

Unveiling Gender Inequity: Unmasking Challenges and Struggles

Dr. Sheeba Kamal

Asstt. Professor, Department of English, University Women's Polytechnic, AMU, Aligarh

Abstract

According to Kofi Annan, Gender Equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.

Gender equality is a state wherein men and women equally enjoy socially valued goods, opportunities, resources, aspirations and rewards. Whereas in gender inequality it is primarily women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to access to economic autonomy and healthcare. They are underrepresented due to lack of education and its access.

A lot of progress has been made lately to reduce gender inequality by imparting education and new life skills to empower women. New policies are being implemented to prevent and combat violence against women. Initiatives are also being made to address stereotypes and increase their political participation to bring them into the mainstream of national life.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women Empowerment, Stereotypes, Disadvantage group

Corresponding author: sheeba.wp@gmail.com

Introduction

Although the concept of gender equality is relatively new, if we are to understand the term, it calls for equality between men and women. It began when women collectively started to demand the rights which were formerly denied to them, starting with the suffragette movement in England, which demanded the right to vote, to be regarded as full citizens. The journey continued through a period of awakening and awareness to the present, when some of the challenges have been addressed with women beginning to work independently by getting educated, and acquiring legal

rights. Besides, men have also started to devote time to families. We can conclude that gender equality implies finding the proper gender balance between the sexes. The majority of power—or perhaps we should say control—has historically been held by men over women since this seemed to be the best way for the sexes to interact. This resulted in the gender balance which was unjust but also biased towards women.

The phrases "gender" and "sex" are frequently used synonymously in common parlance, however they are different concepts. According to National Family Health Survey 2005-06 they can be divided into three broad categories.

- 1) "Gender is generally not value-neutral." Male roles and rights are typically valued more highly than female roles and rights, making the duties, rights, and responsibilities given to each sex not only different but also unequal.
- 2) "Gender differences exist in both, power over and power to." The idea of having the "power to" includes formal and informal rights, resources at one's control. It also includes the majority of social contexts, such as the familial, cultural, and institutional sectors. On the other hand, 'power over' means having the ability to influence societal, household, cultural, and religious beliefs, as well as one's own. It's significant that men typically hold more power than women and, in some circumstances, even control them.
- 3) "Gender is not fixed or unchangeable." Gender roles, rights, and expectations are social constructs that are subject to change through time and across geographic boundaries as societal needs, opportunities, and customs change.

Typically, the following broad categories can be used to classify gender-based discrimination:

- Definition of "work": Gender bias is visible when it comes to work done by women. The major obstacles are recognizing women's labor in the workforce and accurately valuing women's contributions (both paid and unpaid).
- Accounting for household chores: Women work both at home and in the labor market. When it comes to their impact on the labor market, the former (domestic and care work) is rarely given the proper recognition.

- **Discrimination at workplace:** Women are compensated differently for the same work as compared to males. They also have restricted access and control over resources, poor access to information and developing skills. Women are frequently seen as supplementary or extra workers, thereby limiting their capacity to establish themselves as workers. In addition, there is a persistent gender discrimination in the hiring and promotion of female employees.
- **Work environment:** Women are typically employed in repetitive, labor-intensive, low-skilled jobs.
- **Access to services:** Women have less of an opportunity to use amenities and gain benefits. Welfare facilities and services like restrooms, places to drink, eat, and relax, and access to first aid, medical care, and transportation are occasionally not considered from a gender viewpoint. It is known that transportation and security are not offered to female workers who operate at night shift by majority of the employees.
- **Unintentional discrimination:** Women employees frequently experience indirect discrimination, including bad working conditions, low performance evaluations for women, and limited access to resources like skill development. The so-called "glass ceiling" puts up invisible barriers that keep women from advancing in their careers by prohibiting them from obtaining higher positions.
- **Occupational health and safety:** Despite the fact that women have unique needs, most workplaces do not take steps to safeguard the reproductive health of their female employees. Prioritization still needs to be given to eliminating exposure to chemicals, radiation, biological pollutants, poor working posture, and stressful working conditions.
- **Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment of women at work is a common phenomenon. However, it is rare to find that the Supreme Court's judgment-mandated specific procedure for sexual harassment complaints is really followed.
- **Poor and unequal representation:** Women are underrepresented in organizations such as social discussion bodies, employers' organizations, labor unions and other areas. The underrepresentation of women in positions of authority within the organized sector (both public and private sectors) has broader implications on their capability to demand and modify their work environments.

- Despite protective and preventive legislation, women from marginalized communities including Dalits, Muslims, and tribal people continue to be excluded. Women employees not only face discrimination at work but are also paid low. They are least protected, and most exploited. Untouchability and other heinous practices continues to have an impact on rural Indian workers' livelihoods. The increasing marginalization of the labor market has only served to further marginalize them, even while the affirmative action policy has assured their entry into the formal sector in a relatively small number of cases. Since they are unable to express their concerns and demands through union membership, their marginalization is increased.

Over the years, women's status in India has changed. The status of women in Indian society has progressed a lot. Nevertheless, there are still disparities and gaps in the protection of certain fundamental rights of women. The government has vigorously worked to improve women's status through legislation and policy. Keeping in mind the regional variances, religious, caste, and class-based differences that have a clear impact on women in India; we make some broad generalizations about the significant socio-economic trends that have affected women in the nation.

Initially driven by the reformist movement in British India; the nationalist movement promoted women's issues and concerns, which were then supported by the women's movement. The enormous contribution of women to the agrarian economy was underappreciated by the economy since India had a predominantly agricultural economy in the early years after independence. Despite numerous protective laws, women in India still fight for fundamental rights like property rights, equal pay, and minimum wages. Women have comparatively limited access to resources like land credit, skill development, and education, and they continue to work a "double shift" such as cooking at home, cleaning, caring for the young and the elderly, which adversely impacts their capacity to contribute in their workplace.

Women are becoming more and more marginalized in society and the economy, according to the committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) (1971–1974). The committee took note of the changing sex ratio, the widening gap between men and women's life expectancy and mortality rates, and inequalities in their access to literacy, education, and employment as examples of

demographic trends. It also discovered that the vast majority of marginalized women had stayed out of reach of the tools of political rights, legal equality, and education. The committee's findings inspired the women's movement to bring up issues and demand additional reforms and modifications. The proclamation of 1975 as the International Women's Year brought attention to several crucial issues affecting women.

A powerful women's movement began to take shape in the 1980s, and various independent organizations emerged. This movement focused on the issues of gendering of text books and education, divorce, maintenance, and child custody as well as violence against women (such as rape and domestic violence) and also concerned with equal opportunities at the workplace. One of the CSWI's suggestions was to create a National Commission for Women, which was accomplished by amending the National Commission for Women Act of 1990 in order to protect and improve women's rights. This statutory group hasn't been successful in resolving important challenges for women because it only has advisory powers. India ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, but with one reservation and two declarative statements. The Indian divorce (Amendment Act) 2001, Indian Succession Amendment Act 2001, and Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act 2001 are three significant laws dealing to divorce and maintenance that were amended as a result of the taskforce established to evaluate and advise legislation reforms.

Protective and proactive laws aimed at elevating women's status are essential in changing the social status of women. Through legislation, the early reformers sought to address challenging societal practices including child marriage, Sati, and widow remarriage. With varying degrees of success, the attempt to change society through legislation is still being made. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1986, the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986, the Commission of Sati Act of 1987, the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuses) Act of 2002, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 and the Maternity Benefit Act of 1961 are notable examples.

Despite being underrepresented at first, women are gradually becoming a small but significant political force in the nation. The Lok Sabha has not yet passed the Women's Reservations Bill,

which was passed by the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) (Lower House). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which were passed in 1993, established a one-third reservation for women in local governments, both urban and rural (Panchayat). The active engagement of women from scheduled castes and tribes in mainstream politics has been made possible by special reservations. Several locations practice gender budgeting, which involves women delegates chosen by the general public. However, the overall picture shows that women are underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles across all spheres of public life in the country.

In addition to legislative improvements that have granted the rights to women they had been denied, numerous other modifications have been made to women's economic status in the country. The planned economy that India had up until 1991 allowed for planned growth. The liberalization and globalization waves that followed 1991 significantly impacted women workers. There was a substantial growth in the number of women in the unstructured or informal sector, even as new work fields like biotechnology and computer technology recruited more and more women. In India, about 93% of women employed labor in unorganized or informal jobs, and this percentage is rapidly increasing. Low-paid women employees have been negatively impacted by globalization and the removal of trade restrictions, which have also had a severe effect on domestic industry and small farmers. As the number of female interstate migrant workers within the nation increases quickly, there is an increasing concern about the feminization of poverty.

Significant changes are being made to ensure that women have access to their legal rights, such as the 1990 establishment of the Forum of Women in Public Sector (WIPS) under the supervision of the Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE). The overall goal of "WIPS" was to establish a national network and support system that would assist female employees in realizing their full potential and enhancing their contribution to public companies in particular and the process of national development in general. This forum conducts national business through its central headquarters in New Delhi and four regional offices in Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, and New Delhi.

The specific goals and objectives of the efforts are to:

- (a) encourage women's growth and development in the public sector;
- (b) help public organizations to utilize the full potential of women employees; and

(c) act as a catalyst for improving the status of women in and around public enterprises.

Each company has WIPS cells set up to aid in more efficient networking. It does not provide a platform for women to voice their specific complaints or concerns in order to seek redress. It collaborates informally with human resources departments to build the capacities of female employees (via personality development, time management, etc.) and to support skill development. For instance, women in the coal industry in India received shovel usage training.

Several public sector organizations have also complied with the Ministry of Women and Child Development guidelines that a special women's cell be established, led by a senior official, to oversee work pertaining to women's welfare and to take actions to create an environment that is suitable for women employees. Besides this, Gender Responsive Budgeting initiatives have also increased the number of cells established in various public sector organizations for the identification and implementation of women's welfare projects as well as other relevant activities, in recent years.

States must direct their efforts not just toward education itself but also toward the social, cultural, and institutional context in order to achieve gender equality and parity in education. For instance, many parents do not anticipate their daughters having employment outside the home. As a result, girls are pressured to drop out of school after only receiving an elementary or basic education. In addition, economically poor parents are more likely to choose to solely send the male child to school if the advantages of education for boys outweigh those for girls. The cost of sending female children to school should be lowered by the state, and the educational system should be changed so that there are no longer different expectations and opportunities for men and women. States parties are obligated to reduce the gender education gap and to eliminate gender-role stereotyping in and through the educational system. Despite the fact that UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education highlighted that it is "often difficult to address the situation due to the contradiction between societal norms which encourage girls into early pregnancy, and the legislative rules which aim to keep them in school," State should implement programs that give women the chance to return to education after giving birth. The national government and educational ministries should make sure that gender concerns are covered in the training of all

teachers. It must be covered in the curriculum for primary, secondary, and higher education as well as in-service training.

Conclusion

At last, I can say that, India's independence has brought about a lot of development in the country. The expansion of the Indian economy is the most remarkable. Until and unless the disparity between men and women is removed. India will not fully benefit from an improving economy. The majority of Indians will start to reap the benefits of a stronger economy if the women have an equal access to the benefits enjoyed by men and the society accepts women as decision makers not only for the family but in the mainstream of national life. India will truly emerge as an economic superpower and make progress in human development areas like health, education, and gender equality.

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