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Reversing Lens: Contemporary Gender Biases against Men in Society and Social Media

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Abstract:

This article, “**Reversing Lens: Contemporary Gender Biases against Men in Society and Social Media**,” explores the evolving dynamics of gender inequality by shifting focus toward the often overlooked challenges faced by men. While acknowledging the historical and on-going struggles of women, the study argues that contemporary social, legal, and digital environments have generated new forms of bias that disproportionately affect men. It critically examines legal and institutional frameworks, particularly in the context of family law and gender-specific legislation, where men may encounter presumptions of guilt, unequal custody outcomes, and financial obligations shaped by out-dated notions of male responsibility. It also investigates the role of social media in amplifying these biases through phenomena such as trial by media, digital vigilantism, and the rapid spread of unverified allegations. Cultural representations are also analysed, highlighting how stereotypes of masculinity—such as emotional suppression, aggression, and dominance—limit men’s self-expression and contribute to psychological distress. In addition, the study addresses the growing mental health crisis among men, emphasizing how stigma and societal expectations discourage help-seeking behaviour, leading to higher rates of isolation and suicide. Drawing on empirical data and sociological concepts such as patriarchy, androcentrism, and gender socialization, the article reveals the paradox of male privilege coexisting with systemic and cultural constraints. It concludes by advocating for a more inclusive framework of gender equality that recognizes the experiences of all genders, promotes balanced legal reforms, and encourages a redefinition of masculinity grounded in empathy, emotional openness, and shared social responsibility.

Key Words:

Gender bias, Male marginalization, Legal discrimination, False accusations, Social media trials, Masculinity stereotypes, Mental health stigma, Patriarchy, Gender norms, Inclusive gender equality.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality has historically been framed through a singular lens- one that foregrounds the systemic oppression of women in legal, cultural, and socio-economic domains. Across centuries, women were denied property rights, political participation, and equitable access to education and employment. While these injustices remain central to discussions of gender justice, the contemporary social landscape-especially in the age of digital media-reveals a more layered and complex reality. Increasingly, instances have emerged in which men experience forms of bias, marginalization, and stereotyping rooted in their gender.

This evolving dynamic does not negate the struggles faced by women; rather, it expands the discourse to include the multifaceted ways in which gender norms affect all individuals. In present-day society, men encounter disadvantages in legal proceedings, social narratives, cultural expectations, and mental health recognition. These challenges are amplified by the pervasive reach of social media, where narratives are often simplified, polarized, and rapidly disseminated. The result is a cultural environment where men may be simultaneously perceived as privileged and yet subjected to systemic and symbolic disadvantages.

This article seeks to reverse the traditional analytical lens by examining contemporary gender biases against men, particularly within the contexts of law, media, culture, and mental health. By doing so, it underscores the necessity of a more inclusive and balanced approach to gender equality-one that recognizes vulnerabilities across all genders.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Legal and Institutional Biases: The Question of Presumed Guilt

One of the most significant arenas where gender bias against men becomes evident is within legal and institutional frameworks. While many laws were originally designed to protect women from exploitation and abuse, their implementation in contemporary contexts has sometimes produced unintended consequences. In family courts, for instance, there exists a persistent assumption that women are the primary caregivers. This presumption often disadvantages fathers in custody disputes, even when they are equally or more capable of providing care.

Similarly, in matrimonial conflicts, financial obligations such as alimony frequently fall upon men, reflecting out-dated notions of men as default breadwinners. Courts have occasionally justified such decisions by arguing that economic independence is relative, thereby reinforcing the expectation that men must bear financial responsibility regardless of changing socio-economic realities.

In India, particularly in states like Kerala, debates surrounding the implementation of Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code and the Dowry Prohibition Act have intensified. Media narratives and legal commentaries frequently highlight cases where men are arrested swiftly upon complaint, sometimes without immediate verification. Reports indicate that a significant proportion of such cases are later withdrawn, dismissed, or result in acquittal. Despite this, arrest rates remain disproportionately high, leading to what critics describe as a 'procedure-driven presumption of guilt'.

Judicial observations have occasionally acknowledged this imbalance, cautioning against mechanical arrests and emphasizing the importance of due process. Yet, these concerns coexist with the continued enforcement of protective provisions, creating a paradox where the law simultaneously safeguards and potentially marginalizes. This duality reflects a broader tension within legal systems attempting to reconcile historical injustices with contemporary realities.

2.2 False Accusations and the Rise of Digital Vigilantism

The proliferation of social media has transformed how accusations-particularly those related to gender-are perceived and adjudicated in the public sphere. While movements advocating for accountability and justice have empowered many victims to speak out, they have also given rise to instances where allegations are amplified without adequate verification. For men, the consequences of false or unproven accusations can be devastating, often resulting in irreversible reputational damage.

In the digital age, the phenomenon of 'trial by media' has become increasingly prevalent. Social media platforms enable the rapid dissemination of allegations, often accompanied by public outrage and moral judgment. In such environments, the principle of 'innocent until proven guilty' is frequently overshadowed by the immediacy of public opinion. Even when legal proceedings ultimately exonerate the accused, the social stigma persists, affecting professional opportunities, personal relationships, and mental well-being.

Regional media ecosystems further intensify this dynamic. In Kerala, televised debates and online campaigns have popularized narratives of male victimhood, with hashtags and viral content shaping public perception. While some of these narratives may stem from genuine grievances, their amplification can also contribute to polarization, reducing complex legal and social issues to simplified binaries of victim and perpetrator.

This digital landscape underscores the need for responsible media practices and critical engagement with information. Without such safeguards, social media risks becoming a tool that perpetuates new forms of gender bias even as it seeks to challenge older ones.

2.3 Cultural Stereotypes and the Burden of Masculinity

Cultural representations play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes toward gender. Traditionally, men have been depicted as strong, assertive, and emotionally resilient. While these traits may appear empowering, they also impose restrictive expectations that limit the expression of vulnerability and emotional authenticity.

Contemporary media often reinforces stereotypes that portray men as inherently aggressive, privileged, or emotionally detached. Such representations overlook the diversity of male experiences and contribute to a homogenized understanding of masculinity. Social media platforms, with their tendency toward sensationalism, further entrench these stereotypes by framing men primarily as oppressors or beneficiaries of systemic privilege.

In recent years, another dimension of cultural pressure has emerged in the form of body image expectations. Just as women have long been subjected to unrealistic standards of beauty, men are increasingly expected to conform to hyper-muscular and aesthetically idealized physiques. This shift has led to rising concerns about body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and conditions such as muscle dysmorphia among men.

These cultural constructs reflect what may be termed the 'double-edged sword' of patriarchy. While patriarchal systems historically privileged men, they also confined them within rigid roles that prioritize dominance, control, and emotional suppression. As a result, men may experience a sense of alienation, unable to reconcile societal expectations with personal identities.

2.4 Workplace Expectations and the Silent Crisis of Mental Health

The professional sphere represents another domain where gender biases against men manifest in subtle yet significant ways. Despite increasing advocacy for gender equality, traditional expectations regarding male roles persist. Men are often expected to prioritize career advancement and financial stability above all else, discouraging them from pursuing caregiving responsibilities or flexible work arrangements.

In fields traditionally associated with women, men may face skepticism or discrimination, highlighting the persistence of gendered occupational norms. At the same time, societal expectations of toughness and self-reliance discourage men from expressing vulnerability or seeking support in times of distress.

This reluctance to address emotional well-being contributes to a silent mental health crisis. Studies consistently show that men have higher rates of suicide compared to women, a statistic often linked to societal pressures and the stigma surrounding mental health. The expectation that men must endure hardship without complaint exacerbates feelings of isolation and despair.

Social media, rather than alleviating this burden, sometimes reinforces it. Expressions of vulnerability by men are frequently met with ridicule or dismissal, perpetuating the notion that emotional openness is incompatible with masculinity. This environment not only discourages help-seeking behaviour but also normalizes the suppression of emotional experiences.

2.5 Empirical Realities: Data and the Perception of Bias

Statistical evidence further complicates the discourse on gender bias. Crime data from India indicates that a notable proportion of cases registered under gender-specific laws are later classified as false, mistaken, or lacking sufficient evidence. While such classifications do not necessarily imply malicious intent, they highlight the potential for legal processes to impose significant burdens on individuals who are ultimately found not guilty.

At the same time, arrest patterns reveal a pronounced gender asymmetry, with men constituting the overwhelming majority of those apprehended under such laws. Even before trial, individuals may experience detention, social stigma, and financial strain. High acquittal rates in certain categories of cases further underscore the gap between accusation and conviction, raising questions about procedural fairness.

In regions like Kerala, these patterns are particularly visible due to higher reporting rates and active media engagement. Public discourse often frames these statistics as evidence of systemic bias, although interpretations vary widely depending on ideological perspectives. What remains clear, however, is that the legal process itself can become a site of gendered experience, shaping perceptions of justice and inequality.

2.6 The Persistence of Gendered Attitudes: Socialization and Internalization

To understand why such biases persist, it is necessary to examine the underlying cultural and psychological frameworks that shape gender relations. From an early age, individuals are socialized into roles that define appropriate behaviour based on gender. Boys are often encouraged to be assertive, independent, and emotionally restrained, while girls are socialized toward empathy and caregiving.

These norms are reinforced through family structures, educational systems, media representations, and peer interactions. Over time, they become internalized, influencing both individual behaviour and institutional practices. Importantly, such biases are not exclusively perpetuated by one gender; both men and women may unconsciously uphold and reproduce them.

Global studies on implicit bias suggest that a significant majority of individuals hold attitudes that favour traditional gender roles, particularly in leadership and employment contexts. This widespread internalization complicates efforts to achieve genuine equality, as it requires not only structural change but also a transformation of deeply ingrained beliefs.

2.7 The Paradox of Male Privilege and Restriction

The discourse on gender bias often encounters a central paradox: men are perceived as beneficiaries of systemic privilege, yet they also experience constraints imposed by the very structures that privilege them. This duality reflects the complexity of gender as a social construct, where advantages in certain domains coexist with disadvantages in others.

For instance, the expectation that men should serve as primary providers may confer social status but also imposes significant pressure and limits personal choice. Similarly, norms that discourage emotional expression may align with ideals of strength but contribute to psychological distress and relational difficulties.

This paradox challenges binary frameworks that categorize individuals solely as oppressors or victims. Instead, it calls for a more nuanced understanding that recognizes the interplay of privilege and vulnerability within gendered experiences.

2.8 Breaking the Cycle: Toward Inclusive Gender Equity

Addressing gender bias against men requires a shift toward more inclusive and holistic approaches to equality. This involves acknowledging the ways in which traditional norms harm all individuals, regardless of gender, and fostering environments that encourage authenticity, empathy, and mutual respect.

One important step is redefining masculinity to include traits such as emotional openness, caregiving, and collaboration. Encouraging men to participate in these roles not only benefits their well-being but also contributes to more balanced and equitable social structures. Educational initiatives and awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and promoting alternative models of identity.

Policy reforms are equally important. Legal frameworks must strive to balance protection with fairness, ensuring that safeguards for vulnerable groups do not inadvertently create new forms of bias. This requires continuous evaluation, transparency, and a commitment to due process.

Collaborative efforts between men and women are essential in this process. Initiatives that promote dialogue and shared responsibility can help dismantle harmful norms and build more inclusive communities. By recognizing that gender equality is not a zero-sum game, society can move toward solutions that benefit all individuals.

2.9 Conclusion: Reimagining Gender for a Balanced Future

The contemporary landscape of gender relations reveals a complex interplay of progress and challenge. While significant strides have been made in addressing historical injustices against women, new forms of bias affecting men have emerged in legal, cultural, and digital contexts. These developments highlight the evolving nature of gender inequality and the need for adaptive, inclusive approaches.

Reversing the analytical lens does not diminish the importance of women's struggles; rather, it broadens the conversation to encompass the diverse experiences of all genders. By acknowledging the challenges faced by men—whether in courts, workplaces, media representations, or mental health—society can develop a more comprehensive understanding of equality.

Ultimately, the goal is not to replace one form of bias with another, but to transcend binary frameworks altogether. A truly equitable society is one in which individuals are free to define themselves beyond restrictive norms, supported by systems that uphold fairness, dignity, and compassion. In such a society, the liberation of one gender is intrinsically linked to the liberation of all, paving the way for a future where equality is both inclusive and enduring.

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