

# Semester IV

## Unit II

Topic - Forms of gender inequality  
and issues

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# Forms of Gender Inequality

**These are the seven important forms of gender inequality.**

## **1. Women Works Longer than Men:**

In most of the societies the male-stream is the main stream who argues that women have comparative advantage in household non-market production, like cooking and cleaning for the family that can be called emotional and personal caring work.

Based on this thinking, household jobs are then asymmetrically distributed. Women are more valued in home. Men are specialised in market-based production. Thus, being the bread-earners, males enjoy both power and status.

It may be then concluded that women's activities serve primarily as inputs into the family's well-being. In addition, women of poor families are subject to dual burden of home-labour and market work for cash earnings.

[Low status and power of women may thus be attributed to the 'functional theory'. This theory says that in such a sex-based division of labour system one observes a built-in disadvantage for women in non-household jobs or comparative advantage in household activities. Hence the inequality between sexes. Some experts explain gender-based inequality in the perspective of 'conflict theory'.

In the capitalist society, labour market is such that it creates one set of jobs with poor salary and long working hours (e.g., construction workers) for women and a better one for male counterparts. This amounts to saying that women belong to the 'minority' group. This kind of boundary triggers discrimination between sexes.]

Nearly 70 p.c. of food production is prepared by women. An average Indian woman spends at least 4 hours a day or 16 % of their life

time in the kitchen and 2-4 hours in a day for child-bearing and child rearing. These are all non-market household activities. In addition, market-based works are done by women to supplement family income.

Today, women represent 40 p.c. of the global labour force and 43 % of the world's agricultural labour force. Most importantly, because of the reduction in fertility rate in many developing countries, women's participation in paid job has been rising in these countries. This, of course, is suggestive of reduction in gender gaps as time advances. It is revealed from the World Development Report 2012 that the gender gap in work participation has been narrowed from 32 % to 26 % between 1980 and 2008.

## **2. Inequality in Employment and Earnings:**

Historically, men have greater participation in work outside home than women. But women (particularly of poor households) share unequally household duties in addition to economic production. Thus they work longer than males. This kind of 'division of labour' may be seen as the 'accumulation of labour' on women, as described by Amartya Sen. Household activities are often viewed as 'sedentary activities' which require less 'calorie' to gain energy.

As women shoulder household responsibilities, they tend to work mostly in a narrow range of occupations, called 'female industries'—textiles, clothing, electronics, food and beverages, etc., where wages are usually lower than in other industries. Since these jobs are regarded as inferior in status to male jobs, women are differentially paid leading to a gender wage gap.

In addition, the concentration of female labour force is also found in small-scale cottage industries, biri-making activities, paid household jobs, etc. Above all, informal sectors as found in India and Africa absorb quite a large number of female workers, nearly 94 p.c. Today, with the slowdown in the growth of employment in the organised sector, most of the new employment is generated in the informal economy where any kind of social security provisions are conspicuously absent—barring low wages. The conclusion that can

be made is that, in both developed and developing countries, women are under-represented in better paying formal sector jobs and over-represented in the unpaid or low-paid informal sectors.

### **3. Ownership Inequality:**

A case of social inequality: Let us turn to another kind of inequality, called ownership inequality—a classic case of social inequality. In most of the societies, ownership over property and means of production rests mainly on male members. The law of inheritance provides such ownership rights on male child. Such denial coming out of hierarchical dualism within the family not only reduces the voice of women but also prevents them from participating in commercial, economic and social activities.

This kind of social deprivation means absence or lack of capability. Or because of 'capability deprivation', women are subject to various kinds of exploitation and un-freedoms. Social inequality distorts the process of development. Unfortunately, ownership inequality in any country is not of recent origin. In her earlier life, a woman comes under the influence of her father, then husband as she enters a married life, and, finally, under sons ownership right over property is skilfully avoided. A Telegu proverb corroborates this understanding: **“Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another’s courtyard.”**

### **4. Survival Inequality:**

Another crudest form of gender disparity is the unusually high mortality rates of women, though biologically, women live longer than men! Thus, more boys than girls are born everywhere leading to a 'deficit' of women and a 'surplus' of men. In developed countries because of absence of gender-bias in health care and nutrition, women outnumber men. In Europe and in North America, 105 or more girls are born per 100 boys. Such high female-male ratio (1.05) in these countries is attributed to a high gendered survival rate in different age groups.

But in developing countries, women receive less care and support than men. There is a strong 'son preference'. There is a male-bias in food allocation. Women require fewer calories than men; women's

calorie intake constitutes 29 p.c. less than men. Average nutritional intake of Indian women is just 1,400 kilocalories daily against the nutritional requirement of 1,600 kilocalories—the barest minimum. Further, they eat less, even leftover foods after consumption of other members of the family and the guests, and sleep less for the family's welfare. Indian women are thus malnourished. This is how 'marginalisation of women' has been going on in a male-structured society since immemorial times.

Further, developing countries not only show 'pro-boy preference' but also exhibit a strong anti- female bias. Because of this attitude towards women, mortality rates of women are higher than men in developing countries.

The concept of 'missing women' as stated by Amartya Sen may be linked to this kind of anti- female bias relating to care and medical attention. Low female male ratios in Asian and North African countries are another way of explaining 'missing women'. If these countries showed the female- male ratios as observed in Europe and the North American countries, these countries would have millions more women.

Missing women is a rough estimate of the quantitative difference between the 'actual' population sex ratio and the 'expected' population sex ratio in the absence of discrimination between sexes. If 'actual' ratio exceeds the 'expected' ratio, then the excess is called the 'missing women'. Sen has demonstrated that had female-male ratio of Asia and North African countries were equal to Europe and America, then, in 1986, China would have gained 4.40 crore excess women, India 3.70 crore, and all the countries of Asia and Africa would have a total of more than 10 crore. These are the 'missing women'. In 2001, the number of missing women in India went up to 3.91 crore while in China it declined to 4.09 crore. During this time, actual gender ratio in India came to 1.072 against an expected ratio of 0.993.

Let us have a look at India's current state of gender ratio. India's female-male ratio has been becoming more and more adverse as the census figures suggest. Female: male ratio that stood at 927 in 1991

rose to 933 in 2001 and further to 940 in 2011. However, this ratio is 1,084 in Kerala and 618 in Daman and Diu in 2011.

But if we look at the child sex ratio, the picture that emerges is really a mind-boggling one and a cause for great concern. Child sex ratio (0-6 years) that stood at 945 girls per 1,000 boys in 1991 declined to 927 in 2001 and further to 914 in 2011. This diminishing trend of girl child clearly suggests that some girl children are never born nor have the opportunities or scope to survive longer. In its Report, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) claimed that 7,000 fewer girls are born in India everyday a figure higher than the global average. The conclusion that one makes from this notion of 'missing women' in India is the strong gender bias or gender disparity.

As per the World Bank's estimate (World Development Report, 2012) globally excess female deaths after birth (women who would not have died in the previous year had they lived in high income countries) in developing countries and 'missing' girls at birth account every year for 3.9 million women below the age of 60. Out of this, 2/5ths of them are never born.

But why has such gender imbalance been increasing in developing countries? In Europe and America, males outnumber females at birth but women outnumber men as the female-male ratio (of around 1.05) tells. On the contrary, in the third world countries, because of high mortality rates of women, male population becomes large. Abundance of women in advanced countries may be related to premature death, a high propensity to smoking and a larger involvement in violent activities of men.

The bias towards boys over girls explains the 'missing women' mystery. Because of significant anti-female bias in health care and other social influences relevant for survival, female infanticide that goes on is one good reason for 'missing women'. Another reason that has become even popular among the educated Indians is the sex-selective abortions to eliminate female fetuses. This has become possible because of 'high-tech sexism'. It is practised largely in East

Asia (China, and South Korea) Singapore, Taiwan, etc., and even in India and other countries of South Asia.

This 'natality inequality' indicates that parents want the new-born child to be a boy. This sort of 'son preference' in male-dominated societies is not only strong among poor illiterate parents but also among urban educated rich parents! This bias is linked to the increasing devaluation in social status and disempowerment of women in male-structured societies.

## **5. Gender Bias in the Distribution of Education and Health:**

Health and education—the two major forms of human capital—are related to economic development. Human capital gets accumulated as a society advances in education. The contribution of human capital towards Japan's remarkable economic progress attracts our attention. Improvement in health capital also improves the return to investments in education, and vice versa.

However, one finds a huge education and health gaps between developed and developing countries. In recent times, despite a large increase in economic advancement in Asia and Africa, these countries lag far behind the developed countries in terms of educational attainment—particularly in respect of women's education. Gender disparity not only hinders economic progress but also exacerbates social inequality.

There is enough statistical evidence that the rate of return on women's education is higher than that on men's. It is the mother's education that improves child health and nutrition. It has the potentiality of breaking the vicious circle of poverty and inequality. Education of women is directly related to poverty reduction.

In spite of this, male-child bias in third world countries of Asia is palpable. Such bias can be attributed to the following facts. First, being the breadwinner, male child is considered as an 'insurance bond' of the family. Secondly, male child provides security during old age. Thirdly, a male child is deemed to be an asset as it enables parents to garner huge dowry/gift at the marriage time. All these

speaking about anti-female bias. During marriage of a girl, there occurs a leakage of money from the parents to give dowry to the bride.

Above all, investment in women's education is not worthwhile as ultimately a girl child after marriage considers welfare of her husband's family. Unless this mind-set changes gender disparity will continue. To remove such gender gap in education, the role of women's education is undesirable.

Anti-female bias in education gets reflected in male-female literacy rate, gross enrolment rate in elementary education (Class I-VIII), dropout rates among girl students.

Male-female literacy rate in India has increased from 75.26 p.c.-53.67 p.c. in 2001 to 82.14 P.C.-65.46 p.c. in 2011, thereby reflecting an educational gender gap of almost 17 p.c. Such disparity becomes larger if the adult male-female literacy ratio is taken into account. Currently, adult literacy rate for women is roughly 54 p.c.

This means that slightly more than half of female population can read and write—a pathetic figure indeed! Because of lower importance given to education, there has been a deterioration in India's Human Development Index ranking. It slipped from 126th among 117 countries in 2006 to 134th in 2011.

Boys-girls' gross enrolment rate in 2009 at the primary level came to 115 p.c. and 111 p.c. For China, it is 111: 115. Further, dropout rate among girls in India is the highest. Several reasons are advanced to explain the huge gender disparity in dropout rates. First is the low level of education of poor parents.

Secondly, because of low level of education, child marriage at barely 13 or 14 years is a common sight in Indian states, though the legal marriage age for women is 18 years. One in every 4 girls in India and one in every 5 girls in Nepal is married by the age of 15. Fifty p.c. girls of Bihar (having a literacy rate of 32-33 p.c. in 2001), Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are married at or before the age of 16.



This sorry state of affairs in women's education indicates poor state of health. Because of early marriage, poor Indian women's child-bearing age starts earlier. It results not only in frequent pregnancies but also creates problems in caring for the new-born child. Maternal mortality rate per 1,00,000 live births during 2004-09 account for 254 in India as against China's 34 only.

Frequent pregnancies, in addition, at a low age leads to high percentage of anaemic women. 63-85 p.c. of married women of West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh give birth to underweight baby. One sees gross deprivation in having a nutritious food and adequate care during pregnancy. Nearly 46 p. c baby suffers from underweight that raises the risk of having poor health and poor development of brain. Ultimately, all these lead to high infant mortality rate. 30 p.c. women die p.a. due to child birth and pregnancy-related causes. 38 p.c. of all HIV positives are women.

Further, women suffer from illness more than men. Besides anti-female bias, poor women are deliberately denied basic health care facilities. When they suffer from diseases male members make a plea that a visit to a physician or hospital of a female member may lead to a postponement of the entire day's household jobs, including preparation of food for the family.

## **6. Gender Inequality in Freedom Expression:**

Let us talk about gender inequality beyond economic issues or factors. Women are not only subject to income or asset inequality but also in terms of freedom and power deprivation of women goes beyond one's imagination. They lack not only economic freedom at home because of absence of autonomy in household decisions, limited or complete absence of property ownership rights and the poor wages earned but also lack any freedom in airing opinions over education of children.

In some backward poor societies the right of women giving opinion is completely denied. Such un-freedoms, however, are not uncommon even among the educated elites who enjoy enormous power and authority in the male-dominated society. Historically,

this sort of low socio-economic status of women has been continuing nowadays.

In addition, one finds tremendous apathy in awarding political power and authority—that is participation in administrative decision-making and political decision making—to women. In fact, women are underprivileged and are politically marginalised in many countries. Democracy then falters.

In many countries, voting rights to women has been granted, gender inequality, nevertheless, is rather widespread. Although many heads of states of many South Asian countries are women, women's representation in political institutions is indeed minimal.

In government offices, administrative decision-making power rests solely on male members. India, however, is fortunate in having 50 p.c. seat reservations for women in gram panchayats in the year 2009. If these are implemented seriously, democracy and participation of women will foster. Public discussion and participation, interaction of all citizens then can act as catalysts of social change.

But, as in the processes of development and governance in many countries, women are marginalised, the goal of empowerment of women is jeopardized. At the same time, as women's agencies are rather active in India, some sort of politicisation of gender has been taking place and often women have become successful in having their genuine rights. Human capabilities can expand if women are assured of economic and political freedom. Such capability expansion is not hindered by poor income. With the expansion of capabilities of women, not only self-confidence gets a stimulus but also women increase their social status.

A final word of caution. Only by guaranteeing participation in elections, socio-politico-economic freedom of expression of women cannot be ensured. This is, however, not sufficient to remove the shackles of women's un-freedoms. What is important is the effective implementation of democratic procedures and norms.

This requires reforms in the political field. The main opposition here, as usual, comes from the male members of the society. Gender inequality is an ultimate outcome of any patriarchal society. Only by empowering women, this social and economic barrier of gender inequality cannot be broken. This requires education of women. Effectiveness of political participation of women depends on the state of education. Thus, education acts as a great social change.

## **7. Gender Inequality in Respect of Violence and Victimization:**

Finally, anti-female bias starts before the girl child is born (consequent upon sex-specific abortions) and this attitude of the society a female member carries throughout her life.

It is because of the unequal sharing of income, property, household benefits (health and nutritional deprivation), women are subject to both physical and sexual violence—the opposite of freedom, and an extreme form of coercion. This is common for both poor and not too much uncommon in rich countries as well as among rich people. One in three women in the world is beaten or raped during her lifetimes.

Dowry harassment is considered as an ‘instrumental use’ of violence. Dowry death is the most serious form of domestic violence. Wife beating is not uncommon. Sexual violence is an obnoxious form of human rights violation. In addition, with the increase in poverty level, trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation has become a high-profit-low-risk trade for those who organise it.

There are many causes of such violence’s but physical prowess of men, dynamics of power and injustice, low or absence of education of women seem to be the most cogent reasons for gender inequality and subordinate status of women globally.

Economic independence and social emancipation through creating ability to earn income and gainful employment outside the home, guaranteeing ownership rights, literacy in education is of great importance. Empowerment value of all these is difficult to ignore.

All these empower women. Through women's empowerment, patriarchal dominance and male monopoly of violence and the exploitation of women can be broken. And, above all, women's education can only destroy the institution of 'house-wifisation' of women's labour through marriage and through work legislation.