

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND INEQUALITY

Background:

The transformation of gender relations since the beginning of the 20th century is one of the most rapid, profound social changes in human history. For the more than 7,000 years of human history since settled agriculture and early states emerged, male domination has characterized the gender relations of these societies and their successors. Even at the beginning of the 20th century, men and women were generally viewed as occupying sharply different roles in society: a woman's place was in the home as wife and mother; the man's place was in the public sphere. Men had legal powers over the lives of their wives and children, and while domestic violence, though not legal was rarely punished rarely punished. But gradually the scenario started to change as movement for the right of women to vote and other equal rights started to emerge by the end of the 19th century. By the 21st century minority of people still holds to the view that women should be subordinated to men. While all sorts of gender inequalities continue to exist, and some of these seem resistant to change, but there are overall changes in favour of women.

Concepts related to Gender:

At the core of the sociological analysis of gender is the distinction between biological sex and gender: sex is a property of the biological characteristics of an organism; gender is socially constructed, socially created. Throughout most of history for most people the roles performed by men and women seem to be derived from inherent biological properties. According to W.H.O., gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex.

Gender identity is defined as a personal conception of oneself as male or female (or rarely, both or neither). This concept is intimately related to the concept of gender role, which is defined as the outward manifestations of personality that reflect the gender identity. Gender identity, in nearly all instances, is self-identified, as a result of a combination of inherent and extrinsic or environmental factors; gender role, on the other hand, is manifested within society by observable factors such as behaviour and appearance. For example, if a person considers himself a male and is most comfortable referring to his personal gender in masculine terms, then his gender identity is male. However, his gender role is male only if he demonstrates typically male characteristics in behaviour, dress, and/or mannerisms.

Thus, gender role is often an outward expression of gender identity, but not necessarily so. In most individuals, gender identity and gender role are congruous.

Gender inequality and discrimination:

Gender is a common term where as the term gender discrimination is mostly used for women, because females are mostly discriminated on the basis of their gender. Gender discrimination is not biologically determined but it is determined by socially and the discrimination.

Discrimination is the unfair or prejudiced treatment of a person or group. Denial of equality, rights and opportunity and suppression in any form on the basis of gender is gender discrimination. This discrimination leads to inequality in the society on the basis of gender.

Gender inequality in India refers to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India. Gender inequalities, and their social causes, impact India's sex ratio, women's health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment, and economic conditions. Gender inequality in India is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women. According to the Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2011, India was ranked 113 on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) among 135 countries polled. Since then, India has improved its rankings on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (GGI) to 105 out of 136 in 2013.

Factors associated with gender inequality:

- **Early death: Birth and childhood-** Eligible Jat boys from Haryana travel 3,000 km across the country to find themselves a bride. With increasingly fewer girls in Haryana, they are seeking brides from as far away as Kerala as the only way to change their single status. The girls have not vanished overnight. Decades of sex determination tests and female foeticide that has acquired genocide proportions are finally catching up with states in India. Female foeticide is the process of finding out the sex of the foetus and undergoing abortion if it is a girl. Although it is illegal, many people continue to practice it. Besides this, there are some communities which practice female infanticide - the practice of killing the girl child once she is born. This fact is highlighted by the findings of census 2001 which show that there are only 933 women in this country for every 1000 men. Besides this, Census (2011) data showed a significant declining trend in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR), calculated as number of girls for every 1000 boys between age group of 0 - 6 years, with an all time low of 918 in 2011 from 976 in 1961. This decline in sex ratio means that we are not just depriving girls of human rights; we are also depriving them of their right to live.

Even if they are not killed after birth, lack of proper care and malnourishment leads to ill health and early death.

- **Education**- Education is not equally attained by Indian women. Although literacy rates are increasing, the female literacy rate lags behind the male literacy rate. Even if they are sent to schools for primary and secondary education, due to prevalence of child marriage in India there is high percentage of drop outs from school. Even if they can complete school education, most of the times they remain deprived from higher education.

An underlying factor for such low literacy rates are parents' perceptions that education for girls are a waste of resources as their daughters would eventually live with their husbands' families. Thus, there is a strong belief that due to their traditional duty and role as housewives, daughters would not benefit directly from the education investment.

- **Economy** - Most of the women in India do not get the opportunity to establish their career and they stick to the traditional role set for them by the society. However in the rural and sub urban sectors large number of women is engaged in farming, livestock maintenance and works as factory labourers. Even if they work, discrimination against women contributes to gender wage differentials, with Indian women on average earning 64% of what their male counterparts earn for the same occupation and level of qualification. This has led to their lack of autonomy and authority.

Although equal rights are given to women, equality may not be well implemented. In practice, land and property rights are weakly enforced, with customary laws widely practiced in rural areas. Although laws are supportive of lending to women and microcredit programs targeted to women are prolific, women often lack collateral for bank loans due to these low levels of property ownership.

- **Health**- The health of women in India is severely neglected. Lack of awareness and stigma are main reasons behind this ignorance. Basic hygiene of women during regular menstrual cycles is still neglected; even birth of child also takes place at home instead of medical centres in rural areas, making them susceptible to death.

Women and girls often face greater barriers to health information and services due to cultural gender norms such as economic dependence, patriarchal structures and a greater share and burden of domestic roles and responsibilities. They often have limited influence over resources within the household and in society, while having greater needs for services, such as reproductive services. They are at greater risk for physical and sexual violence, and as a result have an increased risk for mental and physical ill-health. Gender inequality and discrimination are root causes of violence against women. Violence against women and girls

is related to their lack of power and control, as well as to the social norms that prescribe men and women's roles in society and condone abuse. Violence against women and girls is not only a consequence of gender inequality, but reinforces women's low status in society and the multiple disparities between women and men. (UN General Assembly, 2006)

Reasons for inequality:

Gender inequality has been historic worldwide phenomena based on gender assumptions. It is linked to kinship rules rooted in cultures and gender norms that organizes human social life, human relations. In India, cultural influences favour the preference for sons for reasons related to kinship, lineage, inheritance, identity, status, and economic security. This preference cuts across class and caste lines, and it discriminates against girls. When a woman does not conform to expected gender norms she is shamed and humiliated. The causes of gender inequalities are complex, but a number of cultural factors in India can explain how son preference, a key driver of daughter neglect, is so prevalent.

Patriarchal society

Patriarchy is a social system of privilege in which men are the primary authority figures, occupying roles of political leadership, moral authority, control of property, and authority over women and children. Most of India, with some exceptions, has strong patriarchal and patrilineal customs, where men hold authority over female family members and inherit family property and title.

Son preference

A key factor driving gender inequality is the preference for sons, as they are considered more useful than girls. Boys are given the exclusive rights to inherit the family name and properties and they are viewed as additional status for their family. They are believed to have higher economic utility as they can provide additional labour in agriculture. Moreover, the prospect of parents 'losing' daughters to the husband's family and expensive dowry of daughters further discourages parents from having daughters. Additionally, sons are often the only person entitled to performing funeral rights and other religious rituals for their parents' after life. Thus, a combination of factors has shaped the imbalanced view of sexes in India.

Discrimination against girls

While women express a strong preference for having at least one son, the evidence of discrimination against girls after they are born is mixed. A study of 1990s survey data by scholars found less evidence of systematic discrimination in feeding practices between young boys and girls, or gender based nutritional discrimination in India. In impoverished families, these scholars found that daughters face discrimination in the medical treatment of illnesses and in the administration of vaccinations against serious childhood diseases. These practices were a cause of health and survival

inequality for girls. While gender discrimination is a universal phenomenon in poor nations, a 2005 UN study found that social norms-based gender discrimination leads to gender inequality in India.

Dowry

In India, dowry is the payment in cash or some kind of gifts given to bridegroom's family along with the bride. The practice is widespread across geographic region, class and religions. The dowry system in India contributes to gender inequalities by influencing the perception that girls are a burden on families. The payment of a dowry has been prohibited under The 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act in Indian civil law and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498a of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Several studies show that while attitudes of people are changing about dowry, the institution has changed very little, and even continues to prevail.

If gender equality could be achieved:

Gender equality and women's empowerment can improve health. While it is important to address women's specific health concerns, men are also faced with rigid gender norms associated with poor health outcomes. Traditional expectations of masculinity increase men's vulnerability to serious health risks and make them less inclined to seek health care when needed. Gender diverse persons frequently face stigma and discrimination in the society and in health care settings. So gender equality and more liberal attitudes towards gender by breaking the gender stereotypes can help us have a healthier society. Gender equality might have a positive effect on the mental health of individuals of the society, both male and female.

Gender equality would help in the progress of the society, as women would get equal opportunity to study and establish career, they would contribute to the economic growth of the country. Also egalitarian society would help in healthy development of children in a stigma and stereotypy free society.