

An Analysis upon Fluctuation of Gender Inequality in India: Some Challenges

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Abstract – Gender-based inequalities in India translate into greater importance being placed on the health and empowerment of males than of females. In India, health and population indicators that are driven by gender differences include sex ratios at birth, infant and child mortality by sex, and low ages at marriage for women. At the household level, dis-empowerment of women results in less access to education, employment, and income, and power and freedom of movement. Considering all these fact, India and its society has a mammoth task of empowering women to provide them the basic needs and to prepare them for a safe and productive future. Despite a high growth rate and plentiful Government measures to encourage gender equality, the gender gap still exists in India. Lack of gender equality not only limits women's access to resources and opportunities, but also imperils the life prospects of the future generation. In the present article an attempt has been made to examine the problem of gender inequality in India.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality or the gender gap continues to be an immense issue of concern in India despite its achieving high rates of economic growth in recent years. Traditional patriarchal customs and norms have relegated women to a secondary status within the household and workplace. Gender inequality is reflected in India's low ranking on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (GGI), 2014, with scores below average on parameters such as educational attainment, economic participation and health and survival. On educational attainment, India ranked 126 with a female to male ratio in the literacy rate of 0.68. On the criterion of economic participation and opportunities, India was ranked 134. Its female to male ratio in labour force participation was 0.36. India was the second-lowest performing country on health and survival, ranking 141, just ahead of Armenia. As a whole the country ranked 127th out of 146 countries with a score of 0.563 on the gender inequality index and came 114th in the world in terms of gender gap. According to the new (2015) report of the McKinsey Global Institute, 'The Power of Parity', India's global Gender Parity Score (GPS) is 0.48, which represents an "extremely high" level of gender inequality (Misra 2015). Furthermore, UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) 2015 highlighted that with respect to gender inequality, among South Asian countries, only Afghanistan fares worse than India. On every parameter of the gender inequality index (GII), India lags behind even both of its neighboring countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Only 12.2 per cent of parliamentary seats are held by women in India as

against 19.7 per cent in Pakistan and 20 per cent in Bangladesh. Some of the world's poorest nations, such as Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Uganda and Mozambique, have over a third to half of their parliamentary seats occupied by women. India also has a high maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 190 deaths per 100,000 live births as compared to 170 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 births in both Bangladesh and Pakistan. India and Nigeria together accounted for one third of global maternal deaths in 2013. 50,000 maternal deaths occurred in India alone in 2013. In terms of the percentage of women receiving secondary education, Bangladesh at 34 per cent far outperforms India at 27 per cent (Lal 2016). On labour force participation, a majority of countries worldwide show a positive trend in female workforce participation; the exceptions include India. On the labour force participation rate for women, Bangladesh stands at 57 per cent, China at 63.9 per cent and India at only 27 per cent (Nair 2015). The 68th set of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) data shows that between 2004-5 and 2011-12 there was a negative trend in the women's labour force participation rate (LFPR or proportion of labour force to total population) in rural India. Rural female participation fell from nearly 25 per cent in 2004-05 to 21 per cent in 2009-10 and then even lower, to around 17 per cent, in 2011-12. Such a fall also restricts women's ability to protect their health. The Global Financial Inclusion Index database underlines that only 26 per cent of adult females in India have an account with a formal financial institution, compared to 44 per cent of male adults (World Bank 2014). A

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report (2013) indicates that women's credit outstanding from commercial banks accounts for only 5 per cent of all credit outstanding (RBI 2013). Moreover, a recent report of the MasterCard Connector's Project (2015) points out that 58 per cent of females in India report difficulty in accessing job opportunities because of their gender (Gandhi 2015). Indeed, many important Global Indices and reports show the sorry state of affairs in India as far as gender equality is concerned. But, in spite of these attempts, a considerable gender gap still exists. In fact, according to the Global Gender Gap Report (2015) the economic gender gap has actually widened by 1 per cent since 2006 (Malhotra 2015). Lack of gender equality not only limits women's access to resources and opportunities but also imperils the life prospects of the future generation. To give one example, the division of labour according to "sex-roles" usually limits women to domestic work and restricts their access to material and social resources and participation in political, economic and social decision-making. A large amount of literature on the gender gap also indicates that it is a major stumbling block in access to education. For instance, many adolescent females, due to the social structure, usually have to help with the household work and take care of their siblings instead of going to school or playing. Gender-based inequality results in the female literacy rate being much lower, at 65.46 per cent, than that of their male counterparts, at 82.14 per cent. A fundamental factor responsible for gender inequality in India, and arguably one of the most powerful, is poverty. Out of the total of 30 per cent poor people, 70 per cent are female. This factor is closely associated with gender disparities in employment opportunities. While the share of employed men remained roughly constant between 2009 and 2012, women's employment dropped from 18 per cent to 16 per cent. Only 13.4 per cent of working-age women (aged 15-59 years) have a regular salaried job compared to 21.2 per cent of working-age men (ILO 2014). Women earn 56 per cent of what their male colleagues earn for performing the same work. As estimated by the World Bank, 90 per cent of Indian working women are employed in the informal sector and do tasks involving heavy physical work of different types, with long working hours with limited payment, lack of guarantee of minimum wages, job insecurity and lack of minimum facilities at the work place. In turn, the disparity in employment opportunities and the nature of the work in which they are engaged contribute to women's economic disempowerment. Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and availability of resources sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood, hunger and malnutrition, ill health, limited or a complete lack of access to education and other basic services, increasing morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by an absence of participation in

decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life. Gender inequalities have been a persistent feature of all modern societies. Although employment-related gender discrimination in various forms is legally prohibited, prejudice and violence against females have not been eradicated. Moreover, gendered social expectations can constrain the career choices of both males and females. Within academia, continuing gender imbalances have been found in many countries (Larivière, Ni, Gingras, Cronin, & Sugimoto, 2013), and particularly at senior levels (e.g., Ucal, O'Neil, & Toktas, 2015; Weisshaar, 2017;). India was the fifth largest research producer in 2017, according to Scopus, but has the highest United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gender inequality index of the 30 largest research producers in Scopus (hdr.undp.org/en/data) and so is an important case for global science. Moreover, the complex web of influences that have led to women being underrepresented in science in India is not well understood (Gupta, 2015). The absence of basic information about gender inequalities is a serious limitation because gender issues in India differ from the better researched case of the USA, due to economic conditions, probably stronger family influences, greater female safety concerns, and differing cultural expectations (Chandrakar, 2014).

GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S WORK

Women's relation with work is complex and mediated by many factors. Globally the female work participation rate has been rising because of economic development, rising education, increasing age of marriage and declining fertility. Economic progress led to enhanced demand for female labour and better family support infrastructure. This has been global experience, but the experience in India has been the obverse of this. Economic growth has failed to boost women's work participation. It is heartening that the issue of women's work, one of the most important intellectual topics in contemporary social sciences, has been identified as a Global Challenge for Research. Rigorous research and advocacy would help to put it on the policy agenda in countries where women's lives are still circumscribed by patriarchal norms and practices. The background note has rich insights from all the regions covered in this network and has a comprehensive research agenda. The objective of this note is to give an overview of research findings in the context of India and to highlight some of the key issues that emerge for further research. Researchers familiar with India will know that it has a deeply stratified social structure and good research must take into account not only gender inequalities but also along the axis of caste, class, religion, rural urban location, region and state. Economic reforms of the 1990s opened up the economy and brought wide-ranging changes in trade, industry and the banking

and financial sectors. The need for creating employment opportunities in rural areas led to the enactment of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in 2006 which promises to provide 100 days of employment to each rural household. "Resurgent India" saw periods of high growth – of over six and a half percent. What have all these developments meant for the dynamics of inequalities in relation to women's work? This brief overview of women's employment in India gives some indication of the patterns and inequalities that exist in the world of women's work. Jobs and earnings are important for both men and women, but for women a job sometimes has a do-or-die significance. Women are frequently victims of violence inside and outside the household and in India are still circumscribed by rigid caste norms that dictate almost every aspect of their life. In a society where there is rampant son-preference, where there is still widespread female feticide, where dowry is literally a burning problem, where women's self-esteem and confidence is eroded at every step, employment may have the potential to enhance her status both in the household and in society, increase her autonomy and self-confidence and improve her own well-being and that of her family. On the other hand, a job if it is low paying and exploitative will only increase her drudgery. Only decent work that not merely pays well but also upholds her dignity as a worker can improve the subordinate status that women suffer in our society.

INDIA'S PROBLEM

India ranks 132 out of 187 countries on the gender inequality index – lower than Pakistan (123), according to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report 2013. The report said all countries in South Asia, with the exception of Afghanistan, were a better place for women than India, with Sri Lanka (75) topping them all. Nepal ranked 102nd and Bangladesh 111th. Gender inequality is especially tragic not only because it excludes women from basic social opportunities, but also because it gravely imperils the life prospects of future generations. Indian families often prefer boys to girls, and female feticide is tragically common. Only 29% of Indian women above the age of 15 in 2011 were a part of the country's labor force, compared to 80.7% men. In Parliament, only 10.9% of lawmakers are women, while in Pakistan 21.1% are women. In United States which ranks 42nd on the list, 57.5% women and 70.1% men are a part of the labor force. China fared even better, landing 35th. Only 26.6% women above 25 years received a secondary education in 2010, compared to 50.4% of men. Pakistan scored even lower, with 18.3% of women having received secondary education compared to 43.1% of men. In the U.S., 94.7% women have received a secondary education – a figure slightly higher than for men (94.3%). In China, this figure was 54.8% for women

and 70.4% for men. In India, 200 women died for every 100,000 childbirths, says the report. In China, the number was considerably lower (37 deaths) and in the U.S. even lower than that (21.)

FACETS OF INEQUALITY

At work, this disparity is visible through a different working environment for women, unequal wages, undignified treatment, sexual harassment, higher working hours, engagement in harmful industries, occupational hazards, working roughly twice as many hours as men and a nearly 27 percentage of women are accounted by unpaid activities. Violence against women is also prominent in India which leads to every 42 minutes a sexual harassment occurring, every 43 minutes a woman kidnapped and every 93 minutes a woman is burnt for dowry. And by the pre quarter of reported, rapes involve girls under the age of 16 years. Every 26 minutes a woman is molested and every 34 minutes a rape take place. Poor health care is another attitude towards women which makes them neglected during illness, recognition of illness by herself, health services as a last resort and reluctance to be examined by male doctors. Lack of education in women has led to poor literacy leading to gender gap in literacy rate and no higher education. Economic constraints are also imposed to women in India by keeping them as dependents, no equal property rights (as against law), loans of men is paid back by women, economic uncertainty and denial in inheritance of properties to orphaned / deserted. Discriminative socialization process is another aspect of inequality towards women which leads to customary practices, more involvement in household activities only (boys not allowed), restricted to play, isolation, separation in schools and public places and restrictions to move freely. Detrimental cultural practices like after marriage husbands dominating the family, dominance from in-laws family members, never or rarely considered for any decision making, limitations in continuing relationships with brothers, sisters, relatives, child or early marriage, patriarchal attitudes and not able to continue girl or boy friendship after marriage are also contributing factor to the inequality. In Governance this inequality is visible, after over sixty years of independence women are still exploited, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments have provided 33 percent reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj System, Panchayat and Parliament totally 790 seats by filling 6.6-8.4 percentage, women Reservation bill delayed, cast disparity and the men domination in administration.

SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Strategies for advancement of women should be higher literacy, more formal education, greater employment opportunity. In education it needs to be reducing primary and secondary dropout of

female child. In post literacy, the basic literacy skills at speaking, reading, and writing and problem solving shall be imparted. Women learners should educate their children which further enhances social advancement. In job opportunities there shall be reservation or expenditure or provision of services or special provisions. In governance all rights and all legal measures should be available for women's protection and support. Human rights education, know how to take control of their circumstance, help to achieve their own goals, helping themselves, enhancing their quality of life and motivating for lobbying or advocacy are also enablers for their advancement. Collaborators such as NGO, INGOs, NPOs, SHGs, CBOs, policy makers, local leaders, information disseminators, health care providers, teachers and family members should help in the social advancement of women.

CONCLUSION

India need to deactivate the gender Inequality. The needs of the day are trends where girls are able not only to break out of the culturally determined patterns of employment but also to offer advice about career possibilities that look beyond the traditional list of jobs. It is surprising that in spite of so many laws, women still continue to live under stress and strain. To ensure equality of status for our women we still have miles to go. Man and Woman are like two wheels of a carriage. The life of one without the other is incomplete.

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