UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

Girls are weighed down by restrictions, boys with

demands — two equally harmful disciplines.

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EXAM YEAR

2023

PAPER

Essay

SUBJECT

Essay

MARKS

125

WORD LIMIT

~1200 words

Answer Hint

Gender inequality harms both sexes through different forms of social conditioning: girls are often constrained by restrictions on freedom, mobility and choices, while boys are burdened by expectations of strength, success and emotional suppression. The essay should examine family, education, workplace and cultural dimensions, recognise intersectionality, and argue for a society based on equal freedom, dignity, opportunity and emotional well-being for all genders

Model Answer

Introduction

Gender discrimination is often understood primarily as the restrictions imposed on women and girls. However, patriarchy and rigid gender roles also impose invisible burdens on boys and men. Girls may be told what they can wear, where they can go and whom they can marry, while boys may be told that they must be strong, successful, financially independent and emotionally invulnerable. Thus, gender stereotypes restrict human potential in different but equally damaging ways.

The burden of restrictions on girls

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From childhood, girls in many societies experience restrictions on mobility, education, career choices, friendships and personal autonomy. Concerns about safety frequently become justification for restricting freedom rather than improving the safety of public spaces.

A girl may be discouraged from travelling alone, choosing a particular profession or returning home late. In some communities, early marriage, preference for sons and unequal access to nutrition and education further narrow her opportunities.

The consequences extend beyond the individual. When half the population cannot fully participate in education, employment and decision-making, society loses human capital and economic potential.

The burden of expectations on boys

Boys face a different form of social conditioning. They are often expected to be physically strong, emotionally tough, financially successful and dominant. Expressions such as “boys do not cry” teach children to suppress vulnerability rather than understand and communicate emotions.

Academic and career expectations can also create immense pressure. Failure may be perceived not merely as an individual setback but as a failure of masculinity. Boys may consequently hesitate to seek counselling or emotional support.

The expectation that men must become primary earners can also create anxiety in an increasingly competitive economy. Thus, the same social system that privileges men in certain dimensions can simultaneously impose psychological burdens upon them.

Family and socialisation

Gender roles are frequently established within the family. Girls may be taught domestic responsibilities while boys are encouraged to prioritise education and careers. At the same time, boys may be discouraged from household work because it is considered feminine.

A more progressive family would distribute responsibilities according to ability and circumstance rather than gender. Children should learn that caring, leadership, emotional expression, ambition and responsibility are human qualities rather than masculine or feminine properties.

Education as an instrument of transformation

Schools can challenge gender stereotypes by providing equal opportunities in sports, science, leadership and cultural activities.

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Textbooks and classroom practices should avoid reinforcing stereotypical representations.

Boys should be taught that emotional expression is compatible with strength, while girls should be encouraged to develop confidence, scientific temperament, leadership and financial independence.

Gender-sensitive education should therefore not merely empower girls; it should liberate all children from restrictive stereotypes.

Workplace and economic dimensions

Women continue to face barriers such as unequal care responsibilities, occupational segregation and safety concerns. Meanwhile, men often face expectations of long working hours and uninterrupted career progression.

A gender-just workplace should provide equal opportunities, fair remuneration, parental responsibilities for both genders, safe working conditions and flexibility wherever feasible.

Shared caregiving can reduce the pressure on women to choose between family and career and simultaneously allow men to participate more meaningfully in family life.

Beyond a binary understanding of gender

Gender justice should also recognise that individuals do not always conform to traditional gender identities or roles. Discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation further demonstrates the dangers of rigid social categories.

The objective should therefore be equality of dignity and opportunity rather than replacing one hierarchy with another.

The way forward

The solution lies not in treating men and women identically in every circumstance but in ensuring substantive equality. Families must encourage children to make choices based on aptitude rather than gender. Schools must promote gender-sensitive education. Workplaces must enable both men and women to balance professional and caregiving responsibilities.

Media also has an important role. Instead of presenting men exclusively as providers and women exclusively as caregivers, it can portray diverse models of masculinity, femininity and family life.

Most importantly, society must replace control and expectation with autonomy and responsibility. Girls should be trusted with freedom, and

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boys should be given permission to express vulnerability.

Conclusion

A just society does not merely remove restrictions from girls; it also removes unrealistic expectations from boys. Gender equality means allowing every individual to develop according to talent, aspiration and conscience rather than socially imposed roles. When girls are given freedom and boys are given emotional space, society does not lose traditional values—it gains healthier families, more productive workplaces and more fulfilled citizens.

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