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Research Article

Gender Inequality and Equality: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

Gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed role for men and women. Inequalities between the genders developed due to these socially and culturally assigned roles. Women are the main victims of gender inequality. Women are treated unequally as compared to their men counterparts and it starts even before the birth and continue till later parts of life or till death. Equal opportunities, honour, status should be given to both the men and women. Equality between genders is necessary to prevent gender base violence and discrimination. Gender sensitization and mainstreaming is required to bring gender equality. Equal participation and contribution from both the public and government is required. The paper discusses the concept of gender, gender inequality and equality based on secondary data.

Key words: gender, gender role, gender equality, gender inequality, gender sensitization, gender mainstreaming.

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1. Introduction

Gender is a "social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women" (UNICEF). Inequalities between genders are produced in society due to gender role socialization and other socio-cultural factors. Many unequal treatments are being faced by women in the society. Equal opportunities in terms of education, diet, health, wages, status, respects, and honours are not given to women. Various incidence of violence against women are continuously happening in the society. A few may be mentioned as sexual harassment, rape, molestation, eve-teasing, battering, female infanticide, dowry problem, unequal wage payment, etc. Government made many laws and gives legal rights to the women to protect from the violence happening against them. But unfortunately, inspite of all this efforts from the government and many other civil societies, the rate of

violence against women is not decrease rather it is increasing. All kinds of unequal treatment based on gender and gender based violence can be eroded from society through gender sensitization and gender mainstreaming. Gender sensitization is necessary to give awareness or sensitize people about the importance of each gender roles, responsibilities and needs and to bring gender equality. Both government and public needs to take effective actions to bring gender equality. The paper discusses the concept of gender, gender inequality and equality. Secondary sources of data are concerned for writing the paper.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences (Wood, 2005). WHO define gender as "the socially constructed

roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.” According to UN, gender is “the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.”

Kishor (2006) identifies three important aspects of gender namely: a) “Gender tends not to be value neutral”. The roles, rights, and obligations assigned to each sex are not just different, but also unequal with male roles and rights generally being valued more highly than female roles and rights. b) “Gender involves differences in power, both power to and power over”. The concepts of power to encompass legal and informal rights, access to resources, and pursuit of knowledge and personal goals, and cuts across most domains of human functioning, including familial, cultural, and institutional domains. Power over refers to control over societal and household resources and decisions, cultural and religious ideology, and one's own and others' bodies. Importantly, men tend to have greater power than women, and, in some domains, even have power over women. c) “Gender is not static or immutable”. Being socially constructed, gender roles, rights, and expectations can change over time and across geographical space as societal needs, opportunities, and customs change.

Gender role refers to the “social and behavioural norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. These often determine the traditional responsibilities and tasks assigned to men, women, boys and girls. Gender-specific roles are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, occurrence of conflict or disaster, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions (UNICEF) Further, according to World Bank, “gender role demarcate responsibilities between men and women in social and economic activities, access to resources, decision making authority.”

Therefore, differentiation among men women are made in terms of role that includes social, economic and political. Women roles are mainly social oriented and soft in nature that includes child bearing and rearing, looking after the household and family members, economical dependent on husband or other family members, etc. But men roles are economic and political oriented that include all sorts of earning income,

property owning, decision making, head of the household, hereditary name, etc. Because of these differences in the roles, the concept of superiority and inferiority develops in the mindset of the people. Because of the inequalities among gender, many gender base violence incidences are occurring in the society. Therefore, gender equality is necessary to remove all the inequalities based on gender from the society.

The Global Gender Gap Report released by non-profit organisation World Economic Forum, ranks India at 101 among 136 countries in 2013, 129 among 146 countries in 2024. The Global Gender Gap Index was first introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006 to benchmark progress towards gender parity across four dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health and political leadership (WEF-GGGR, 2024).

Gender Equality

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated, “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.” According to UN, gender equality “refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.”

Gender sensitization is necessary to promote gender equality among the people. Gender sensitization refers to the process of changing behaviour and perception that one hold about themselves and other genders by acknowledging the importance of gender equality. Gender sensitising “is about changing behaviour and instilling empathy into the view that we hold about our own and the other sex.” It helps people in “examining their personal attitudes and beliefs and questioning the ‘realities’ they thought they know” (Soma, Bhowmick, 2012).

The United Nations Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997, mentioned that “Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.” According to the UN, the condition of gender equality in India is one of the worst in the world. The

UNDP report 2013 shows that India rank 136th out of 186 countries on the HDI (Human Development Index), 134 out of 193 countries in 2023. The HDI is a composite indicator composed of three equally weighted measures for education, health and income. On the Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2022, India stands at rank 108 out of 193 countries with a score of 0.437. India stood at rank 122 out of 191 countries with a score of 0.490 in the Gender Inequality Index 2021. This shows a significant jump of 14 ranks on GII 2022 vis-à-vis GII 2021. Over the last 10 years, India's rank in GII has become consistently better, indicating progressive improvement in achieving gender equality in the country. In 2014, this rank was 127, which now has become 108. This is an outcome of the decisive agenda set by the Government for ensuring women's empowerment through policy initiatives aimed at their long-term socio-economic and political development. Government's initiatives have spanned across women's lifecycle including large scale initiatives for girls' education, skill development, entrepreneurship facilitation and safety in the workplace. Policies and legislations in these areas have been driving the Government's 'women-led development' agenda (PIB, 2024).

Conclusion

Government started many schemes to provide equal education for both boys and girls, but still the participation of girls' child in higher education is still low. In many families women has no decision making rights, they need to follow whatever their husband or elders says to them. Political participation of women is still low. Therefore gender equality is very much necessary to eliminate all these inequalities and gender base violence from the society. Providing equal opportunities in terms of social, economic, political and psychological is needed. Equal status and honour should be given both within and outside the family. Decision making rights should give to women and chances should also be given to express their opinion. Political participation of women should be encouraged. Violence or crimes against women need to be stopped in order to make feel secure while participating in the societal work. Proper and effective implementation of the legal rights and laws are also required. So, proper action should be taken to implement legal provisions and punish the culprits severely not to rapid the crime again in future. Public also need to contribute their responsibilities equally through gender sensitization to bring gender equality in the society.

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