him, the settlement of humans have yielded far greater social costs than net benefit. But he too is optimistic as there are radical changes beginning at individual level and compounding.

We must all take this call and start small. In these situations it is always useful to remember Mises who said, "Humanity's progress has always involved a small minority deviating from the ideas of the majority, until its example finally persuaded others to adopt its innovations as well."