

A STUDY OF GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract: Gender inequality that exists among every region, social class and prevents the growth of Indian economy from improving the lives of Indian people. The reality of gender inequality in India is very complex and diversified, because it exists in every field like education, employment opportunities, income, health, cultural issues, social issues, economic issues etc. An attempt has been made to find out those factors which are responsible for this problem in India. So, this paper highlights the multi-dimensional context of gender inequalities prevalent in India. The study also attempts to analyze the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment. Practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study is based on purely from secondary sources. The researchers have tried to suggest some relevant strategies and policies implication for reducing this gender inequality and to promote the dignified position for Indian women. The study concludes by an observation that access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Economic, Social & Cultural issues, Women Empowerment, Education.

Introduction: Gender issues mean the discussion on both men and women, though women who suffer from gender inequality. From all gender issues, gender inequality is the most prevalent in India. Consideration of gender inequality is now common in Government, Non-Government organizations, and in the politics in India. The policy makers are strongly believed that a positive commitment to gender equality and equity will strengthen every area of action to reduce poverty because women can bring new energy and new sights. A lot of debates are going on women and their development since last few decades. Gender Inequality means disparity between men and women in different social, economical & political, cultural and legal aspects. India is ranked 125 of 159 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII). The ratio of maternal mortality is 174 against every 100,000 live births. Only 12.2 per cent of Parliament seats are held by women. 26.8 per cent of women above the age of 15 years are part of India's labour force compared to 79.1 per cent men.

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, and gender based violence and political participation. However there are significant gap between policy

advancements and actual practice at the community level. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave. When women are empowered, the whole family benefit, thus benefiting the society as a whole and these benefits often have a ripple effect on future generations.

History of Gender Inequality: If we highlight ancient India, an Indian woman was in the position of high esteem and was pronounced by the word of maata (mother) or Devi (goddess) in the Vedas and Upanishads. Same as Manu Smriti, woman was considered as a precious being and in the early Vedic age, girls were looked after with care. Then practice

of polygamy deteriorated the position of woman and in the medieval period, the practices of purdha system, dowry system, and sati system came into being. But with the passage of time, the status of woman was lowered. After the development of science and technology, female feticides is being practiced by large number of people. This has also led to a drop in the female ratio. The Indian census 2011 state wise shows that Kerala represent the highest sex ratio with 1084 females per 1000 males while Haryana represents the lowest sex ratio with just 877 women per 1000 males. Then the dowry became popular and it was the starting period of female infanticide practices in few areas. In India, a sex-selection phenomenon has been in place since the 1980s, with men born during this period now at marriageable age. Then the urbanization since the 1990s where a lot of families and men have moved to cities to look for work. People are much wealthier but at the same time there's pressure to produce sons as an heir, so educated, wealthy families are now more likely to have sex selection. These entire factors are coming to play and creating this toxic mixture, which has turned violence against women into a bigger issue today. The origin of the gender inequality has been always the male dominance. At least in India, a woman still needs the anchor of a husband and a family. Their dominating nature has led women to walk with their head down. It was all practiced from the beginning and is followed till date. In the case of a woman's reservation in parliament, the opposing parties believe that women are born to do household tasks and manage children and family. In many parts of India, women are viewed as an economic and financial liability despite contribution in several ways to our society, economy and by their families. The crime against women is increasing day by day. Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual harassment, molestation, eve-teasing, forced prostitution, sexual-exploitation, at work places is a common affair today. So, it's an alarming issue for our country. The major reasons for the gender inequality are identified as the need of a male heir for the family, huge dowry, continuous physical and financial support to girl child, poverty, domestic-violence, farming as major job for poor and the caste system.

Types of Gender Inequality: According to Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen (2001), there are seven types of gender inequalities at present in India. Here is a brief explanation of all the types of gender inequality.

Mortality Inequality: In this, Inequality between women and men directly involves matters of life and death, and takes the brutal form of unusually high mortality rates for women and a consequent preponderance of men in the total population, as opposed to the preponderance of women found in

societies with little or no gender bias in health care and nutrition.

Natality Inequality: - In this kind of inequality a preference is given to boys over girls. It is ardent in many of the male dominated societies and these manifests in the form of parents wanting their newborn to be a boy rather than a girl. With the availability of modern techniques to determine the gender of foetus, sex selective abortions has become common in India.

Employment Inequality: In terms of employment as well as promotion at work women often face greater handicap than men. This is clearly exemplified as men getting priorities in getting better work opportunities and pay scale than their female counterparts.

Ownership Inequality: In many societies ownership of property can also be very unequal. Since ages the traditional property rights have favored men in the most parts of India. The absence of claims to property can not only reduce the voice of women, but also make it harder for women to enter and flourish in commercial, economic and even some social activities.

Special Opportunity Inequality: Even when there is little difference in basic facilities including schooling, the opportunities of higher education may be far fewer for young women than young men. Indeed, gender biasness in higher education and professional training can be observed in India.

Basic-Facility Inequality: Even when demographic characteristics do not show much or any anti-female bias, there are other ways in which women can have less than a square deal.

Household inequality: There are often enough, basic inequalities in gender relations within the family or the household, which can take many different forms. Even in cases in which there are no overt signs of anti-female bias in, say, survival or son-preference or education, or even in promotion to higher executive positions, the family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and child care.

Review of Literature:

Thomas, R.E. (2013), has highlighted his paper with the state of gender based inequality in the modern India. It has presented gender inequality with the help of some facts & figures and representing the inequality practiced in India & its comparison with other Asian & Western countries.

Jayachandran, S. (2014), has presented the roots of gender inequality in developing countries. This paper also discussed the several mechanisms through which the economic development could improve the relative outcomes of women & gender gaps can be reduced as country grows.

Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011) Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.

Sethuraman K. (2008) The Role of Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence in child Growth and Under nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This research paper explores the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community.

Objectives of the Study:

- 1) To identify the factors behind in growing gender inequality in India
- 2) To know the status of global gender gap and inequality.
- 3) To identify the Hindrances in the Path of Women Empowerment.
- 4) To study the Government Schemes For Women Empowerment.

Research Methodology: This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

Factors behind Growing Gender Inequality: There are so many factors which are fully responsible for gender inequality in India. These factors are as follows:-

Economic Factors: Labour Participation: There is wage inequality between man and woman in India. A substantial number of women enter the labor market after thirties, generally after completion of their reproductive roles of child bearing and rearing.

Access to Credit: There are large disparities between men and women in terms of access to banking services. Women often lack collateral for bank loans due to low levels of property ownership and micro-credit schemes have come under scrutiny for coercive lending practices.

Occupational Inequality: Women are not allowed to have combat roles in military services. Permanent commission could not be granted to female officers because they have neither been trained for command nor have been given the responsibility in India.

Property Rights: Although women have equal rights under the law to own property and receive equal inheritance rights, yet in practice, women are at a disadvantage. The Hindu Succession Act of 2005

provides equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property, the law is weakly enforced.

Women's Inequality in Proper Inheritance: Women are insignificantly deprived of their proper inheritance culturally and religiously as well. The religious constitution doesn't give women equal inheritance; there is a segregation of giving the property to women as they will not be given the property as men can have. Though Islamic constitution permits women having at least half of the property as man, society is reluctant to give the desired property to women let alone giving the equal share.

Employment Inequality: Some common inequalities that take place in the workplace are the gender-based imbalances of individuals in power and command over the management of the organization. Women are not able to move up into higher paid positions quickly as compared to men. Some organizations have more inequality than others, and the extent to which it occurs can differ greatly. In the workplace the men usually hold the higher positions and the women often hold lower paid positions such as secretaries.

Social Factors:

Education: The female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. According to census of India 2011, literacy rate of female is 65.46% compared to males which are 82.14%.

Health: On health issue, the gender inequality between women's and men's life expectancy and women live compared to men in good health because of lots of violence, disease, or other relevant factors.

Patriarchal Society: Most of India has strong patriarchal custom, where men hold authority over female family members and inherit property & title. It is the custom where inheritance passes from father to son, women move in with the husband & his family upon marriage & marriages include a bride price or dowry.

Dowry: The dowry system in India contributes to gender inequalities by influencing the perception that girls are a burden on families. Such belief limits the resources invested by parents in their girls and limit her bargaining power within the family.

Gender-Based Violence: Gender-based violence such as rape, sexual assault, insult to modesty, kidnapping, abduction, cruelty by intimate partner or relatives, importation or trafficking of girls, persecution for dowry, indecency and all other crimes are practiced on women. These crimes show the high degree of inequality in India.

Women's Inequality in Decision Making: In India, Women have less authority than men to legal recognition and protection, as well as lower access to public knowledge and information, and less decision-making power both within and outside the home.

This is also one of the reasons for inequality in gender.

Cultural Factors: Patrilineality System: It is a common kinship system in which an individual's family membership derives from and is traced through his or her father's lineage it generally involves the inheritance of property, names, or titles by persons related through one's male kin.

Role of Sons in Religious Rituals: Another factor is that of religious practices, which can only be performed by males for their parents' afterlife. Sons are often the only person entitled to performing funeral rights for their parents.

The Status Global Gender Gap And Inequality: The Global Gender Gap Index presented the measure of one important aspect of gender equality the relative gaps between women and men across four key areas: health, education, economy and politics. The Index was developed in part to address the need for a consistent and comprehensive measure for gender equality that can track a country's progress over time. On average, the 144 countries covered in the Report have closed 96% of the gap in health outcomes between women and men, unchanged since last year, and more than 95% of the gap in educational attainment, an improvement of almost one full percentage point since last year and the highest value ever measured by the Index. However, the gaps between women and men on economic participation and political empowerment remain wide: only 59% of the economic participation gap has been closed a continued reversal on several years of progress and the lowest value measured by the Index since 2008 and about 23% of the political gap, continuing a trend of slow but steady improvement. Weighted by population, in 2016, the average progress on closing the global gender gap stands at a score of 0.683 meaning an average gap of 31.7% remains to be closed worldwide across the four Index dimensions in order to achieve universal gender parity. Out of the 142 countries covered by the Index both this year and last year, 68 countries have increased their overall gender gap score compared to

last year, while 74 have seen it decrease. It therefore has been an ambiguous year for global gender parity, with uneven progress at best.

All things held equal, with current trends, the overall global gender gap can be closed in 83 years across the 107 countries covered since the inception of the Report just within the statistical lifetime of baby girls born today. However, the most challenging gender gaps remain in the economic sphere and in health. At the current rate of change, and given the widening economic gender gap since last year, it will not be closed for another 170 years. The economic gender gap this year has reverted back to where it stood in 2008, after a peak in 2013. On the other hand, on current trends, the education-specific gender gap could be reduced to parity within the next 10 years. The currently widest gender gap, in the political dimension, is also the one exhibiting the most progress, narrowing by 9% since 2006. On current trends, it could be closed within 82 years. The time to close the health gender gap remains undefined. Formally the smallest gap, it has oscillated in size with a general downward trend. Today, the gap is larger than it stood in 2006, in part due to specific issues in select countries, in particular China and India. Some regions should expect to see their gender gaps narrow faster than the global rate of change. Among these are South Asia, with a projected closing of the gender gap in 46 years, Western Europe in 61 years, Latin America in 72 years and Sub-Saharan Africa, due to achieve parity in 79 years. Projections for other world regions suggest closing their gaps will take longer than 100 years, namely 129 years in the Middle East and North Africa, 146 years in East Asia and the Pacific, and 149 years in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Given the slow progress over the last decade, the gender gap in North America is expected to close in 158 years. None of these forecasts are foregone conclusions. Instead they reflect the current state of progress and serve as a call to action to policymakers and other stakeholders to accelerate gender equality.

Table: 1 Details of Gender Gap Index – 2012 (Out of 135 Countries)

Gender Gap sub-Indices	India	
	Rank	Score
Economic Participation and Opportunity	123	0.4588
Educational Attainment	121	0.8525
Health and Survival	134	0.9612
Political Empowerment	17	0.3343
Overall Index	105	0.6442

Source: World Economic Forum (2012) Global Gender Gap Index – 2012

Hindrances of Women Empowerment: The main Problems that were faced by women in past days and still today up to some extent:

Gender discrimination
Lack of Education
Female Infanticide
Financial Constraints
Family Responsibility
Low Mobility
Low ability to bear Risk
Low need for achievement
Marriage in same caste

Child marriage
Government Schemes for Women Empowerment: The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. Some of these are as follows:

1. Rastria Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October, 1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98.
5. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
6. Swayasjdha.
7. Swa Shakti Group.
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP).
9. Swalamban.
10. Crèches/ Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mother.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Swadhar.
13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975),
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).

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19. Short Stay Homes.
20. Ujjawala (2007).
21. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan).
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).
23. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM).
24. Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY).
25. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS).
26. Working Women's Forum.
27. Indira Mahila Kendra.
28. Mahila Samiti Yojana.
29. Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
30. Indira Priyadarahini Yojana.
31. SBI's Sree Shakti Scheme.
32. SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi.
33. NGO's Credit Schemes.
34. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes.

Conclusion: There is a solution of every problem. For reducing gender inequality in India, we should offer high level of education to girls and increase women empowerment. We should also give them opportunity in active politics & social activities so that social integration in Indian society can be made. Government should make policies & strategies regarding stopping the sex identification & abortions. In context of above NGOs can also play an important role to eradicate Gender Inequality. Politicians should frame out policies for increasing social welfare development regarding this issue. The Campaign of our Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" can be successful, when the mindset of Indian society will be changed towards women.

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