



A STUDY ON IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE GOAL OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

The term gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. This paper deals with importance of gender equality towards achieving the goal of women empowerment. It outlines the gender inequality scenario in India and types of inequalities between men and women. This paper sheds light on importance of gender equality and role of gender equality in women empowerment, gender concern in development and gender mainstreaming in development.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must be made available in order to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore, a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same it only means that, same access should be given to opportunities and changes which is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex. Achieving gender

equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favor, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Jayachandran, S. (2014), has presented the main cause of gender inequality in developing countries. This paper also discussed the several tools that helps in reducing the gap of women & men inequality. Chaudhary, & Sarkar, D. (2012), focused on the main factors that cause the inequality i.e., educational status, work participation, level of gender inequality and suggested some relevant strategies to overcome this gender inequality to promote the deprived women. Raju. (2014), has examined the gender perception in India on the basis of demographic, social, economic and political

context. The paper has broadly discussed the issue of gender inequality, women empowerment & reproductive health among women of India. Some measures under taken by the International and national organizations were also discussed in this paper. Rustagi, (2015), this paper focus that if the participation of women increases in different sector, then it would eliminate gender inequalities in income & wages. Sharma, R.E. (2015), this paper highlights the inequality among the different states of India in today's modern era. It has presented gender inequality with the help of some evidences & statistics and signifying the inequality practiced in India & its comparison with other Asian & Western countries.

GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender Inequality means consider women inferior as compared to men in different social, economic & political, cultural and legal disciplines. In simply terms this is consider as gender biasness, which in simple term means the gender stratification .

According to the United Nations Development Programs Human Development Report (2021), India ranks 122 out of 162 countries on the gender inequality index. The gaps between the genders in areas like life expectancy, education and incomes are considered to measure human development.

HISTORY OF GENDER INEQUALITY

In ancient India, an Indian woman was at position of honor and was marked by the term of maata (mother) or Devi (goddess) in the Vedas and Upanishads. Then in the medieval period, practice of bigamy declined the position of woman and in this period dowry system, and sati system came into existence. This has also led to a drop in the female ratio. As per Indian census Kerala state represents the highest sex ratio with 1086 females per 1000 males and Haryana states represents the lowest sex ratio with just 878 women per 1000 males. The main cause of female infanticide practices in few was dowry system.

Indian Society is male dominating; a woman still needs the anchor-person 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. But to remove this disparities the woman's reservation in parliament, is one of the commendable step taken by Government of India. In many parts of India, women are viewed as an economic and financial liability despite contribution in several ways to our society and also to the economy. The crime against women is increasing day by day. Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual harassment, molestation, eve teasing, forced prostitution, sexual-exploitation at work places are a common affair today. So, its 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 as expected by in-laws, poverty, domestic – violence and the caste system.

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

GII is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and vice-versa.

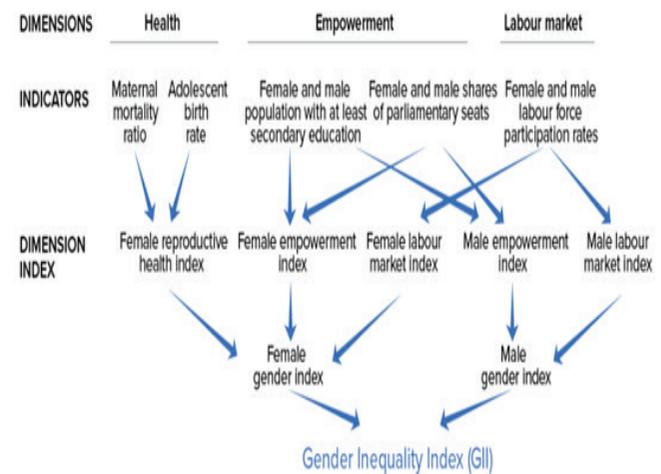


Fig 1. Dimensions and indicators along with index
Source : <https://databank.worldbank.org>

According to Human Development Reports, there is reduction in GII value in the world and also India has shown improvement in gender equality from the year 1990 to 2020.



	1990			2021		
GII VALUE	0.710			0.490		
Maternal Mortality Ratio	599.0 death/ 100.00 live births			133.0 death/ 100.000 live births		
Adolescent Birth Rate	122.3 births/ 1000 women age 15-19			17.2 births/ 1000 women age 15-19		
	FEMALE	MALE	GENDER GAP	FEMALE	MALE	GENDER GAP
Shares of seats in parliament	7.3%	92.7%	-85.3%	13.4%	86.6%	-73.1%
Population with at least some secondary education (age 25 and older)	12.8%	27.1%	-14.3%	41.8%	53.8%	-12.0%
Labour force participation rate (age 15 and older)	30.4%	84.2%	-53.8%	19.2%	70.1%	-50.9%

Table 1 : Proportion of participation of women in various forces with GII value

Source: Source : <https://databank.worldbank.org>

The above table shows the improvement in women participation in various areas but the gender gap is very high . It speaks about gender inequality. However in India, the proportion seats held by women in the Parliament has increased which is show in the figure below.

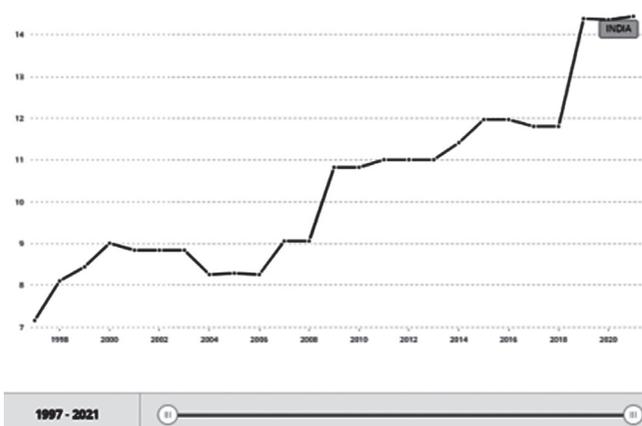


Fig 2. Proportion of seats held by women in Parliament in %

There is 14 percent increase in the seats occupied by women in the Parliament. This shows that India is moving towards gender equality.

IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is vital to the realization of human rights for all. The gender equality is very essential to achieve the goal of women empowerment. The overall objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share responsibility for the home and children and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender-based violence both at work and at home.

Within the context of population and development programmes, gender equality is critical because it will enable women and men to make decisions that impact more positively on their own sexual and reproductive health as well as that of their spouses and families. Decision-making with regard to such issues as age at marriage, timing of births, use of contraception and recourse to harmful practices female genital cutting stands to be improved with the achievement of gender equality.

However, it is important to acknowledge that where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore, a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. This would enable them to make decisions and take actions to achieve and maintain their own reproductive and sexual health.

The achievement of gender equality implies changes for both men and women. More equitable relationships will need to be based on a redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of women and men in all spheres of life, including the family, the



workplace and the society at large. It is therefore crucial not to overlook gender as an aspect of men's social identity. This fact is, indeed, often overlooked, because the tendency is to consider male characteristics and attributes as the norm, and those of women as a variation of the norm.

Societal norms and practices about "masculinity" and expectations of men as leaders, husbands or sons create demands on men and shape their behaviour. Men are too often expected to concentrate on the material needs of their families, rather than on the nurturing and caring roles assigned to women. Socialization in the family and later in schools promotes risk-taking behaviour among young men, and this is often reinforced through peer pressure and media stereotypes. So the lifestyles of men often result in them being more exposed to greater risks of morbidity and mortality than women. These risks include accidents, violence and alcohol consumption. Men also have the right to assume a more nurturing role, and opportunities for them to do so should be promoted.

Addressing these rights and responsibilities entails recognizing men's specific health problems, as well as their needs and the conditions that shape them. The adoption of a gender perspective is an important first step; it reveals that there are disadvantages and costs to men accruing from patterns of gender difference. It also underscores that gender equality is concerned not only with the roles, responsibilities and needs of women and men, but also with the interrelationships between them.

Empowering Women

Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence. The gender equality is need of the hour to prevent the violence against women.

The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's

empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights—including the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence—are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all. Where women's status is low, family size tends to be large, which makes it more difficult for families to thrive. Population and development and reproductive health programmes are more effective when they address the educational opportunities, status and empowerment of women. When women are empowered, whole families benefit, and these benefits often have ripple effects to future generations. The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined they are socially determined, changing and changeable. Although they may be justified as being required by culture or religion, these roles vary widely by locality and change over time.

Key issues and linkages

Reproductive health: Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including maternal mortality and morbidity, represent a



major – but preventable cause of death and disability for women in developing countries. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproduction health therefore constitutes gender-based discrimination and a violation of women's rights to health and life.

Stewardship of Natural Resources

Women in India are usually in charge of securing water, food and fuel and of overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they tend to put into immediate practice whatever they learn about nutrition and preserving the environment and natural resources.

Economic Empowerment

In India more women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities falls on the shoulders of women and because they face discrimination in the economic sphere.

Educational Empowerment

About two thirds of the illiterate adults in India are female. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with both lower infant mortality and lower fertility, as well as with higher levels of education and economic opportunity for their children.

Political Empowerment

Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women.

Gender Concern in Development

Taking gender concerns into account when designing and implementing population and development programmes therefore is important for two reasons. First, there are differences between the roles of men and women, differences that demand different approaches. Second, there is systemic inequality between men and women. Universally, there are clear patterns of women's

inferior access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, women are systematically under-represented in decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives. This pattern of inequality is a constraint to the progress of any society because it limits the opportunities of one-half of its population. When women are constrained from reaching their full potential, that potential is lost to society as a whole. Programme design and implementation should endeavour to address either or both of these factors.

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for integrating gender concerns in the analysis, formulation and monitoring of policies, programmes and projects. It is therefore a means to an end, not an end in itself; a process, not a goal. The purpose of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in population and development activities. This requires addressing both the condition, as well as the position, of women and men in society. Gender mainstreaming therefore aims to strengthen the legitimacy of gender equality values by addressing known gender disparities and gaps in such areas as the division of labour between men and women; access to and control over resources; access to services, information and opportunities; and distribution of power and decision-making.

Gender mainstreaming, as a strategy, does not preclude interventions that focus only on women or only on men. In some instances, the gender analysis that precedes programme design and development reveals severe inequalities that call for an initial strategy of sex-specific interventions. However, such sex-specific interventions should still aim to reduce identified gender disparities by focusing on equality or inequity as the objective rather than on men or women as a target group. In such a context, sex-specific interventions are still important aspects of a gender mainstreaming strategy. When implemented correctly, they should not contribute to a marginalization of men in such a critical area as access to reproductive and sexual health services. Nor should they contribute to the evaporation of gains or advances already secured



by women. Rather, they should consolidate such gains that are central building blocks towards gender equality.

Critical Appraisal

Despite major progress, gender inequality persists in many societies and violence against women and girls remains widespread. The lack of access to secondary education and to sexual and reproductive health services for girls and women is a key driver of gender inequality. In addition, discrimination against ethnic minority groups, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and geographically-isolated populations is widespread throughout the world. Gender inequality and other forms of discrimination violate the universal standards of justice enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other agreements. Societies that discriminate against women and social groups obstruct the economic potential of large shares of their populations, which lowers economic growth and limits poverty reduction. Pervasive discrimination and high levels of inequality are also associated with higher risks of conflict and violence.

In response, India has successfully instituted legal and administrative reforms to reduce inequality and realize the human rights of all members of society, with a specific view towards reducing disparities by gender and other status. In some cases, practices that are inconsistent with sustainable development and the realization of human rights, such as child marriage, child labor, and sexual violence, need to be tackled head on. Some countries have also actively promoted social support for children in poor households as a way to ensure that poverty is not “vertically transmitted” from poor parents to their children. Ensuring registration at birth has also proven successful in enhancing equal opportunities and legal rights.

Societies and political systems differ in their responses to inequality. Some resist it strongly through aggressive policies and transfers; others seem to tolerate very high levels of inequality. We call on all societies to ensure that all individuals and households are empowered to fully participate in political, economic, and social life. To ensure

sustainable development, economic gains must not only be inclusive, but the quality of social interactions that are based on trust, honesty, voluntarism, and solidarity needs to be enhanced through the promotion of social ethics and the observance of human rights for all.

FINDINGS

Constraints to Women Empowerment

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structures in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of such norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child, which is present in almost all societies and communities. The hold of this preference has strengthened rather than weakened and its most glaring evidence is in the falling sex ratio (Seth, 2001). The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception in Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural, thus inflicting an injustice upon them.

Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority of women in India. It is another factor that poses challenge in realizing women’s empowerment. In a poor family, girls are the main victims; they are malnourished and are denied the opportunity of better education and other facilities. But if they are financially independent or they have greater control over the resources then they exhibit greater autonomy both in the household and in public sphere and are no longer victims of poverty.

Lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provisions and failure in realizing it, is another factor that hinders the process of empowerment. Most of the women are not aware of their legal rights. Even women who are aware lack the courage to take the legal step. The legislation which affects women most is their situation in marriage and inheritance. As far as the rights of inheritance are concerned, women generally do not try to inherit land left by their parents if brothers are alive (Seth, 2001). The



traditional belief that land should not go outside the patriarchal family operates. The provision of Act like (1) Child Marriage Resistance Act, 1930, (2) The Suppression of Immoral Trafficking of Women Act, 1987 and (3) The Indecent Exposure of Women Act, have not led to the suppression of practice indicated in them.

Of these three, the first one is by and large successful in restraining child marriage. The legislation almost failed in case of immoral trafficking and indecent exposure to women. There are numerous incidence of indecent exposure of women in all forms of media with hardly any prosecution. Although the legal rights are in place to create an enabling atmosphere these have not been very successful in realizing women's empowerment.

SUGGESTIONS

- Expansion of women's participation in policy decision-making processes
- Reconsideration of social systems and practices and raise awareness from a gender equal perspective
- Promotion of understanding of the significance of gender equality among men
- Promotion of understanding of gender equality from childhood
- Securing equal opportunities and treatment between men and women in employment
- Promotion of equal and balanced treatment aimed at equal wage for work of equal value

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- Promotion of gender equality aimed at bringing about vibrant agricultural, forestry, and fisheries communities
- Promotion of prevention of spousal violence and protection for victims
- Comprehensive policy development for women's lifelong health
- Health support that corresponds to gender difference
- Enhancement of education and learning to promote gender equality and facilitate diversity of choice
- Gender equality in science and technology and academic fields
- Promotion of gender equality in the area of regional development, disaster prevention, environment, and others
- Expansion of Women's Participation in Policy and Decision-making Processes in All Fields in Society
- Prohibition of gender discrimination during all stages of employment and management
- Promotion of Measures to Secure Equal Opportunities and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment
- Improvement of Women's Education and Learning Activities to Achieve Women's Empowerment



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