

# Female Genital Mutilation: Secret Practice in India

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**Abstract-** In this paper I want to explore discrimination faced by women in the world because of their Gender. Gender includes a range of physical, biological and behavioural characteristics pertaining to and differentiating between masculinity and femininity. Gender inequality still exists globally despite of substantial national and international measures that have taken towards Gender equality. At least one in three women around the world is estimated to have been coerced in Sex, physically beaten or otherwise abused in her life time.

In this context the study wants to explore the most harmful practice faced by contemporary women in some parts of the world. That is the practice of Female Genital Mutilation. In spite of global efforts to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation every year 3 million girls are subjected to this harmful practice mostly in Africa and Asia. The barbaric practice is associated with immediate and long term complications and has no benefit what so ever, is unethical and has no religious basis. From this overview, this article outlines the practice of Female genital Mutilation in the context of Indian regions.

**Index Terms-** “Barbaric”, “Circumcision”, “Female”, “Genital”, “Gender”, “Mutilation”, “Sex”

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the name of Gender the women have been discriminated throughout the world. This can be estimated by the fact that although females represent half of the world's people, women and girls make up 70 percent of the world's poor and two-thirds of the world's illiterate population.<sup>i</sup>

Because of her Gender women have been subjugated by many ways as Women throughout the globe lack support for fundamental functions of a human life. They are under nourished than men, less healthy, more susceptible to physical cruelty and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have paraprofessional or technological education. They face great hurdles, including pressure from family or spouse, sex intolerance in hiring, and sexual aggravation in the workplace without effective legal recourse.<sup>ii</sup>

One of the most inhuman practices faced by women's in some regions of the world is *Female Genital Mutilation* also known as *Female Genital Cutting* and *Female Circumcision*. This practice is carried out by some communities who believe that it reduces a women's libido. This practice is performed just after the girl attains puberty or before puberty. The World Health Organization has defined it as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons”. The WHO estimates that 100–140 million women and girls around the world have experienced this procedure

including 92 million in Africa . According to WHO *FGM* can be categorised into four types according to the extent of the injury: type I includes removal of the Clitoral hood, type II, includes removal of the Clitoris and inner labia, type III is removal of all or part of the inner and outer labia and usually the clitoris and fusion of the wound leaving a small hole for the passage of urine and menstrual blood. The fused wound is opened for intercourse and childbirth.<sup>iii</sup>

This barbaric practice is prevalent still and is know by the fact that around globally 100–140 million girls have been subjected to Female Genital Mutilation this data according to World Bank as discussed above. In spite of global efforts to eradicate the practice, but it is still prevalent.<sup>iv</sup>This practice is mostly practised by Diaspora communities round the world though and it is concentrated in 29 African countries, certain ethnic groups in Asia (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), the Middle East (Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine and Israel), and South America (Columbia, Ecuador and Peru).<sup>v</sup>

This reason for performing this barbaric practice is that as it has been known that sexual behaviour is a result of interaction of biology and psychology. Sexual excitement of the female can be triggered by stimulation of erotogenic areas; part of which is the clitoris. Female circumcision is done to minimize sexual desire and to preserve virginity.<sup>vi</sup>

## II. CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In the Indian society the Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem. The women have been relegated to the secondary status both within the household and workplaces due to the presence of Traditional patriarchal norms.<sup>vii</sup>

The patriarchal structure of society in India is responsible for the gender inequality. In the words of famous sociologists **Sylvia Walby**, patriarchy is “a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”. Discrimination against women in Indian society is an age old phenomena. The religious beliefs, whether it is Hindu, Muslim or any other religion gives legitimacy to the system of patriarchy. For example, as per ancient Hindu law giver **Manu**: “Women are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, they must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son in old age or as widows. In no circumstances she should be allowed to assert herself independently”. In the contemporary Indian society the above description of Manu is still relevant in some cases. Except certain section were women are independent and they can take part their decision by own. In Muslims also the situation is same and there too sanction for discrimination or subordination is provided by religious texts and Islamic

traditions. Similarly in other religious beliefs also women are being discriminated against in one way or other.<sup>viii</sup>

The Female genital mutilation is probably one of the biggest secrets of modern Indian discrimination or rather we can say inhuman treatment against women. In India, it is widely practiced by the Dawoodi Bohra community, a sect of the Shia-Muslims, who are led by the Syedna. This barbaric practice is locally termed as 'Khatna'. Some of the reasons include family honour, increasing sexual pleasure for the male, enhancing fertility, [social acceptance](#) and preservation of virginity. If we take the Indian context such operations usually take place in the [Mullanis](#) house, and those who practice it are given permission from the clergy of Dwoodi Bohra sect. This Barbaric practice is also prevalent in the Bohra community in Pakistan.

The matter, even though unjust, gets buried inside the girls' mind like any normal process. The women are made to believe that FGM is necessary to ensure acceptance by their community and are unaware that FGM is not practiced in most of the world. Because of the patriarchal structure makes women are either too afraid or too embarrassed to raise their voice against such oppression.<sup>ix</sup> The girl's circumcision has been kept an absolute secret not only from outsiders but also from the men of the community<sup>x</sup>

### III. CONSEQUENCES OF THIS BARBARIC PRACTICE

The victims of this practice complaint of many health complications such as severe bleeding, tetanus, infections and some cases of frigidity. Because the practice is performed with a razor and the perpetrators often used [abeer](#) or [kapurkanchi](#) powder mixed with silk thread ashes to put over the clitoris after cutting takes place for its cooling effect and for its adhesive value. Which is totally unhygienic?<sup>x</sup>

The other health hazards include severe pain and shock, complications in pregnancy and childbirth, sexual dysfunction, difficulties in menstruation and [psychological damages](#) among many consequences. In addition to these there are considerable psychosexual, psychological and social consequences of *FGM*.<sup>xi</sup> Women undergone this barbaric practice of FGM faced a significantly greater risk of requiring a Caesarean section, an episiotomy and an extended hospital stay, and also of suffering post-partum haemorrhage. Women who have undergone infibulation suffer from prolonged and obstructed labour, sometimes resulting in foetal death and [obstetric fistula](#). The infants of mothers who have undergone more extensive forms of FGM are at an increased risk of dying at birth.

There is also a high risk of HIV transmission in the women undergone the process. Because the procedure is coupled with blood loss, and because one instrument is often used for a number of operations, FGM increases the risk of HIV transmission. This is particularly the case in communities where a large group of girls are cut the same day as part of a socio-cultural rite.<sup>xii</sup>

### IV. ADDRESSING THE DISCRIMINATION BY UNITED NATION

Achieving Gender Equality is a goal has been accepted by governments, regional and international organizations. Any new

developmental structure must prioritize Gender empowerment primarily because of the persistent injustice faced by women around the world with women disproportionately representing among the poorest and most marginalized. It is enshrined in international agreements and commitments. The creation of a body of international human rights law is one of the United Nations great achievements. The United Nations has helped negotiate more than 70 human rights treaties and declarations—many focused on the rights of vulnerable groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities, minorities and indigenous peoples. Together, these treaties and declarations have helped create a 'culture of human rights' throughout the world, providing a powerful tool to protect and promote all rights.<sup>xiii</sup>

Far reaching commitments to women rights are encapsulated in core international human rights instruments including the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) as well as Beijing Declaration also in Millennium Development Goal, UN Security council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889.<sup>xiv</sup> *Female genital mutilation (FGM)* is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. February 6th is International Day of Zero Tolerance for *Female Genital Mutilation*. Ending FGM by 2030 is one of the UN Global Goals. In December 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the elimination of *Female Genital Mutilation*. The resolution was passed unanimously and India was part of this unanimous decision. Several countries in the world have banned the practice of FGM. Nigeria is the latest country which recently passed a law banning FGM, taking the total of countries banning this Practice to 23 in Africa alone.<sup>xv</sup>

Laws against the practice also exist in at least 12 countries with immigrant populations from countries that practice FGM. Very recently, the United States passed a federal law making it illegal for girls to be taken out of the United States for the purpose of performing FGM. Funding for efforts to end FGM has also increased--from less than one percent of UNICEF's budget in 1993, when Equality Now [started a campaign](#) calling on UN agencies to address this serious violation of human rights--to millions of dollars today.

### V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of gender, unfavourable treatment of individuals denies the rights, opportunities or resources to a particular section of society. Throughout the globe, women are treated unequally and less value is placed on their lives as compared to men because of their gender. Women's degree of difference, right to use to power and control of possessions is central to this discrimination in all institutional spheres, i.e. the family circle, community, market, and state. In spite of institutional discrimination there is barbaric practices as *Female genital mutilation* which has health and social hazard and stigma, the effects of which do not only affect its victims, but its repercussion reaches the other partner, the family and the community at large also. India is generally considered to be third world where the women have given the secondary status. It has to be condemned by all, and there must be a target in the coming few years to ban it at the level of all the Indian health authorities as well as the Indian governments.

In order to solve this issue following suggestions can go long way in bringing about a change in entire belt.

1 Nothing has changed since. This barbaric practice goes on unchecked to this day, and I believe legal intervention is necessary as soon as possible. Establishment of sufficient number of courts in the state to deal with the cases related to women and to resolve chronic as well as fresh cases of discrimination.

2 Develop among women awareness about their rights and obligations in all the fields of life. While this process may be carried out in the schools, Families and education.

3 The need to widen the circle and strengthen our alliance: In the last decade, it has become increasingly apparent that the involvement of younger generation in women's rights, development and social justice works is absolutely necessary. Many activists and professionals are reaching the last stretches of their carriers, making it essential to foster the transfer the transfer of knowledge between generations and regions in order to sustain and built upon efforts to date.

4 Marketing feminism: In many parts of the world, there is a negative stigma associated with feminism: some say, for example, it is too angry and anti-male, it is about victims

and complaints, or worse, it is irrelevant. This image problem inhabits our success. We need to broaden the movement by attracting new alliance from all sectors, ages and identities.

5 To make lasting change for girls, first, governments need the political will to match their words with action. Enactment of laws against FGM is only the first step. Too many governments are failing to properly implement their laws or to educate their citizens about the laws as Kenya's and Nigeria.

6 Efforts to end FGM must be rooted in the recognition that FGM arises due to gender inequality and the lower status of women in society. As such, anti-FGM efforts must include work to create equality between men and women, girls and boys.

#### AUTHORS

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