

Women Empowerment: Need for Developing India

Dr. Noel Parge

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Commerce, Ahmednagar College, Ahmednagar-414001, Maharashtra (India)

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*Corresponding Author

Email: noel_parge[at]yahoo.co.in

ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Gender equality is critical to development and peace of every nation and Gender discrimination is the biggest problems facing developing countries like India. Discrimination against women is existing for many generation affecting the society as a whole. The Indian Constitution grants equal opportunities and rights to both genders, but we still see the disparity even after more than 70 years of independence. Although women form roughly fifty percent of the population in India, they are less represented in the public life. They face discrimination right from their birth in various forms like lower education ratios, parent's reluctance to educate daughters, early marriages, lack of nutritious food, less allocations of managerial positions despite of being well educated, biased capital investments etc. Female foeticide and infanticide are also quite common. Recognizing women's rights and empowering them is necessary for their development and the development of the country. According to Volart (2004) the available talent in the economy is largely reduced, having negative impact on the country's economy, due to gender discrimination against women. The inherent talents of women are not utilized lost due to various social practices resulting to economic loss. The paper will argue that the equality of Adam and Eve is the pre-requisite for meeting the challenge of poverty reduction, promotion of sustainable development and building good governance. It also focuses on the root causes and effects of discrimination on the economic development of the country.

Research Methodology:

Secondary data is collected through reputed journals, books and web articles.

Conclusion:

The paper concludes with the present condition of women of India, looking for the future road ahead in the movement of women empowerment and their contribution in the development of India.

1. Introduction

Gender equality is critical to development and peace of every nation and Gender discrimination is the biggest problems facing developing countries like India. Discrimination against women is existing for many generations, affecting the society as a whole. The Indian Constitution grants equal opportunities and rights to both genders, but we still see the disparity even after more than 70 years of independence. Although women form roughly fifty percent of the population in India, they are less represented in the public life. They face discrimination right from their birth, in various forms like lower education ratios, parent's reluctance to educate daughters, early marriages, lack of nutritious food, less allocations of managerial positions despite of being well educated, biased capital investments etc. Female foeticide and infanticide are also quite common. Recognizing women's rights and empowering them is necessary for their development. In some Indian states such like Rajasthan, all of these problems have aggravated by high levels of seasonal migration. The rural economy cannot provide year-round income for the family due to which the men have to migrate to other parts of the country in search of employment. As a culture women are supposed to take care of the household and are left behind. According to Volart (2004), the available talent in the economy is largely reduced, having negative impact on the country's economy, due to gender discrimination against women. The inherent

talents of women are not utilized lost due to various social practices resulting to economic loss of the country. Since ancient times women have been given the secondary status in every phase of life, whether it may be household or workplace. She was tangled with the patriarchal norms which limited her existence within the house. Women are passed on the family responsibility and become mothers at a very young age as child marriages are common. They are burdened by personal and financial responsibilities. Women are usually malnourished due to limited food intake as they are expected to eat last after all the male member's have eaten food. They also do not receive proper medical attention. The literacy rate among Indian women is only 65.46% in comparison with men which is 82 percent of men. Women suffer from biased traditions and are not encouraged to go for schooling and higher education (especially in rural areas). The divorce and inheritance laws restrict them from accumulation of wealth limiting them from planning their financial and social security along with their autonomy.

2. Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a huge problem in India that Indian economy is facing. It is a term which refers to the roles and behaviors assigned in a given society to the 'males' and 'females'. On the other hand, 'sex' is a term which refers to the biological and physiological side that defines man and woman.

From the historical, cultural and social perspective, gender can be referred as power relationship function in men and women. In this relationship Women are considered inferior in comparison to Men. Gender can be said to be a man made notion, and 'sex' can be referred as the natural or biological features of humans.

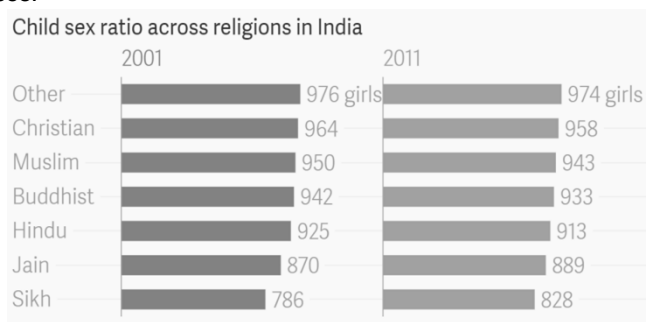
In ordinary words the inequality and discrimination against women due to their sex can be called as Gender Inequality. Women are considered as a weaker sex, since ancient times. They received inferior position in comparison to men. They are discriminated and exploited in their homes as well as in outside world. Women suffer inequality all over the world and especially in developing countries like India.

3. Sex Ratio In India

Indian Census depicts the unbalanced statistics on the matter of sex ratio in the country's population. Gender statistics 2001 revealed that there were 532 million males, constituting 52 percent of the population while there were 497 million females, i.e. 48 percent of the remaining population. That means, the number of males is more by 35 million in comparison to females. The census of 2011 has shown some signs of improvement. Census 2011 shows that the improvement in sex ratio by an average of 943 in comparison to sex ratio of 2001, which was 933.

a) Child Sex Ratio

The term Sex ratio is used to express the number of females per thousand males in a particular region/area/country. The difference in sex ratio may be due to various reasons like difference in mortality rate, varying birth rates, migration, exclusion from census etc. It is commonly understood that the number of males and number of females in the population balance each other, but in reality sexes are imbalanced in different population across the world. Child sex ratio is the number of girls (female child) born per 1000 boys (male child). The bar graph below shows the varying child sex ratio among different religions as per both 2001 and 2011 censuses.



Source: ATLAS Data census 2001 and 2011

b) Critical Sex Ratio States

State Name	Census 2001	Census 2011 Sex ratio=Women/1000 men
Kerala	1,058	1,084
Puducherry (2011) Pondicherry (2001)	1,001	1,037
Manipur	974	985
Goa	961	973
Haryana	861	879
Punjab	876	895

The above mentioned selected census data shows some Indian states with distinct sex ratio. According to Census of India, the above statistics show that the state of Kerala has shown good signs as it has sex ratio of 1084 for every 1000 males, having the highest sex ratio in the country. The Manipur state with 985, while Punjab is still at 895, but this state has witnessed a growth from 798 (2001) to 846 (2011) in its child sex ratio. Gender bias in India is one of the reasons for the fall in female ratio. However, the last ten years has shown a steady improvement. Along with patriarchy traditions, illiteracy along with poverty also result in gender bias in rural areas.

4. Reasons Behind Discrimination

Women experience inequality and discrimination at home and outside home at different society levels. Various causes of such discrimination are:

- Preference for Male Child:** Traditionally girls are treated as a burden by the family due to various customs especially dowry. People prefer to have a Boy as the dowry cost can be avoided as well as they can get dowry. A strong 'son preference' attitude in the society, which still exists in various states throughout the country, is the root cause for unexplored potential of women. High rates of female infanticide and female feticide are common. Orthodox families believe that having a son is beneficial economically due to cultural institutions; Son is believed to be a torch bearer of the family. Gender equity is very important as women have to fight at every stage for attaining equal status with men. According to Mathur A (2004) there were 922 women per 1000 thousand men in Rajasthan. There is a strong preference for a male child in the Indian society which results in the decline of females across the nation. According to the 2011 Census, India has one of the poorest child sex ratios i.e. 918 girls for every 1000 boys, for the 0-6 years age group children.
- Patriarchy System:** The patriarchy system, especially in the rural areas is one of the major reasons for gender disparity in India. Sylvia Walby, a famous sociologist says that, patriarchy is a social arrangement of practices designed in such a way that men can dominate, exploit and oppress. This system is validated in the religious beliefs and forms a part of culture in India. Women are not allowed to be independent in the society. As a child is under her father's custody, as a wife she has to be under her husband's custody and in case of old age or in unfortunate case of a widow, she has to be under her son's custody. Even today, with all the progress and education, you can observe this situation in certain communities in India. They are not allowed to take independent personal decisions within or outside their homes except in a few exceptional cases.
- Acceptance of Discrimination:** Due to socio-cultural trainings in the name of traditions women have also accepted their role as a subordinate in comparison to men. They have accepted it as their fate. Many of them don't even stand, speak or raise voice against the discriminatory practices.

- d) **Poverty:** Extreme poverty is also one of the reasons for women's low status in society. Due to poverty women are forced to work on low paid jobs in the unorganised sector or as migrant laborers in the cities. They are paid low wages for the same work as men. Many a times they are forced to work on low skilled jobs even though they may be capable.
- e) **Lack of Education:** As per the culture girls have to leave their parents house and stay in the husbands house after marriage. Therefore the cost of getting the girl educated is considered as bad investment. Although every year, the 10+2 results show that girls are performing better than boys, but still there very slow progress in educating girls. Without good education women are unable to get opportunities in high skilled jobs.
- f) **Malnutrition:** Due to patriarchy culture in the family, the best and nutritious food is given to the male child. Whatever food that is remaining afterwards is eaten by the girl child. This leads to major health issues like anemia in her later years. Especially, women suffer more due to lack of nutritious food.
- g) **Lack of Opportunities:** Women are considered basically a weak gender and many times they are overlooked and not offered opportunities in comparison to male counterparts.

5. Indicatives Taken to Correct the Situation

The skewed sex ratio and gender discrimination is a matter of worry for India. To tackle with this social evil, various initiatives have been taken by government and other private organisations. Some of which are:

- a) **Role played by NGOs:** Several NGOs host in providing opportunities for women. These NGOs try to create networks among women to create financial self-help groups. They initiate ideas about microfinance, education, management and provide them with the practical trainings. They further allow women to be a part of activities related to management which trains them to become managers. Other local NGOs implement projects that export the skills of women abroad to generate significant income. These have enormous potential to improve the financial and social status of women. NGO's help to create awareness in the society about the disparity against women and other gender issues.
- b) **Government Initiatives:** Both the Central and State governments have designed and implemented various schemes reduce the gender inequality. This has resulted in the increase in the number of girl child as the national average has increased to 943 females per 1000 males. Schemes like BetiBachao, BetiPadhaoare launched by Government of India for the welfare girl child. The government of Maharashtra has also started various schemes for girls and women. For example, ManjhiKanyaBhagyashree, where government provides financial assistance of Rs.50000/- for a single girl child (Rs.25000/ for 2 girls) for 18 years, to the families with income 7.5 lakhs, on the condition that they provide family planning certificate. The government has also introduced a

scheme called Manodhairya, for women who are victims of rape, sexually abuse and who have suffered acid attacks which provides shelter, financial assistance medical aid and counselling services.

- c) **Legal and Constitutional Safeguards:** Indian Constitution through its preamble, tries to eliminate gender inequality; The Preamble strives to achieve social, economic and political justice to all and also to provide equality of status and of opportunity to all the citizens of India. The Constitution also authorises the state to implement measures encouraging positive discrimination favoring women through drafting of legislation and policies. The constitution also endows equal right to vote for women. According to the Article 15 of the Indian Constitution it prohibits discrimination on basis of sex, religion, race, caste or place of birth. The Article 15(3) also empowers the State for making special provisions for the women and children. Moreover, provisions are also been made in the Directive Principles of State Policy providing safeguards for women against discrimination. The parliament has also passed various legislations to provide equal status to women and also to protect them from exploitation. For instance, the inhuman tradition of Sati was abolished by the by punishment through the enactment of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1829. For the elimination of the practice of dowry the parliament passed the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. The women who want to marry a person of her choice irrelevant of caste or religion is protected by the enactment of Special Marriage Act, 1954, which gives legal status to their marriage. In order to stop the female infanticide, the parliament enacted the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act in 1994. From time to time, the Parliament makes amendments to the prevailing laws to remove the gender inequalities in the society. For example, the parliament added Section 304-B to the Indian Penal Code, 1860 by making burning of brides or death due to dowry as an offence punishable with life imprisonment as maximum Punishment.

6. Conclusion

Although there are various laws passed for women's protection, we still find cases of atrocities against women. People still want to have male child and treat girls as inferior. Female infanticide and dowry deaths are still seen. The real equality for women will come only when the discrimination of girls will stop in each family in India. Both girls and boys should be bought up equally from childhood. The mindset of men to respect women should be from their childhood. Infact, the elderly women in the house should also encourage equality in their house and reject the negative conditions of the patriarchy system. A movement for Women's empowerment should be started to empower women to become financially independent and become self-reliant. Women are capable of handling themselves provided they are provided with equal opportunities along with good education. We have seen women go to highest level in all the fields whether it is science or technology, medical, armed forces, politics etc. There is no

field in which women have not left their mark. Although there is a change in the society with the spread of education and

initiatives by government and NGOs, we still have a long way to truly explore this under explored creation.

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