



Prominent concerns of gender discrimination: Cultural barriers, familial resources, challenges and suggestions

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Abstract

Gender inequality persists in every aspect of performance and achievement not only in Indian society but all over the world. Gender inequality is prevalent in India for centuries, which is deep rooted in almost all Indian communities and Rajasthan is no exception. Health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in Rajasthan is more common. Gender discrimination deprives women from availing benefits of development even in old age and marginalizes them from the mainstream. Gender inequalities and its social causes impact elderly women's health and economic conditions. Woman is the complement of guy, and there is no inferior complex anymore. In India, since lengthy lower back, ladies had been considered as an oppressed section of the society and that they were ignored for hundreds of years. Gender inequality in India is a vital truth. The Gender difference in India is more in contrast to other countries. Rajasthan has the biggest gender divide of 23.2% in terms of literacy rate across the country, making it one of the most gender unequal states. The census data of 2001 and 2011 says literacy levels in the state have jumped from 60.40% to 66.11%.

Keywords: gender inequality, gender discrimination, economic conditions, literacy levels

Introduction

Gender discrimination is the unequal or disadvantageous treatment inflicted on someone because they belong to a specific gender. It is usually the women who usually have to face such gender discrimination. As per 2011 census data, effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. Parents are unwilling to spend on girls' education because educating women is of no value as they will only serve their husbands and the in-laws in the future. The Indian constitution provides equal rights and privileges for both men and women, but most women across India don't enjoy these rights and opportunities guaranteed to them. This is because of a number of reasons. Gender inequality still exists in India within the households, workplaces and in larger society. As per 2011 data, effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. In certain developing nations like India, gender inequality starts manifesting itself very early, a girl child starts facing discrimination right from the womb and it ends in female foeticide. Female child is treated inferior to male child and this is deeply engraved in the mind of the female child. This is more predominant in India as well as other lesser developed countries. A male child is considered a blessing and his birth is celebrated as opposed to a female child where her birth is not celebrated and is considered more of a burden. The 2011 Indian census shows that there are 940 females per 1000 boys. Educating a boy is seen as an investment as they are expected to earn and provide for their ageing parents. Whereas, an educated girl will have a higher dowry expense because they need an educated partner. It is also believed to be a waste of resources to educate a girl child as she will eventually get married and be a homemaker. If a family cannot afford to educate all their children, the male child will get preference.

It is true that there are biological differences between men and women. Women produce children. They are primarily witnessed as mothers and housewives. They are seen cooking, sewing, washing and taking care of their men from centuries. In some societies, the issue of marriage of women is largely determined by their men folk. Thus traditionally women are assigned roles within the confines of their households and more frankly to take care of their men folk. From cradle to the grave, the women are prepared for their feminine role as housewives. Known as "the land of Kings," and founded on legends of warfare and chivalry, Rajasthan has always been a traditionally patriarchal society. Deeply ingrained social practices, traditions and customs passed down through generations have created a culture that accepts discrimination against women as a part of life. This discrimination shows up as some of the most troubling statistics on the status of women in India; Rajasthan holds the record for highest percentage of married females between the ages of 10 and 14 and has one of the lowest sex ratios in the country. Discrimination against women manifests itself in many forms that start even before birth. Sex selection, not celebrating the birth of female children girl-child, naming girls *Mafi* (Sorry) or *Dhapu* (Enough) and forcing them to drop out of school after primary level to assist at home are just some

examples of this. The prevalence of child marriage and the dowry system, an insistence that girls keep purdah, domestic violence and harassment of young girls by in-laws are also linked directly to gender inequality. Women are excluded from decision-making processes in their homes and communities and the traditional caste and community leadership structures do not encourage women to voice their grievances openly.

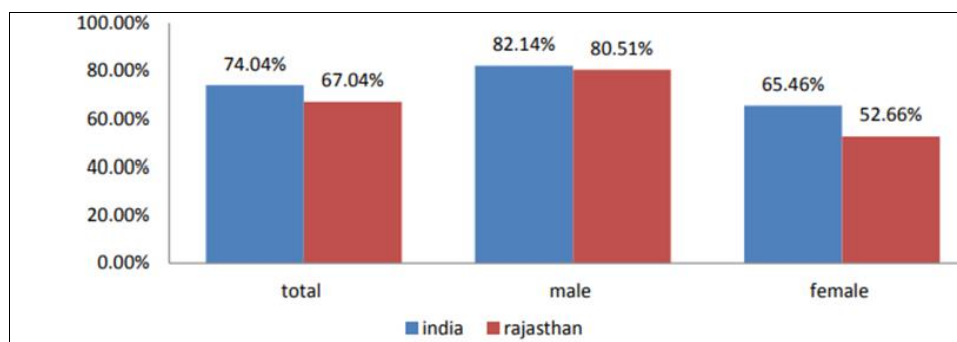
The main factors responsible for gender inequality

Poverty

In India of the total 30 percent people who are below poverty line, 70 percent are women. Women's poverty in India is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision making process. The situation of women on economic front is no better and men still enjoy a larger share of the cake. Thus poverty stands at the root of gender discrimination in our patriarchal society and this economic dependence on the male counterpart is itself a cause of gender disparity. This is the root cause of gender discrimination in the patriarchal Indian society, as the economic dependence on the male counterpart is itself a cause of gender disparity. In this setup, the male dominates almost every aspect of life. Thus, they consider themselves to be superior to others.

Education and learning opportunities

Gender-wise literacy rates in India showcase the wide gap between men and women. Education can bring about a change in this mindset because educated people will less likely partake in gender discrimination. Gender discrimination in India had led to educational backwardness for girls. It's a sad reality that despite educational reforms in the country, girls in India are still denied a chance at learning. The mindset needs to be changed, and people need to understand the benefits of educating girls. An educated, well-read woman ensures that other members, especially the children of the house, get a quality education. Rajasthan ranks at 8th in population size among the States and Union Territories in the country. There has been only a marginal change in the Decadal Growth Rate from 28.44% in 1981-91 to 28.33% in 1991-2001. It ranks 24th in the population density because of its size but 29th in literacy in spite of a jump in literacy from 38.55% in 1991 to 61.03% in 2001 among the States in the country. The States that are worse in female literacy are Bihar, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, J & K, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.



Source: Census of India, 2011 (Provisional)

Fig 1

Gender-wise, there is a big gap between male and female literacy. In total literacy, Rajasthan ranks 33rd amongst the 35 states and union territories and in case of male and female literacy it ranks 27th and 35th respectively.

Lack of employment facilities

Women are not able to resolve the conflict between new economic and old domestic roles. In both rural and urban India, women spend a large proportion of time on unpaid home sustaining work. Women are not able to respond to new opportunities and shift to new occupations because their mobility tends to be low due to intra-house hold allocation of responsibilities.

Social customs, beliefs and practices

Social attitudes towards education of women vary in context of rural and urban people. In urban areas, women's education gets more attention in comparison to rural areas because of the conservative attitude of rural people. Women's literacy rate also varies with regard of higher, middle and lower class families. To date, a lot of families have a preference for a male child and disfavor towards the daughter. Sons, especially in the business communities, are considered economic, political, and ritual assets where daughters are considered liabilities. The traditional matrilineal joint family system confines women's roles mostly to the domestic sphere, allocating them to a subordinate status, authority and power compared to men. Men are perceived as the major providers and protectors of a family while women are perceived as playing only a supportive role, attending to the hearth. Boys

and girls are accordingly drained for different adult roles, status and authority. In Indian culture since very early periods, men have dominated women as a group and their status has been low in the family and society.

Lack of awareness among women

Lack of awareness, which is very closely connected with the level of literacy, is another major factor responsible for the widening gender gap in India. Most Indian women are not aware about their opportunities, their rights and their capabilities. This lack of awareness hinders their entrepreneurial development and stops them accessing credit from formal financial institutions. Moreover, these women are unable to discover about the schemes, policies and initiatives taken by the government to empower them. In short, the information gap greatly affects women's development. Thus the causes of gender inequality are interdependent and interconnected. They lack a basic understanding of how the socio-economic and political forces affect them. They accept all discriminatory practices that persist in families from generation in the name of tradition and societal norms primarily due to their ignorance and unawareness. Gender-based discrimination across India can only be checked when girls are not denied their chance to learn and grow in life. Girls like boys should get a great start in life in terms of educational opportunities. This will help them attain economic independence and help them be rightly equipped to contribute towards their upliftment and that of the society they are part of. The state cabinet has recently approved a new women's policy. This is the second time that the government comes out with a policy especially for women. The first policy was formulated in 2000. The government said there were substantial changes in the situation on the ground since the 2000 policy was framed. Besides, the new policy also takes into account the UN sustainable development goals 2030. The policy noted that the Rajasthan initiative of one stop centre'. Aprajita, set up in Jaipur in 2013 to attend the grievances of women was adopted nationally as Sakhi, one stop centre, under the Nirbhaya fund. Now, such centres are functioning in all the districts. In such centres services of consultation, legal aid, police help, and protection to victims of violence and abuse. Chief minister had announced in the 2020-21 Budget a new policy for women. The new policy, amalgamates the girls policy of 2013. In the new policy, women have been not only broadly categorised in various groups on the basis of their caste and social status like SC, ST, primitive tribe, nomadic, minority, and economically weaker sections but also of their occupation pattern. Women working in the unorganised sector, migrant workers, silicosis victims, single, destitutes etc.

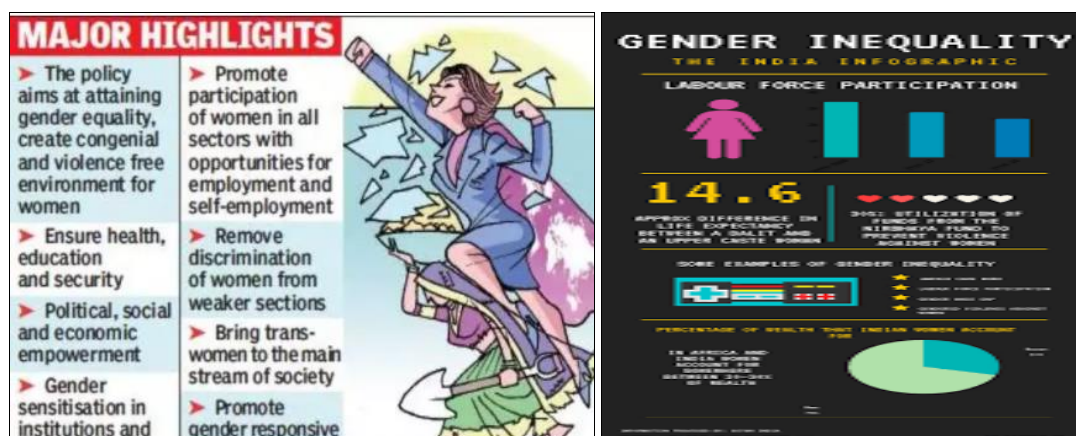


Fig 2

Suggestions to improve gender ratio

There should be multidimensional strategy to tackle the problem of gender ratio in India. **Government:** The government is constantly trying to overcome the problems associated with the girl education in Rajasthan. There have been several efforts to improve quality made by the government. It has been providing free education to girl students since July, 2011. The idea behind this scheme is to encourage the poor families to educate their girl child without feeling any financial burden. The government also promised to provide free education to girls till graduation. Government initiated the policies to raise the status of the girl child in the family and to prevent female feticide and infanticide. But mere launching these schemes and policies cannot do wonders. There is dire need to popularize these schemes and incentives should be considerable. The coverage of these schemes should be increased so that maximum people can get the benefit. Government, of India, launched a countrywide scheme i.e. National programme of nutritional support to primary education (Mid-Day Meal) scheme in 1995 in which the students of primary classes are provided cooked meal. Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is another initiative of Indian government aimed at the universalisation of elementary education operational since 2010. It is providing elementary education for all and bringing the entire social and gender gaps with active participants of local community in the affairs of the school and effective decentralization down to the school level. The major thrust of scheme is to achieve zero drops out.

National Initiatives for Education of Women: Indian Government focused on women and child development right from pre independence till today. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) focuses mainly on this issue.

Rajshree Yojna

This amazing scheme provides a total financial assistance of up to Rs 50,000 to a girl child's family for her educational, health and other expenses up to class XII.

Legal

Though number of acts have been passed for the crime against women and to end social evils against women but they are neither able to control the crimes nor fully end the social malevolence.

The Protection of Women Against Domestic Violence Act, 2005: The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 etc. could not come up to the expectations. So the reasons of their less success should be find out and loopholes should be strictly covered. Amendments in these acts can also be made if required.

Parents, the change leaders

Along with the children, parents are also the main stakeholders of the education system and it is they who bear the impact of the faulting school system. They need to be given opportunities and support to bring about a change in the education system because they hold the powerful key to initiate the process of reversing the decline in schools, through their constructive and collective engagements with the school. Parents should encourage their daughter to stay in school and progress through examinations, despite of expectations that she would stay at home. She would not have to put schoolwork after housework or automatically be expected to clean the classroom. They have to change their mind set in the direction of girl education. The parents should remember that an educated girl can not only improve the status of their family but also play very important role in the education of coming generation.

Community

The awareness campaign for the declining gender ratio can only be successful when it will be initiated by the local communities at the village and block level. The anganwadi workers and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers can really make the difference. The awareness camps should be organized at Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs) so that maximum people can be covered under the campaign. Special attention should be given to the areas where the gender ratio is enormously less.

Economic

The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1000 boys (NFHS-3). It is important that the women should be economically sound, and education can play important role. An educated girl can share the financial burden of the family with her father and later with her husband. In this way she will no longer be considered as financial liability. Free and compulsory education should be provided to female children so that they can support themselves during exigency. Also it will remove the attitude that 'investing in girls is unnecessary' (Report, National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, 2008). The Government should ensure proper implementation of equal wages for same work in men and women in all the sectors.

Social and cultural

About two in five currently married women age 15-49 have experienced spousal violence in their current marriage, and among women who have ever experienced such violence, more than two in three have experienced

violence in the past year (NFHS-3). This shows pitiable condition of Indian women in the society. Women should be considered equal to the male members of the society and this is possible by empowering women in terms of their rights in all respects. Women should also be socialized from early childhood to consider themselves equal to men. They should be encouraged to assume all those responsibilities, which are normally considered to belong to the male domain (Report, National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, 2008). Women should be involved in the decision-making of the family issues as well as in the social issues, that will increase their position in the society and their self-confidence will boost up.

Social rights of women

Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Special measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of education, occupation, vocation, technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Set oral time targets in existing policies will be achieved, with a special focus on girls and women, particularly those belonging to weaker sections including the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes,

Conclusion

Unfortunately, Indian society is suffering with discriminating behavior with women right from the childhood or even when they are in the womb in the form of female feticide. When they grow up there is discrimination in providing female child proper medical facilities that results more mortality rate in females as compared to males in 0-6 years of age. This is because the male child is preferable to female child because of their financial, social, and cultural advantage. There is also a significant gender gap in educational participation in Rajasthan, the reasons that behind the dropping girls out of the schools by parents and society in general; the vision of girl's education; include incapable of the family to undertake girls education expenses, poverty; and the practice of child marriage. India must take concrete steps wishes to reduce the gender inequality. The Government has taken many steps to make people aware about this evil and many programs has been started as a part of campaign against female feticide and infanticide to improve the gender ratio in the country. But all the Government efforts could not bring much change. Education develops the personality, rationality among individuals, makes them eligible to meet with socio - economic and political functions and in turn improves their socio - economic status to achieve desired goals. Women who are well educated have smaller, healthier and better educated families. As education opens up better opportunities for women to earn and as it changes women's position in the family and society, couples tend to opt smaller families and to invest more in the health and education of every child.

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