

Gender and inequality

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I. Introduction

Gender is referred to as characters, behaviour of men and women, which are seen in sociological prospective. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

Sometimes, term '*gender*' is associated with the biological differentiation between men and women. But, gender is only associated with the roles, norms and behaviour, in society and towards society. Rather the biological difference is defined as '*sex*'.

The gender is not only a biological division, rather in contemporary sociological conceptualisation, it has become '*Division of labour*'. Instance, people feel that men are meant to perform jobs and duties, whereas women are considered as keeper of the household chores. But, with the modernity of time, this orthodox mentality has been changed, women are also being educated and even seeking jobs and performing in various fields.

Not only in India, almost all the societies, women are also marginalised in Western society and Arab society. We can't imagine a religion, which treats it's both male and female members equally.

This article focuses on the inequalities faced by women and this article aims to seek the answer some of the questions, as-well-as question some forms of inequalities, faced by the women, not only in contemporary as-well-as discrimination faced by women in past times. This also takes some of the examples from daily lives. This also takes up the topic of '*marginalised amongst the marginalised*', as the discrimination of women also depends on the caste, race and community they belong too.

Types of inequalities

Many sociologists have tried to define various types of gender inequalities in different ways and on different basis. One of the prominent scholar and noble price awardee Amartya Sen have discussed the types of inequalities, faced by women in Indian context. He has described seven types of gender inequalities. But, the common among all of them is women are the sufferers and the core being depicted is the persistence of male dominance in the household and family.

- **Mortality inequality:** - The mortality rate in India is highest among the girl children. A girl child is not given proper medical treatment and care. People tends to provide domestic healthcare, which lack scientific and medical validation. Even, women, especially in rural areas receive little to no healthcare and nutrition, as compared to men.
- **Natal inequality:** - The society is viciously male dominated and there is a preference of male child in the society. Therefore, in some parts of our country, people tend to sex-selective abortion of female child, or even they are sell in the illegitimate market of human trafficking. Even at later stage, those girls are exposed to prostitution.
- **Employment inequality:** - In many such places male employees are given more preferences, in terms of promotion, job opportunities and pay scales. In India, within informal sector of unemployment, female employees are paid less, as compared to male employees. But, this practice is relatively less to no in India, when the formal sector is considered. Whereas, in the developed countries like USA, women are paid less, as compared to men, for the same post and rank, even in formal sector.
- **Ownership inequalities:** - Women lack in terms of property ownerships. Generally, women are not handed over property and financial assets.

Not only in India, in many parts of the world, the property laws are biased for men. The lack of ownership in property and assets lack women's voice, while it comes to observe important family decisions.

- **Special opportunities inequalities:** - Women are not provided such opportunities in many things, like education, job and other opportunities.

- **Basic-facilities inequalities:** - Although the data shows a fluent condition of resources and basic facilities to women. But, women are not provided with basic facilities.

It is also said that "women, eats in last and eats the least". This quote has interpretation that, in families, generally in rural and poor families. This is prevailing in those families, for whom meal for two times is not easy.

- **Household opportunities:** - In many conservative families, in our countries, girls are not allowed to pursue her higher educations. Instance, in some marginalised families, generally education of a girl child is sacrificed for the sake of her brother's education. Even girls are not allowed to go to big cities or foreign countries are miles away from approach, for their higher education.

From the above classification of the inequalities, faced by women and girl children in the society, of India and even western countries. The women, belonging to the marginalised groups¹ are more prone to the inequalities and discrimination. In western context it may be a woman, belonging to the black race or a woman hailing from the Dalit community, if considered in Indian context.

Division of labour

Women consists of half of the population of the world. But, still in most of the societies, the equalities of women are more often legal, than essential. No societies can claim a keen equality, among men and women. Also, we can't think of any religion, in the world, which treats it's both male and female members equally. At least, part of the reason for this belated articulation of feminine consciousness can be traced to the very status and role traditionally assigned to women in society. Sociologists refers this situation as '*Division of labour*'.

The '*Division of labour*', was a doctoral dissertation, published by a French Sociologist, Émile Durkheim in 1893. He was the first to coin the term first '*Division of labour*' (*De la division du travail social*). In this published paper, he described about the different types of solidarity, how the 'primitive' society, turned into 'industrial' society.

But, the modern sociologies and feminist use this term in context of sharing of duties and jobs between men and women. It was constructed by them as '*Sexual Division of labour*'. This is another doctrine, which proffers that the delegation of different tasks between males and females. This implies that women are meant to work at home, looking after the home and children, household chores and marketing chores are looked after her only. But, a general perception is that women can go to buy grocery or textile, but not computer or a car. Men are considered to be shopkeepers, business keepers, outside jobs and duties. This distinction begins at home only, while a girl child is given doll or kitchen set to play, while a boy is given a car or a gun, as toys.

But, the case varies, if men are being paid for such jobs, they are ready to take-up such duties, as their jobs. For examples, in the restaurants, the chefs are generally men. Servants and housekeepers are generally men. But, at home, they are not ready to help at their homes. Sometimes, working women are forced to give-up their jobs, for the sake of children and household.

Socio-cultural Framework

The socio-cultural framework can also help in evaluating about the condition of women in the society. No religion or no culture can ever be thought of, which treats both its male and female members equally.

India is home to six major religions of the world. The different theological texts prescribe role of women in its own prospective. However, if basic theory of all the religious scriptures are looked upon, it can be seen that, in every religion and culture women are expected to maintain their chastity, being well-behaved, kind, polite and gentle towards everyone. But, there are also applicable for the men. The men are also expected to perform such religious duties, in the similar manner. Nevertheless, the clergy in every religion is dominated by the male members only. They impose such ideas among the society that the women are just ideal wives, who is meant for the services of her husband. They treat them as housekeepers, obedient daughter, faithful wife and a devoted mother. They take these decisions, in the name of religion, which are generally a wrong interpretation of religious texts. These theological promulgations sometimes look like gender-biased. Few instances from every religion can be sighted.

¹ The groups, which are considered inferior and even sometimes excluded from the main stream society.

Hinduism

The world's oldest and India's majority religious worship women as Goddess. Although, every society, within Hinduism are practising patrilineal society. Except, few, such as Khasi² Tribe in Meghalaya or Nairs and Thiyyas in Kerala. Male dominance is there. Some of the evil practices, which were abolished by the law, during British time only. Instance, 'Sati pratha', for which the Hindu society was infamous. There is NO mention of this practice, anywhere in the scripture. But, it was inculcated, due to fear of invaders. Apart from that, child marriage was in prevalence and widow remarriage was not allowed. Later, these are abolished by the virtue of law. Women were not allowed to enter temples and kitchens, while they menstruate. It was believed that, they are impure, during that time. But, actually, this practice was constituted, in order to provide proper time and rest to women, during menstruation. Later, it became harsher and it was interpreted in the wrong manner. Women were not allowed to enter the temples, but later they were permitted to visit, after judicial intervention.

Islam

India is the country, with the second largest Muslim population in the world. Although Islam concedes social equalities towards men and women. But, proscribes women from equal participation in the religious realm. For instance, women are not allowed to enter mosques, in India and most of the Islamic countries, but this is contrary in case of Indonesia. Polygamy is prevalent in Muslim community. But, in India, it is relatively less, as compared to the Arab countries. But, divorce is relatively easy, on the wish of the man. Which was known as 'Talaq-e-biddat'. This was also terminated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, in the case of *Shayara Bano vs Union of India*³, where the apex court of justice observed that this practice is unconstitutional. Apart from that, women are expected to be in veil (Burkha/parda), especially when they are moving out of the home.

Christianity

Catholic or Orthodox Christianity did not concede equality to women. Although, there are some characters, in Bible, who are having more than one wife. But, in modern Christianity, there is more emphasis on nuclear family and monogamy. But, in Christianity women were denied from property rights. In Hinduism, where women were not allowed to enter temples, similarly in Christianity, women were not allowed to enter Churches, during menstruation. Rest, most of the things, within Indian Christians are similar to that of tribal culture or Hindu culture.

Sikhism

Sikhism is the newest religion, in India, which grew out of Hinduism. Most of the Sikh Gurus were trained by Hindu warriors only. Therefore, Sikhism derives most of its culture and tradition, to those of Hindus. But, the one of the deviation is that they are mostly concentrated to Punjab, Haryana or Jammu, which is infamous for honour killing of own daughters and sisters. Therefore, the Sikh community has the lowest sex ratio, among all the religions.

There were some of the minor variations regarding the condition of women, in every religious community in India. Therefore, in every Indian family, the conditions are similar and women are treated in a similar manner.

Political Framework

In India, 48% of the population of India, consists of female population. Nevertheless, the representation of women is only 12%, in the Parliament of India. Rather, the same ratio of the representation is there in most of the countries.

Some instances can also be sighted. After the revolution in France, when the Constitutional Monarch was established in France, the women were promulgated as 'Passive citizens', which means that they were not allowed to take part in voting. But, during the freedom struggle in India, the then political leaders encouraged women to take part in freedom struggle. But, some argued that they must be taking care of home and children and nursing them so that children can become a good citizen in future. While other scholars held this doctrine as bogus. They argued that it is NOT the sole responsibility of mother to nourish a child. Rather, it is collective responsibility of both mother and father.

Later, while the discussion was going on, in the Constituent Assembly regarding the voting rights. The concept of 'Universal Adult Franchise' was adopted, without any impassioned argument.

² Biggest matrilineal society in the world.

³ (2017) 9 SCC 1 (16)

In contemporary time, the Parliament of India is underway to present 108th amendment⁴ in the Constitution of India, which would allow one-third affirmation of seats for women in the union legislative body, i.e. Parliament of India. But, the bill of in pending in the Parliament since 2008. Apart from that, there was a latest bill, pending in the parliament of India, which is 112th amendment⁵ bill, still pending in the Parliament, which would provide 50% of reservation of women in the local urban bodies. Latest bill on introduced on 12th August, 2015, which would insert Article-16A and 29A in the constitution and provide reservation for women, about 30% in the government posts and services and 33% in the educational institutions, by the state government, respectively. But, still those are still bills, not the laws.

However, twenty states have provided for reservation for women in local bodies. In those states also, the even if women are elected as village heads or political administrators in cities. They are wholly dominated by their male members of the family, when it comes to take political decisions, conduct village meetings or gatherings, or address the public and their grievances. This is also denying the voice of a women, even if she is holding a political post. This is also an inequality.

II. Conclusion

There are various parameters, which can be compared in order to fetch out, how women are treated in unequal manner and the concept of 'male chauvinism' in embodies in almost every religion and culture. The social structure in most of the countries are similar when women are to face biasedness, in terms of educational and job opportunities. Many attempts are made by the governments, in order to improve the position of women. Some of them are successful, but some are still unsuccessful, due to the behaviour and acceptance of society. This is the responsibility of the state to create conditions to promote the welfare of each and every sections of the society. However, the governments even can't go against the society, either being a democratic state or even being autocratic state. The government would collapse, if society won't cooperate. But, a government is such powerful entity, which would bring reforms in the society and law and also have terminated many social evils. The governments are also trying level best. But, society is also needed to create awareness and educate people. So that female population can also contribute in the development of the economy, nation and ultimately society.

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⁴9th March, 2010.

⁵24th Nov., 2009.