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Women empowerment lies in resolving the tension between paternalistic interventions and the freedom of individual agency and choice.

She was born in a small village in Manipur to a poor family. She was the eldest child and life was tough for her. But she had a fire inside her - a passion for sports. One day she found something unusual : boxing. It was not something girls in her village even considered. Boxing was seen as a man's game but she didn't care. With determination and a will to succeed, she began training on her own. Her family was concerned and society did not support her choice but she kept going. She knew her dreams were bigger than the challenges in her way. Her hard work paid off when she won her first national boxing champion in 2000 and later on she

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won multiple championships including Olympius Bronze Medal in 2012. What made her win extraordinary was that she was a mother of three when she won at the Olympius. She was none other than MARY KOM - symbolising powerful example of individual agency and choice.

Throughout history, women's roles and rights have evolved significantly. Neolithic period gave a quick advantage to male as agriculture needed physical labour. Even Yuval Noah Harari in his book "Sapiens" argued that gender roles became more rigid with the rise of agriculture. It laid the foundation for the patriarchal systems that followed. However, in Rig Vedic period women enjoyed freedom participating in Sabha and Samiti. But in later Vedic period patriarchy began to take hold and women's roles were confined to home. With the rise of Mahajanapadas women were further subordinated in male -

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dominated system. Patriarchy was so deeply entrenched into our psyche that we never questioned it and accepted it as divine.

In India there is great gender paradox as we as a country worship female goddess but we as a society have growing incidences of crime against women. In family a woman is not paid due attention and intra-family resource allocation is biased.

Share of women in overall higher education is increasing but female labour force participation rate is decreasing.

In fact the female labour force participation rate of Bihar is only 11% which is far below the national and global average. This is because parents are educating their daughter not because they can become independent but to find a suitable groom for them. The father of the girl child agrees to pay dowry but disagrees to give

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her equal property rights. The electoral participation of women has outnumbered men but in terms of representation it is still staggering. Of the total elected members in 18th Lok Sabha, only 13.6% are women. India faces problem of asymmetrical representation and underrepresentation. Also, there is feminisation of agriculture but women, but only 12% women in some form have property rights. This great gender paradox has led to great gender divergence impacting the overall development of society.

We see how patriarchy has always sidelined women as they do not want women to control power. Even philosophers who talked a lot about individual liberty, capitalism, socialism did not talk about political empowerment of women. This issue never became a part of public discourse. But as we know, "Personal is Political" so it should be made part of public reasoning. Now, when many issues are coming to the fore

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उमीदवारों को  
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नहीं लिखना  
चाहिए।  
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and women are being empowered but still the fundamental structure is not changed. Why a male dominated society is making laws, why they are trying to empower the females? Even the transformative potential of such a big move like Nari Vandhan Adhiniyam cannot be realised unless the fundamental structure is changed.

Also, deprivation in economic and social sphere is the main reason for other kind of deprivation. Inclusive growth is not possible unless women have equal share in the economy. The global value chain is disrupting and shifting towards Bangladesh, Philippines, Vietnam rather than India because of their increasing female labour force participation rate. In our Constitution, there is provision of equal opportunity but there is divergence between constitutional ideal and social reality. IMF report says that if female labour force participation in India equals to that of men our GDP will grow by 27%. Women empowerment is not only a moral imperative but a socio-economic necessity.

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Women are in a gender trap as societal norms and expectations impose predefined roles on women. This idea aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's - "One is not born rather becomes a woman."

This emphasizes that gender roles are not natural but are imposed on women from birth. Patriarchy as a pervasive social phenomenon is manifested in various dimensions. Tragedy of womanhood is well reflected in care work. Woman is the glue who binds individuals into a family and still she is not recognised by anyone. It is the curse of femininity that rather than getting justice she is asked to compromise.

Also, women's experiences of oppression and empowerment are not uniform but shaped by multiple intersecting factors such as caste, class, religion, region etc. for instance, urban educated women may face challenges like glass ceiling in corporate environment, dalit women face burden of class, caste and gender discrimination at the same time. Empowerment must address these intersecting barriers to create inclusive solutions.

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Now in the present times, gender justice and climate justice are closely interlinked. Women especially in marginalised communities are more affected by climate change. Promoting gender equality will lead to a more sustainable future for everyone.

So far we have focused only on empowering women but empowering a woman is a passive concept.

Simon de Beauvoir in her book, "The Second Sex" writes — "For long male has considered themselves as default representation of humanity and women are seen as the other." There is dichotomy in the concept of empowerment. Empowerment is provided through external measures like laws, policies or programmes designed to uplift women. But this approach feels paternalistic implying that women lack the capacity to empower themselves without external help.

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On the other hand, agency based approach involves the fundamental shift in perceptions and inner transformation. It can enable women to define self-interest, make choices and consider themselves entitled to do so. Agency can challenge the status quo, influences the social norms, moral judgments and search legitimacy in every reaction. Empowerment is achieved through interdependence but agency is prerequisite autonomy. So, agency based empowerment will lead to fundamental transformation of power relations, expansion of choices and capabilities.

Every woman can become the MARY KOM of her own life, exercising her individual agency and choice and unshackling the barriers of paternalism. Her journey reminds us that true empowerment lies not only in providing directions but in creating opportunities that allow individuals to choose their own paths.

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We have entered into era of  
Amritkaal, and now we do not need  
women empowerment rather we need women  
led empowerment.

- "LET US GLOBALISE FEMINISM"
- "LET US FEMINISE COMPASSION"
- "LET US GLOBALISE WENDER JUSTICE"
- "LET US ACHIEVE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY"
- "LET US ACHIEVE EQUITABLE SOCIETY"
- "LET US ADOPT AGENCY APPROACH."

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The essence of gender justice lies in transcending biological differences to recognise the universal human potential for equality and empowerment.

Arsh and Abhya went to the market with their parents. At a toy shop, Arsh saw a beautiful doll. He expressed his desire to buy the doll. On the other hand Abhya was drawn to a robot that moved. She asked her parents to buy the robot for her. Their parents hesitated and told them that dolls are for girls and robots are for boys. Despite the kids' protest they bought the doll for Abhya and robot for Arsh, thinking it was the right choice. On the way home, both siblings sat quietly. Arsh held the robot without enthusiasm and Abhya looked at the doll with disappointment. After a while, their parents noticed their sadness and realised their mistake. They forced their children into roles which

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they didn't choose for themselves. The parents finally switched their toys and understood that everyone should have the freedom to choose and explore their interests, regardless of gender.

Looking back at history we can see how gender roles have changed. In neolithic period, when agriculture became prominent women were restricted to household work and men were considered suitable for field work. During the Rig Vedic period gender roles were not clearly defined. However, over time withs during later Vedic period and with the rise of Mahajanapadas men started to take on more dominant roles. Women's role were mainly seen as homemakers. With the rise of feudalism the same trend continued even in medieval times where women <sup>were</sup> expected to stay at home. In modern times, even though laws have changed to support equality, but old ideas about gender

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Still persist and mindset of people has not changed much.

Gender justice is a concept that promotes full realisation of rights and opportunities for all genders. It seeks to realise equality between men and women, as well as between diverse gender in terms of rights, responsibilities and opportunities. It is a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of gender discrimination. It ensures that women and other gender are not excluded from the full enjoyment of their human rights.

However, we see that there is a concept of gender trap in our society. It refers to the expectations society places on individuals based on their gender. It begins early in life as children are taught to behave in a certain manner. For instance, boys are expected to become strong, unemotional, bread winner for

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the family. On the other hands girls are expected to be nurturing, passive, take responsibility of care work. Gender trap perpetuates through social conformity. Simone de Beauvoir also says that girls are born neutral and they are made women through social conditioning. Gender trap affects not only an individual but overall growth of society.

Recognising the harm caused by these stereotypes it is clear that breaking the gender trap is essential to achieve equality. Equality ensures that everyone has same rights and opportunities, regardless of their gender. There is concept of equality of opportunity in our constitution. But there is divergence between constitutional ideal and social reality. We see there is lack of equality at schools, colleges, workplace and even at homes. At our own homes, intra-family resource allocation is biased. At workplace there is concept of glass ceiling.

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However, equality alone is not enough. There should also be empowerment and that too active and not in passive form. Agency based approach involves the fundamental shift in perceptions and inner transformations, enabling people to define self-interest, make choices and consider themselves entitled to do so. Agency can challenge the status quo, influences the social norms and search legitimacy in every action. For eg., education is a powerful tool for empowerment but it is only meaningful when individuals can use that education to make choices about their careers.

Although there have been many positive steps towards gender justice like recognising same sex marriage, recognising the rights of Transgenders, provision of paternity leave but still challenges persist. We need to bring change in our social as well as behavioural outlook to tackle with these challenges.

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As we see there are many Arsh and Abhya in our society who are not allowed to pursue their dreams freely. Gender justice is not just about laws or policies, it begins with how we treat our children and shape their beliefs. For an equal and empowered society it is necessary that everyone should have -

"FREEDOM TO DREAM

FREEDOM TO EXPLORE

FREEDOM TO BE THEMSELVES

FREEDOM TO FOLLOW THEIR PASSION

so that dreams are not limited by "gender."